Fire, Fury, and Flame

by IAmAVeronica

Summary

Stiles Stilinski was never going to be the omega who got knocked up right after high school, and then he's accidentally artificially inseminated with a stranger's sperm. Awesome.

And the father of Stiles's baby just so happens to be Derek Hale. Half-feral, quite possibly a murderer, and pursued by a gleefully sadistic band of hunters who are only too eager to use Stiles and his baby to hit Derek right where it hurts.

Joy.

Notes

I've never seen Jane the Virgin (though I hear it's great), but I'm like 99.9% sure it doesn't involve werewolves, hunters, kidnappings, insane road trips, and baby names inspired by Disney movies. So I'm just borrowing the most basic plot: young person gets accidentally inseminated with a stranger's sperm and decides to keep the resulting baby.

Basically I woke up at three a.m., had this idea, went back to sleep, and wrote it in the morning as soon as I woke up again.

In my little headcanon, everyone in this world is A/B/O, but only some are full-shift werewolves.

Enjoy!
Chapter 1

The first day of Stiles Stilinski’s life begins with a hangover. Yesterday he graduated from high school and turned eighteen on the same day, so at least it’s a well-earned hangover, but shit.

“I think I’m dying,” he says past the fuzzy roar in his ears when he meets his friends for coffee at noon.

“You should be.” Lydia wrinkles her nose and takes a dainty sip of her latte, looking so perfectly poised nobody would have guessed she’d matched Stiles shot-for-shot last night. “You were completely out-of-control.”

“It was his birthday,” Scott protests, on Stiles’s side as always.

“So how does it feel, Stilinski?” Jackson is Stiles’s least favorite friend, the one he hopes sort of drops off now that high school is over, but he looks at Stiles with eyes uncommonly bright and attentive. “Being a big, grown-up omega now?”

Ah. That’s why Jackson’s being nice.

“I’m not any different than I was two days ago,” Stiles tells him, trying to keep his voice cool.

Jackson shakes his head. He’s kind of been puffing out his chest all morning, unconsciously trying to impress the omega in the room. “Well, your scent is. Kind of clouded by all the shit you poured into your body last night, but still. I’m surprised you weren’t accosted by Alphas the whole way over here.”

“Some of us are just better at controlling it than you,” Scott mutters, but he scoots his chair a little closer to Stiles’s, protecting him from the unwanted attention. Something he definitely wouldn’t have done two days ago.

Stiles sighs. He knew this would happen as soon as he went off his blockers. Omegas are required to take them once they hit puberty, to protect them from Alphas who can’t control themselves, but the blockers end as soon as an omega comes of age. Personally, Stiles thinks it would be better to teach Alphas how to control themselves, rather than putting it all on the omegas, but who ever listens to him? He’s been off the blockers for almost forty-eight hours and every minute he can feel himself becoming more omega. It sucks.

“Don’t get used to it,” he tells Jackson, taking a gulp of his coffee, which is weirdly good today. “Right after this I’m going to the clinic and I’m getting my first OmaEsterin dose.”

Jackson’s mouth falls open. “You’re what?”

Stiles shrugs. “Look, I was salutatorian of our graduating class. I’m going to college in the fall, not mated to the first Alpha who wants to drag me into the kitchen and keep me there. I’m staying on birth control until I’m ready to have kids, not until the state or the Alphas in my life decide it’s time for me to get knocked up.”

Jackson looks almost devastated. “But…but OmaEsterin blocks everything. Your scent, your heat…I mean, after having all of that kept from you for years, don’t you want to enjoy it?”

“No,” Stiles says flatly. “I want to enjoy life.”
Jackson shakes his head. His face is a little pinched and disapproving now. He takes a bite of his pastry and speaks around the crumbs: “Well, it just seems like a huge waste to me.”

Stiles feels his eyes flash. Now that he’s off the blockers they flash gold, not blue, which ruins the effect, but he can’t help it. He’s pissed. “So sorry I find my needs more important than your knot, man.”

“Your needs are all related to my knot, omega. Or did the salutatorian fail biology?”

“Fuck off,” Stiles and Scott say simultaneously, both flashing their eyes at Jackson. Scott’s bright red ones actually shut Jackson up for, like, half a second.

“Don’t pretend you support him, Scott. You’re an alpha too. He’s practically your omega, and the drugs are going to take him away from you. You should be trying to talk him out— ”

“Is there a problem here?”

A shadow falls over the table and they all look up to see the barista, the guy who made the first good coffee Stiles has ever had here. He barely spoke when they ordered, just kept his head ducked and grunted out the price, and Stiles had felt like he just didn’t belong behind the counter. Now, getting his first good look at the guy, Stiles realizes that he was right. This guy belongs in Hollywood or Parisian runways, not working at the cheapest eatery in Beacon Hills. He’s so gorgeous Stiles wants to flash gold eyes at him until the Alpha is smiling down at him. If a mouth that hardly-set is even capable of smiling.

And he smells good. Really good. The blockers used to prevent Stiles from recognizing Alphas by scent, and now that they’re out of his bloodstream he’s been catching little whiffs of people and realizing right off the bat whether they’d be a compatible mate.

Apparently this guy is very compatible. He’s also completely out of Stiles’s league, and is currently glaring at the four of them as if he wants to throw them out on their ears.

“No problem, man,” Jackson says. “Unless you’re starting one.”

The guy’s eyes narrow and Stiles can see just the slightest hint of red bleed in, but he controls himself. “No fighting in the café,” he says gruffly before he turns and stalks away.

“What was that, Jackson?” Lydia snaps as soon as he’s gone. “Are you going to start a pissing contest with everyone today?”

“You guys don’t know who that is?” Jackson looks around at all of them, evidently delighted when they shake their heads in tandem. “That’s Derek Hale!”

“Who?”

“Derek Hale. Of the Hale family? Hale werewolves? Hale family fire? Hello?”

Stiles’s eyes widen. The Hales had been one of the most influential families in Beacon Hills for years, one of the few who were actually full-shift werewolves. The Hale house had burned down years and years ago, killing everyone inside. It had been a huge, terrible tragedy, so awful and shocking the ruined house still stands like a monument to the lives lost. “Where has he been all this time?”

“Running from the law.” Jackson points an accusing finger at Stiles. “You should know about this. Your dad’s the sheriff. They thought maybe he set the fire, for, like the longest time, and then he
killed a bunch of people up in Kitoosie…”

“What?”

“That’s what I heard, anyway. He’s crazy. He’s been living on his own, all feral and shit, but I guess he wanted to come home. I can’t believe they let him work here. I’ll have to tell my dad.”

Stiles’s watch beeps and he stands up. Derek the feral murdering barista isn’t behind the counter anymore, and Stiles almost feels sad that he’ll never be able to smell him again. Fuck, that’s weird. His birth control shot can’t come fast enough. “Well, this has been fun, but I’ve got my appointment. Hasta la later.”

“You’re making a mistake!” Jackson yells at him.

Stiles flips him off and keeps walking.

#

As Stiles climbs into his car, he notices Derek walking across the parking lot towards him. He scowling and staring at the ground and Stiles gulps. Had he overheard Jackson?

Stiles peers through his rearview mirror as he slowly backs out of his parking spot. Derek is still walking. Derek is still not looking at him. Derek is getting into his own car.

Stiles drives out of the parking lot, Derek right behind him. The shitty, beat-up old jeep Derek is driving stays behind Stiles for almost three miles before Stiles starts to feel a little bit freaked out.

Is Derek following him?

Stiles pulls onto the interstate and Derek stays on his tail. When Stiles takes his exit, Derek does too.

Holy shit.

Stiles start to speed up.

He knows that it’s stupid to be afraid of werewolves. They’ve just evolved faster than anyone else—scientists think that in five hundred years, everyone will be a werewolf. The human race has already evolved into alpha/beta/omega markers and everything that comes with those biological changes. Werewolves can actually shift into full-body wolves, but they’re good at controlling it. They’re just like everyone else in every way that matters.

That’s what Stiles’s dad has always said, at least, and Stiles tries to be tolerant. But now a werewolf is following him and he’s a little bit terrified.

When he turns into the clinic parking lot and Derek does too, he almost has a heart attack. He shuts off the car and locks the door, then reaches for his phone. If he calls his dad, a squad will be here in, like, two minutes.

He watches through the window as Derek gets out of his car and walks inside the clinic, not even glancing over at Stiles.

Derek hadn’t been following him.

They’d just been going to the same place.

Duh.
Stiles drops his phone, feeling like a world-class moron.

#

Stiles doesn’t go in for his appointment until twenty-minutes past his start time, and when he does he’s greeted by a harried-looking doctor who apologizes that the clinic is so under-staffed.

“So, you’re eighteen?” The doctor scans the page briefly. “Congratulations. I assume you’re here for heat stabilizers?”

“No, birth control.”

“Wait, you want birth control? Do you mean fertility drugs?”

“No. I want OmaEsterin. One dose a year for complete omega suppression.” Stiles fights to tamper down his anger when the doctor just stares at him like he’s some sort of monster.

“That blocks your heats, your omegas senses, and your omega markers to alphas,” the man tells him a little condescendingly.

“I’m aware.”

The doctor shrugs and presses a button on the wall intercom. “Jess, I need a dose of OmaEsterin in room 300.”

A stressed-out voice comes through in a crackly burst. “I have your samples done for the patient in 291, what should I—”

“Bring those to me, too.” The doctor gives Stiles a false smile. “I have to check on another patient. You hold tight.”

Stiles leans back and closes his eyes. The wait turns into another twenty minutes, and Stiles is ready to hop off the bed and go find his doctor when the door finally opens and an intern comes in.

“Sorry, Dr. Lunger got called away. Mr. Stilinski, right?”

“Right. You have my birth-control shot?”

The doctor holds up a syringe. “Right here.”

“Awesome.”

“This needs to be injected directly into your anal gland,” the intern says apologetically. “It’s a little painful.”

“Lay it on me.” Stiles flips over and pulls his hospital gown up to his waist. There’s a bright, excruciating pinch, making him grit his teeth, but it quickly fades to a throbbing and then to almost nothing.

“You’re all set.” The intern takes off his gloves and throws them in the trash. “Your omegas senses should be completely blocked by tomorrow morning. Coming so soon after the blockers, you may experience some nausea, but it’s nothing to worry about.”

“Thank you.”

“Have a good day,” the intern says absent-mindedly, already flipping to a new page on his clipboard.
for the next patient.

“Hey, dad,” Stiles says at dinner that night. “What do you know about Derek Hale?”

Stiles’s father, the Sherriff of Beacon Hills, freezes with his fork halfway to his lips. “Why?”

“Well, he’s working at the Coffee Karma now, and we were there today— ”

“Did he hurt you?”

“What? No. Not at all. But Jackson was talking about him, and said he killed some people, or something?”

“Jackson should keep his mouth shut.” The sheriff takes a bite of the tofu casserole Stiles made for dinner, scowling. “The law has already dealt with Derek Hale. If he doesn’t give people a reason to distrust him, they should let him be.”

“So it’s true?”

“It’s none of your business, kiddo. Hale’s had a hard life, and he’s only a few years older than you. He’s got a lot to deal with without worrying about rumors.” The sheriff chews thoughtfully. “But… stay away from him, all right? You have a habit of sticking your nose where it doesn’t need to be, and that’s one place I don’t want you messing around.”

“No problem.” Stiles goes back to his dinner, putting thoughts of Derek Hale out of his mind. He’ll never have to smell the guy again if he doesn’t want to. Handsome, moody alphas aren’t going to distract Stiles now. He’s eighteen, loaded up on birth control, and free from high school.

The Summer of Stiles starts now.

As it turns out, the Summer of Stiles starts with throwing up.

A lot of throwing up.

When Stiles had heard nausea, he’d assumed he’d maybe be a little dizzy, a little off-balance in the mornings for a few days. He really hadn’t anticipated vomiting every morning and usually at least twice more throughout the day.

Three weeks after his shot, he’s lying in his bed, too miserable to move. The throwing up started the week after the injection, but it’s just getting worse. At this rate he’s going to spend the entire summer sick.

He’s too old to whine, but fuck, it’s not fair.

Scott and Jackson stop by to offer some emotional support after Stiles misses the beach trip they’d all had planned. They smell like salt water and sunscreen, but Stiles is pleased to find that they don’t smell like alpha too much anymore. When he asks, they tell him he smells different, too.

“You don’t smell like an omega,” Jackson tells him, inhaling deeply. “But…I don’t know. You don’t smell like you did on the blockers, either. It’s weird. Kind of nice, I think? I don’t know. It smells like…I don’t want to get too close.”
“Gee, thanks.”

“No, I know what he means.” Scott sniffs, then leans back. “Must be the way the drug works. It’s like, telling me you’re off-limits.”

“Told you you shouldn’t have done it,” Jackson tells him smugly. “It’s completely fucking up your body chemistry.”

“Get out,” Stiles says, too tired to argue.

After five weeks, Stiles has had enough. He’s constantly sick, his back hurts, he’s bloated, and, most annoyingly, he’s depressed. Stiles never gets depressed, but he just feels like he doesn’t want to get out of bed. These aren’t side effect he was warned about, and he’s going to do something about it.

He drags himself to the phone and calls the clinic. “Hi,” he says when the receptionist picks up. “I got an OmaEsterin shot there five weeks ago, and I’m having weird side effects.”

“Do you remember who treated you?”

“A doctor and an intern, I think. Doctor Lunger and…someone else.”

“Please hold.”

Stiles waits, listening to the jangly waiting music, until a male voice comes over the line.

“Doctor Lunger.”

“Yeah, hi. I got an OmaEsterin shot five weeks ago and it’s made me really sick.”

“Nausea is normal after a dose—”

“This is more than nausea, though. I’m constantly throwing up, I have weird pains in my back, I’m, like, really down all the time in a way that isn’t normal for me…oh, yesterday I ate seven donuts in one sitting. I threw them all up, but it was this super weird hunger pang I’ve never felt before.”

The doctor pauses. “Can you refresh me on your name and the date you were treated?”

“Stiles Stilinski. May 23rd. You ordered the shot and someone else actually gave it to me.”

“May 23rd?”

“That’s right.”

The doctor sounds a little ill. “Can you refresh me on your symptoms, please?”

Stiles does so, and there’s an even longer pause.

“Mr. Stilinski, I’m going to need you to come into the clinic so we can run some tests. Could you come with a parent or alpha tomorrow at noon?”

Stiles frowns. Tomorrow is his father’s day off, so he can make it, but he’s a little wary of the doctor’s tone. “I guess.”

“Thank you.”

The line goes dead.
Stiles tries not to be scared as his father turns the car into the clinic parking lot. “I’m sure it’s nothing,” his dad says for like the hundredth time, patting Stiles’s leg soothingly as he searches for a parking spot.

“Uh-huh.”

But what if it’s not nothing? What if there’s something really wrong with him? Like…like…

Like the cancer that took his mom away years ago. He doesn’t like to think about that, but he remembers the way she faded away right before his eyes.

He doesn’t want to die, and he really doesn’t want to die like that.

When they get inside the clinic they’re quickly directed to a private waiting room. “The doctor will be with you in just a moment,” the receptionist tells them, shutting the door soundly behind her.

“Did you see the way she looked at me?” Stiles starts pacing, rubbing his stomach when it starts to roil. “I’m dying.”

“You’re not dying, son.”

“That’s the way you look at someone who’s dying.”

“Stiles, she’s a receptionist. They don’t tell her jack. It’s against HIPPA to share your medical information with her.” Sheriff Stilinski sighs. “You’re making me tired with all that pacing, buddy. Come sit.”

“I can’t. I’m scared, dad.” Stiles squeezes his eyes shut, feeling so awful he wants to sink into the floor.

The door opens and Stiles is hit by a wave of scent so overpowering he stumbles. There’s a sudden, shocked intake of breath from the doorway, and then Stiles is being scooped up in an embrace.

It’s so sudden he kind of shrieks, and then his dad is yelling, and everything is so overwhelming that it takes Stiles several seconds to realize what’s happened.

Derek Hale is holding him.

Derek Hale practically broke the sound barrier so he could get to Stiles and sweep him up in his arms.

And now Derek is pressing Stiles face into his chest and growling at Stiles’s dad, who has one hand on his gun and the other hand stretched out towards Derek.

“Mr. Hale,” Sheriff Stilinski says in his sternest voice. “Put down my son, or I will shoot you.”

Derek hisses and moves, just a little, turning Stiles away from his father. Protecting him, Stiles realizes sickly. So he won’t accidentally get hit if his dad shoots.

“Dad, he’s not hurting me,” Stiles manages to say, words muffled by Derek’s chest. It’s true. Derek’s arms are incredibly gentle, and, honestly, Stiles almost wants to cling to him. The shaky, sad, sick way he’s been feeling for five weeks has almost disappeared.

But he’s being cradled like a baby by a complete stranger. A stranger who is, if the rumors are true, a
murderer.

“Put him down,” the sheriff repeats, eyes steely.

Derek growls again.

“Derek,” Stiles says, feeling a little weird at addressing him by name when they’ve never technically been introduced. “My dad will shoot, okay? Put me down.”

Derek blinks at him, and a little bit of reason come back onto his eyes. He sets Stiles carefully on his feet and shakes his head, bewildered.

“Who are you?” he whispers. “Why do you smell like…” His eyes flash red as he struggles to put the concept into words. “Like my mate?”

Stiles gapes at him. “I smell like what?”

Derek reaches out to him. His hand is trembling, eyes wide and a little scared. “You smell like my mate. Like I’ve been mated to you for years. But I don’t even know you. What’s going on?”

“I don’t know,” Stiles says. He folds his arms around his middle and blinks back tears. “I have no idea what’s happening.”

At the sight of his tears Derek’s eyes bleed red again and he wraps his arms around Stiles. The sheriff steps close but it’s obvious that Stiles isn’t being hurt. Instead Derek cuddles him, making a comforting rumbling sound in his chest. As he keeps inhaling Stiles’s scent his wolf seems to come closer and closer to the surface, until he’s mumbling words without even apparently being aware of what he’s saying: “Shh. Don’t cry. Don’t be sad. You’re safe. So safe here. I’ll take care of you. Gonna be right here. Gonna take such good care of you and the cub. Don’t cry—”

Stiles pulls away, shocked. “What did you just say?”

Derek stares down at him, obviously just as stunned by his own words.

Cub?

From the open doorway, someone clears his throat. They all turn to see Dr. Lunger and a nurse staring at them. “You can cancel that blood test,” the doctor says to the nurse. “I think we have our answer.”

“Doctor?” Stiles swallows hard. “Am I…am I pregnant?”

The doctor grimaces. “I can’t tell you how sorry I am for this mistake,” he starts.

Stiles faints.

Derek catches him just before he hits the floor.
Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

You guys, after I posted Chapter One I had to trek seven hours to the city I'm working this summer, and just as I drove in my tire blew out and I had to deal with that, and then I had to unpack everything I owned in the sweltering sun, and generally just cope with the loneliness of being in a new place where you don't know anyone, and then I got online and saw your lovely comments and kudos and just like that: day::made. So thank you very much!

Stiles wakes up to a stinging smell in his nostrils and the most comfortable pillow he’s ever felt.

After a moment of confusion he realizes the stinging smell is a bottle Dr. Lunger is waving in front of Stile’s nose, and the comfortable pillow is Derek’s chest.

Stiles jerks and automatically snaps, “Put me down.”

Derek carefully deposits Stiles on his feet, keeping one hand on Stiles’s shoulder to steady him. His concern pisses Stiles off as much as it makes his stomach curl in happiness, and it takes everything in his power not to jump right back into Derek’s arms and ask him to do that nice chest-rumbling thing again.

“I wouldn’t worry about the fainting,” Dr. Lunger says, capping the bottle. “Your body has been in withdrawal from your alpha during a very sensitive time.”

His words make Stiles so furious it must bleed into his scent, because Derek makes a small angry noise on his behalf. “I don’t have an alpha,” Stiles says between gritted teeth.

Dr. Lunger makes his apologetic little grimace again. “In cases like these, your body recognizes the…er…donor of the… biological material as your chosen alpha. It simulates a mating bite. For as long as you’re pregnant, you’ll be tied to each other.”

Stiles wants to hit something. He really, really does. He can’t have an alpha. When an omega is mated to an alpha, their whole life changes. They have weird biological urges to be cuddled by their alpha, and start cooking and cleaning for them, and that’s not even getting into the heats.

At least Stiles doesn’t have to worry about those. Because pregnant omegas don’t need heats.

And Stiles is pregnant.

Pregnant.

He sways on his feet and feels Derek reaching for him again.

“Dad?” Stiles asks in a small voice, and in a heartbeat Derek is pushed away and Stiles is being held close in his father’s embrace. It feels good, but somehow lacking for the first time, and that comes closer to breaking Stiles than anything.

“Why is he here?” Sheriff Stilinski barks, jerking his chin at Derek. “Whatever my son chooses to do
about this has nothing to do with Mr. Hale. It’s one hundred percent Stiles’s decision and Mr. Hale has zero say. Isn’t that right?”

Stiles expects Derek to have some sort of angry reaction to that, but the bigger man just hangs his head and doesn’t say anything.

“Of course, but when I heard Mr. Stilinski’s symptoms, I knew he was in withdrawal. Alpha-to-omega contact is crucial for an omega’s health during pregnancy,” Dr. Lunger explains quietly.

Stiles knows that. He knows everything about omega pregnancy, in a sort of know-thy-enemy tactic. His body feels vulnerable and wants an alpha for protection. He’ll go into paroxysms of delight if Derek brings him food to show what a good provider he’ll be for the baby. He’ll crave a room somewhere only he and Derek are allowed, a private little cave free of intruders that might harm his cub.

And, now that Derek has smelled him, Derek will be having his own biological urges. To provide, caress, protect. Even human alphas feel that way during their omega’s pregnancy, and Derek is a freaking wolf. It’ll be ten times stronger for him.

But he doesn’t even know Stiles. It isn’t real. Stiles has always been afraid that any relationship he has with an alpha will be led more by biology than the heart, and now look what’s happened.

Stiles sinks into a chair and buries his face in his hands.

#

Eventually things calm down enough that they all sit at the table together, joined by one of the clinic’s lawyers. Derek sits next to Stiles and Stiles has to order himself sternly not to go crawl onto Derek’s lap.

“Please explain to me exactly how this happened,” the Sheriff says, sitting on Stiles’s other side.

Dr. Lunger glances at the lawyer, who nods slightly. “Well, an omega just off blockers is incredibly fertile, and Mr. Hale had just given a fresh sperm sample. That was injected directly into Mr. Stilinski’s anal gland, where it had a clear path to his uterus.”

“Thanks for the birds and the bees stuff, but I already know that part,” Stiles snaps. He’s on-edge with Derek so close but not touching, and his leg jumps up and down in an erratic rhythm. “How did the sample get injected into me in the first place?”

The doctor keeps talking to the Sheriff, as if Stiles is just a dumb little omega old enough to get knocked up but too immature to understand what’s going on. “We’d taken Mr. Hale’s sample and put it in a collection vial. When Mr. Stilinski requested OmaEsterin, a dose was prepared for him in a similar vial, and both were placed on my desk. Unfortunately the day had been hectic enough that neither were properly labelled and when I sent my intern to give Mr. Stilinski his shot he grabbed the wrong vial.”

“How the hell do you make a mistake like that?” Sheriff Stilinski growls, beta eyes glowing bright blue.

“They...well, they looked similar. I wish we had caught the mistake earlier, but I’d sent a nurse to prepare Mr. Hale’s kit, and when she realized the sample wasn’t on my desk she didn’t know where it had actually gone. I didn’t put the pieces together until Mr. Stilinski called yesterday. When I questioned our intern, he admitted that the OmaEsterin he administered looked exactly like a sperm sample, but he just assumed that was normal.” Dr. Lunger shifts uncomfortably when they all stare
incredulously at him. “The intern has been reprimanded,” he says, a little prissily.

“The intern should be fired,” Sheriff Stilinski snaps.

“We’re a teaching clinic,” Dr. Lunger says defensively, as it that answers anything.

Derek speaks up for the first time. His voice is a little gruff, as if he isn’t used to talking in front of a crowd. “You told me my sample was accidentally destroyed.”

Dr. Lunger shrugs helplessly. “Well, we didn’t want to be alarmists.”

The lawyer glances up at the ceiling, clearly cursing the day he chose this career path. “The clinic is more than willing to settle this out-of-court to avoid unnecessary fees,” he says. “We just need to know what Mr. Stilinski wants to do, so we can decide on an appropriate amount.”

Stiles looks up. “What do you mean?”

“If you decide not to terminate, the clinic will be paying to support your child until its eighteenth birthday. Of course, if you do choose termination, the clinic understands there’s a significant emotional trauma that accompanies that, and will enter it into the calculations accordingly.”

Stiles swallows. He has every legal right to have an abortion, and pretty much every moral right too. Stiles has always been a crusader for omega abortion rights. Plenty of lawmakers have tried to chip away at an omega’s right to choose, arguing that it’s too traumatic biologically for an omega to have an abortion and they shouldn’t even have the option presented to them. Just last year Stiles had protested a proposed provision to abortion law that would have required every omega to have an alpha’s consent before the procedure. It had failed, thank God.

If someone had asked him what he would have done in this situation five weeks ago, he’d have chosen the abortion without hesitation.

But.

Now that his brain and all its omega senses knows there’s a baby growing inside of him, it’s practically roaring at the thought of termination. He pictures the table, the stirrups, the sterilized instruments the doctor will use, and his mind just screams THREAT THREAT THREAT over and over. He wants to crawl back into Derek’s arms and beg him to protect Stiles and the baby from something so horrifying.

“I can’t decide right now,” he says almost pitifully, and his father’s hand clamps over his in support.

“Of course not,” Sheriff Stilinski says, glaring at the lawyer. “You take all the time you need, Stiles.”

Stiles glances back over at Derek. The alpha should be losing his mind at the thought of Stiles terminating, but he’s just staring down at the table, fisted hands at his side. “Do you have anything to say?” Stiles asks in a sudden spurt of bitterness, omega senses getting all huffy that Derek isn’t jumping to protect him.

Derek looks over at him guiltily, then at the lawyer. “This isn’t going to be public, is it?” he asks, rough voice almost nervous. “Nobody will know I’m involved?”

“Of course not,” the lawyer says.

Derek closes his eyes in relief, and Stiles suddenly feels so hurt he almost can’t breathe. “Don’t
worry,” he says, voice meant to sound acerbic but coming out flat. “I’ll make sure nobody knows someone like me got shot up with your precious sperm.”

“That’s not why I asked,” Derek says quietly.

Stiles studies him, and then frowns as something occurs to him. “What were you having a sperm sample taken for, anyway?” For all he knows, Derek has a mate he brought back to Beacon Hills with him, and he or she is now pregnant with the baby Derek actually wants.

“Stiles.” Sheriff Stilinski grips his hand. “That’s none of your business.”

Stiles stares at his dad. “You’re kidding, right?”

“When I move to a new place, I’m required by law to give biological samples,” Derek tells him, still looking away. “They test it to monitor my aggression levels and to see how often I shift into my wolf form.”

An awkward silence falls over the room. Stiles looks up at his father, who nods to tell Stiles that, yes, he knew that already. Stiles narrows his eyes. He’s going to get this father to tell him just what the hell Derek Hale did in his life to put him in so much trouble with the law.

“How long do I have to decide?” Stiles asks the doctor, breaking the silence when it becomes unbearable.

“It depends. You can terminate up until the point of viability. If the baby is human, that’s twenty-three weeks. If the baby is a werewolf, that’s eighteen weeks. We’ll take a blood test today, but it’s a little early yet. We usually can’t tell until at least week eight.”

Stiles feels himself go a little green at the thought of a werewolf baby. “I’ll give you an answer soon,” he tells the table at large, keeping his head down. “But I’ll probably…I’m probably going to terminate.”

It hurts to say it. He forces himself to look over at Derek and after a moment the werewolf meets his eye. Each word comes out in a strangled, tortured choke: “That’s probably for the best.”

They look away from each other immediately. Every fiber of Stiles’s being wails for Derek’s touch.

Stiles cries the entire ride home. He swears he can feel the distance between himself and Derek increasing with each passing mile, and his stomach is churning in protest. “It’s not fair,” he hiccups.

“No, buddy. Not even a little.” Sheriff Stilinski squeezes his son’s knee.

“I don’t know what to do.”

“I know. Whatever you decide is just fine, Stiles. We’ll make it work either way.”

That makes Stiles feel a little better, but not by much. He doesn’t want to have an abortion. He doesn’t want to be pregnant. He just wants it all to go away.

“When you found out Mom was pregnant with me, how did it feel?” he asks his father, barely able to speak around the lump in his throat.

“Oh, Stiles.” John looks at his son, heartbreak in his eyes. “You don’t want to think about it that
way. We were adults. We’d been together for years. It’s a completely different situation.”

“I know. But I just have to hear it. Did you, like, recognize me? When did I start to actually feel like a baby to you?”

Because right now it doesn’t feel like a baby. It feels like a cluster of cells at best, a little twist of poison making him sick at worst. Maybe he’s just in denial.

He’s not sure if he should be thinking about it as a baby or not.

“When you kicked,” John answers, keeping his eyes on the road. “You were a demanding little guy. You’d kick and kick and kick until one of us would start singing to you. Remember your mom’s lullaby? It would calm you down so she could get some sleep. That was the first time it felt like you had a personality of your own. Your mother said you were going to be her little Energizer bunny. And then you were, as soon as you were born.”

Stiles’s eyes fill up again. He puts his hand over his abdomen and imagines a baby kicking there. He wonders if you really can have a personality that early. He wonders when the soul comes in.

Stiles knows that he’s lucky to even be allowed to make this choice; lucky he lives in the time he does. A hundred years ago things were so much worse for omegas. Stiles would have been forced to have a mate as soon as he turned eighteen, for his own health, his own protection. He’s always felt free, at least.

Until now.

But now he isn’t being caged by society. It’s his own body, trapping him in a situation he doesn’t want. Whatever he chooses, he’ll feel like he’s betraying something close to him. His convictions or his body. His future or his baby.

If he’d only been an alpha or a beta...

“When I presented as an omega, were you disappointed?” he whispers.

His dad looks at him, sees the pain deep in his eyes, and swerves off to the side of the road. “Not for a second,” he says firmly. “Stiles, look at me. Not for a single second. And you know what I remember?” He takes his son’s hands and squeezes. “You presented when your mom was really sick.”

Stiles nods. He remembers. He’d thought he had somehow caught the cancer from her when the first sickening heat had hit him. The smell of him in heat had upset his mother’s stomach, and they’d had to stay apart for almost a week until he was on his blockers and his hormones had stabilized.

“I went into her room to tell her that the doctors had confirmed you were an omega. And your mom smiled at me and said, ‘I’m glad. He’s going to give omegas everywhere a good name. Our boy won’t ever let an alpha tell him what to do.’” John’s voice breaks. “And she was absolutely right, Stiles. She’d be so proud of you. Just like I am.”

Stiles rests his head against his dad’s chest and cries until he can’t cry anymore.

#

The next morning, after a night of tossing and turning, Stiles holes up in his room and calls Scott. His mind is all jumbled up and confused and he needs Scott’s simple, cheerful way of looking at situations. Scott isn’t dumb, of course, but he’s never had the problem of overthinking things the way
Stiles does. Sometimes that’s just what Stiles needs.

“Hey man,” Scott says when he picks up. “You feeling better?”

“I’m pregnant,” Stiles says.

Might as well just throw Scott right into the deep end.

There’s a long pause. “Are you joking?”

“No.”

Scott’s voice is incredulous. “With whose baby?”

“Derek Hale.”

“The werewolf? I can’t believe you actually talked to him, let alone agreed to be knotted by him!”

“I didn’t,” Stiles says, before realizing how that sounds.

There’s a quick, furious intake of breath. “I’ll kill him,” Scott says simply.

“No, Scott.” Stiles sighs, absurdly touched by the outrage. “He didn’t do anything. It was a mistake at the clinic. They accidently inseminated me. They took some blood samples from me today to confirm, but it’s pretty much certain. And I have no idea what to do.”

“Does Hale know?”

“Yeah. He doesn’t want anything to do with me.” Stiles swallows. Derek had bolted from the clinic as soon as possible, as if he was afraid to touch Stiles again.

Scott pauses again, and when he speaks again Stiles can tell the situation is finally starting to sink in. “Shit, Stiles. Holy shit. Pregnant? You’re seriously not kidding?”

“Does this really seem like a prank I’d pull, Scott?”

“Uh,” Scott says. “Yes?”

It’s true. Stiles has taken advantage of Scot’s gullibility many a time. He’d once convinced Scott that he had a twin brother named Stuart who was too shy to attend school. Every so often he’d put on a pair of his dad’s reading glasses and deepen his voice a little and that was enough to fool poor Scott. He’d kept it up for almost six months.

“No prank,” Stiles says. “I promise. I’m freaking out, Scott. I have to decide if I want to stay pregnant or not and I just… I’m lost.”

Scott’s voice drops. “Stiles, you’re the smartest person I know. Whatever you decide will be the right thing.”

“Thanks, buddy.” Stiles chews at a hangnail. “But that doesn’t get me to the decision any faster, you know?”

“Oh?”

“Do you want me to come over?”

Stiles nods into the phone as if Scott can see him, but apparently that’s answer enough, because Scott says, “I’m on my way.”
Stiles and his personal brain trust sit at the kitchen table to talk their way through the crisis. Scott’s munching on the sour-cream-and-onion chips Stiles had asked him to pick up on the way. By the time Scott arrived with the chips, Stiles wasn’t hungry anymore. He hadn’t really been craving chips. He’d just wanted his alpha to bring him food.

And eating chips from another alpha feels like a betrayal of Derek, which is so, so stupid.

“Okay,” Stiles says, looking at the two people he trusts most. “I don’t want us to get up from this table without a decision.”

“You can take as much time as you want, buddy,” the Sheriff starts.

“I know. But the longer I spend pregnant, the more my brain is clouded by my hormones. I want this decision to be what I decide the right thing is, not what the omega side of me thinks.”

“Pros and cons list?” Scott suggests, crunching another handful of chips.

Stiles has to smile. He’s always been the one telling Scott to make a pros and cons list for every little decision. “Good plan.”

Scott goes for a notebook and a pen, and writes BABY on the top in big letters. “First con,” he says. “A baby would probably ruin our plans to room together at BHU next year.”

“Right.” Stiles looks at his dad. “I want to go to college. I know that the settlement from the clinic will probably make it so I don’t really need to work, but I still want to. Only fourteen percent of omegas are employed in a job that requires a college degree. I want to be in that fourteen percent. I have to be.”

John nods. “Just so we’re considering every piece of the puzzle…you could attend college and still go forward with the pregnancy. BHU is very supportive of omega parents. If I remember correctly, that’s one of the reasons you wanted to go.”

It’s true. Beacon Hills University was the perfect choice for Stiles both in terms of location and in the good work they do for omegas. Still, Stiles had always thought he would just appreciate the university’s omega-parent programs, not take advantage of them. “All those omegas have alphas. I don’t.”

“Right. But they do have housing just for omega parents.”

Stiles grimaces. “I don’t want to live there. That’s for families. I don’t have an alpha, and I wouldn’t feel like I belonged.”

John nods. “That’s a solid con.”

Scott marks it down dutifully. “Any pros?”

Stiles sighs. “I don’t know if this can be considered a pro, but if I have the abortion, my omega senses will basically make me go into a tailspin. Something like that really fucks--sorry, dad--omegas up. It won’t be just some easy cure-all.”

“We can get you counseling,” John says quietly. Stiles had counseling before, right after his mom had died. It hadn’t gone well. Stiles doesn’t really like being psychoanalyzed by anyone.
“But still. It’s not something I’m looking forward to.” Stiles grabs the pen from Scott and rolls it between his palms. “And then there’s Derek,” Stiles says. “He’d be involved in some way if I went forward with the pregnancy.” He slinks a look at his father. “And I’m not exactly thrilled at the thought of being tied to a murderer. If he even really is one.”

The sheriff looks a little tortured. “I can’t share that information with you, Stiles.”

“Oh, that so means yes,” Scott says.

Stiles stares his father down. “Why did Derek need to give the Sherriff’s department samples when he moved back to Beacon Hills?”

“Because that’s the law,” John says firmly, shutting the door on the conversation. “We’re talking about you here, Stiles. Derek doesn’t have to be involved at all. He’s a drifter; I’ve looked at his records. He never stays in one place for more than a year. I can’t tell you about his past, but I can tell you this: sooner or later, he’s going to run. And you can list all these pros and cons in the abstract, but I don’t think they’re really going to help you.” John’s voice softens. “What do you want, son? Go past what your biology is trying to tell you. What does your gut say?”

Stiles closes his eyes. It’s a little easier to be honest without looking at his dad and Scott. “I don’t want people to think I’m just another omega who needed to get knocked up,” he confesses in a rush. “I’ve always been so vocal about what I wanted my life to be like. I thought…I don’t know. I was so special because I wanted to be independent. And if I’m pregnant, everyone will just see me as another walking womb.”

“Oh, Stiles,” Scott says. He reaches for Stiles’s hand, knowing that, as an omega, Stiles can usually be soothed by an alpha hug when he gets upset. But when Scott touches him, all Stiles feels is guilty. Like he’s cheating on Derek.

Will that go away, if he terminates? Or will he be ruined for other alphas forever?

Not like he wants an alpha anyway. He’s never dreamed of having an alpha to take care of him, not even after he first presented, because he’s always been afraid that it won’t be real. He’ll be tricked by a pretty scent and wind up trapped in some alpha’s kitchen, too sated by hormones to run away.

He can’t hide from that fate forever. His body will always, always be longing for a mate and a baby. Those who wait too long go almost crazy in the last few years of their fertility and practically become willing to mate with anyone. Stiles has always been living on borrowed time.

But...if he has a baby now...

An omega that’s been mated and bred isn’t attractive to alphas, and doesn’t need to be attracted to alphas, so Stiles won’t ever crave anyone…well, except Derek, of course, but if Derek doesn’t want anything to do with him, it’s a moot point. And, given the way Derek acted today, Stiles feels pretty sure that he won’t want to be involved. Like the Sheriff said, odds are Derek will be skipping town before the baby even pops out.

Stiles would be a single parent. A single omega parent. That’s insanely rare. Leaving out omegas whose mates have been killed, only two percent of omega parents are unmated.

Stiles can raise his child the way he wants to raise it. No alpha thinking he’s the head of the household ordering Stiles around and influencing their child. Stiles can raise a baby who cares about omega rights, whether it’s an alpha, beta, or omega.

Maybe this baby isn’t a cage at all.
Maybe it’s the thing that will finally set Stiles free.

Scott and the Sheriff must be able to tell by Stiles’s face that he’s having an epiphany, because John gently says, “Son?”

“Do you think I’ll be a good parent?” Stiles asks them both, only slightly aware that he’s said it as if it’s a done deal. He flattens one hand over his abdomen and for the first time doesn’t feel disgusted by the thought of what’s lying under his palm.

“I think you would be a fantastic parent,” John says.

Scott nods. He sounds a little choked up when he says, “I think the world would be a better place if there were more people like you, bro. Any kid raised by you would be amazing.”

“I think I want to do it,” Stiles says. He swallows and amends: “I know I want to do it. I want to have this baby.”

He’s so relieved as soon as he says it.

This is the right thing.

This is what he wants.

#

On his way to the Coffee Karma, Stiles has to pull over three times thinking he’s going to throw up. He’s nervous as fuck, but the part of his brain where the senseless omega lives is all twitterpated at the thought of going to see Derek.

“You’re an idiot,” Stiles mutters to that part of himself as he pulls into the parking lot. He’s not here for cuddles. He’s here to tell Derek that a baby with Derek’s genetic material is going to be making its grand debut in eight months, and he has a feeling that Derek won’t be pleased.

Hence the throwing up.

Someone new is at the counter when Stiles walks in. An alpha, his brain notes, almost distastefully when it sees it’s not the alpha Stiles wants. “Hey,” Stiles says when he reaches the counter. “I’m looking for Derek Hale.”

“He’s unloading a supply truck out back. He doesn’t work the counter anymore.” The new barista wipes the counter with a rag and smirks. “The management decided they wanted someone a little less subverbal.”

Stiles can’t help but bristle at the insult to his quasi-mate. “Because asshole is so much better,” he says without thinking.

The alpha sneers and looks Stiles up and down. “I do love a good asshole,” he almost purrs, leaning over the counter. “But it smells like yours is taken, omega. Shame. Maybe whoever owns it should teach you some manners.”

Stiles flushes, and there’s an enraged snarl from behind him. All the color leaches out of the alpha’s face and he backs away. “You wolf out and I’ll call the cops,” he says shakily.

Stiles turns to see Derek, hands clenched into fists as he tries to keep himself under control. His eyes are bright red and Stiles can see claws biting into his palms. The entire café is silent, watching the
showdown, and suddenly Stiles is afraid on Derek’s behalf. He wants Derek to be okay. He doesn’t want him to be fired or arrested because of Stiles.

Whatever happens to Stiles’s scent at the thought works to calm Derek down. Derek closes his eyes and takes a few deep breaths. When he opens them again, they’re a normal brown. “You don’t talk to him that way,” he grunts to the alpha at the counter.

The man raises his hands in acquiescence. “Just get out of here,” he says to them both. “You’re done for the day, Hale.”

Derek grabs Stiles’s hand and storms outside with him. His hand is a little rough and calloused and Stiles wants to feel his thumb scraping over Stiles’s bottom lip, teasing him, then letting Stiles suck on it until it’s wet and soft in his mouth…

Damn it. Down, boy.

“I hate that guy,” Derek says when they’re in the parking lot.

Stiles is so surprised he barks out a laugh. “I can see why.”

“Are you okay?”

“I’m fine.” Stiles crosses his arms and studies Derek. Whenever he’s heard Derek talk to someone else—Jackson, the lawyer at the clinic, the barista—he acts like a caveman who’s just mastered the art of stringing syllables together. But when he’s talking to Stiles he sounds…normal.

Maybe he’s reading too much into it.

“I just wanted to let you know that I made my decision.”

Derek looks away from him and squints into the sun. “Okay,” he says. Stiles can see him take a deep breath, steeling himself for the blow.

“I’m going to have the baby.”

Derek’s mouth falls open. “But…you said…”

“I know. But I thought about it and I changed my mind.” Derek just stares at him, stunned. “I know it’s not what you wanted,” Stiles says, ignoring his internal omega’s sad whining. “You don’t have to be involved at all. I can get by without alpha contact. I’m sure there’s some kind of drug to stifle the bond we have now. You don’t have to feel obligated in any way.”

Derek keeps staring at him. Then he says in a mumble, “I don’t want you to be alone.”

“I won’t be alone. I have my dad, and my best friend. Lots of friends. I’m crazy popular.” Stiles tries to smile at his own lame joke, but Derek doesn’t meet his eye.

“I want to be there for you,” Derek continues, still mumbling, now with his eyes cast to the ground. “But I also want you and the baby to be safe. And you won’t be if you’re around me.”

Stiles’s smile slips. He examines the werewolf, who doesn’t look at all scary right now with his head hanging. “Look,” Stiles says, not even sure where the words are coming from. “I don’t know what you did. My dad won’t tell me. For all I know, you blew up an entire maternity ward or something. But for what it’s worth…I don’t think you’d ever hurt me.”

Derek’s head snaps up. He stares at Stiles like Stiles has just given him the most amazing, surprising
gift ever, and his mouth sort of hangs open in what Stiles thinks is the closest Derek Hale can get to a grin. It makes Stiles feel so good. He’s pleased his alpha. He made Derek smile.

He doesn’t know which one of them goes in for the embrace, but in the time it takes to blink Stiles is in Derek’s arms again. It feels amazing, so perfect Stiles decides to just let himself have it. He presses his face into Derek’s shirt and smells him happily while Derek purrs deep in his chest.

It’s enough to make Stiles think that it might not be so bad, being mated to Derek for real. Maybe Derek is a super-progressive alpha who wants an omega as a partner, not a servant. After all, Derek knows what it’s like to be judged on something he can’t control. Maybe they were made for each other.

They stay like that for over a minute, until Stiles is finally brave enough to break away. Derek kind of grimaces once he isn’t holding Stiles anymore and he glances around the parking lot to make sure nobody saw them.

That kills the post-embrace bliss Stiles is feeling real fast.

Maybe Derek is just a dick who feels obligated, and Stiles would be better off if they never talked to each other again.

“I should go,” Stiles says, backing away. “I just wanted you to know what I decided.”

“Wait.” Derek stuffs his hands into his pockets as if he doesn’t trust himself not to reach for Stiles. “Can I… bring you dinner tonight? We don’t have to eat it together or anything. If you just give me your address I can drop it off.” He swallows so hard Stiles can see his Adam’s apple bob. “I’m an okay cook, I promise. It’ll have spinach in it. Or something like that. Something good for the baby.”

“That would be nice,” Stiles manages to say past the happy shrieking in his mind. Derek wants to make him dinner. Sure, maybe he doesn’t want to be seen holding Stiles, but who cares? Derek is providing, and that’s all Stiles’s omega needs to stay happy. “Do you have a cell phone? Give me the number and I’ll text you my address. We should probably have a way to communicate with each other anyway.”

Derek does so. “I’ll see you tonight,” he promises.

“See you tonight.” Stiles gets in his car and puts the key in the ignition, watching Derek slip back into the café. Suddenly, before Stiles can actually start his car, he’s laughing hysterically.

What is his life?

He’s eighteen.

He’s pregnant.

He’s just decided to change the entire course of his future.

And a murdering werewolf is making him something with spinach for dinner.
As it turns out, Derek Hale is a surprisingly good cook. At first Stiles thinks it might just be his omega hormones making him think the spinach casserole Derek drops off that night is so freaking delicious, but when his dad tries it he ends up eating an entire plate without complaint. And the Sheriff never eats a healthy meal without at least a little bitching.

The only thing leaving a sour taste in Stiles’s mouth is the fact that Derek had rung the doorbell and then bolted back to his car, leaving the casserole on the porch. Stiles had opened the door just in time to see him drive away.

He agonizes over his phone forever, trying to figure out what to say to Derek, and finally just settles on: thanks.

Texting seems a little too human for Derek Hale, but ten minutes later he gets a reply: I’d like to do it again tomorrow. Are you allergic to anything?

No. Stiles hesitates over the keys. He wants to tell Derek to make enough for three, so Derek can stay and eat with them, but he knows how much it will hurt if Derek refuses.

So he just sends the single word and buries his head in his pillow, cursing his cowardice.

Derek doesn’t text back, but the next day there’s a tureen of pumpkin soup, still hot from the stove, sitting on the porch.

#

After a week of dinners, Stiles is determined to beat Derek at his own game. He hovers by the door, waiting for the bell to ring so he can yank it open and catch Derek before he runs away, but Derek always manages to arrive just when Stiles has to take a bathroom break or grab a glass of water.

He doesn’t just want to see Derek to make his internal omega happy. They have stuff to discuss. Important stuff, like the settlement from the clinic, and whether or not Derek will be staying in Beacon Hills, and what Stiles is supposed to tell his friends. He couldn’t keep Derek’s involvement from Scott, of course; Scott is his best bro. But if tells Jackson and Lydia that Derek is his child’s father, the entire town will know, and Stiles doesn’t want to do that to Derek without his knowledge.

They’ve texted, but Stiles can’t bear to bring up something so important over the phone. As the week goes by, though, they move past the ingredients in Derek’s dinners and start to talk about other things. Stiles’s pregnancy symptoms. Whether or not Stiles will be taking a gap year and starting school after he has the baby or just starting in September like he planned (he hasn’t decided yet). Whether or not Stiles wants a baby shower. Why people insist on playing weird diaper games at said showers (Derek is completely in the dark about such a practice, and is gratifyingly disgusted when Stiles describes melting different chocolates in a diaper, then passing it around to see if attendees can guess what brand it is.)

On the sixth day, Stiles is bold enough to ask Derek why he had to give biological samples to the Sheriff’s department when he moved back into town.

Derek refuses to respond.

Figures.
But Stiles has a feeling that if he was right up in Derek’s space, flooding his nose with pheromones, flashing gold omega eyes at him over the table, Derek would open right up for him. Sure, it’s underhanded, but Stiles is tired of being in the dark.

So exactly one week after Stiles decides to keep the baby he camps out by the window in the living room and watches for Derek’s jeep. His father is still at work, which Stiles figures is best for all involved—Derek has to be wary around law enforcement, and the Sheriff probably wouldn’t be thrilled to know that Stiles is meeting Derek alone like this.

When the jeep pulls up Stiles runs for the door and wrenches it open just as Derek’s finger is going for the doorbell.

Derek freezes.

“Hi,” Stiles says lamely.

“Hi,” Derek mimics, tensed to run away.

Stiles looks down at the Tupperware container Derek has already placed on the ground. “What’s today’s delicacy?”

“Ah…chicken on rice with mushrooms.”

“Sounds good.” Stiles steps aside, leaving a space for Derek to step through. “My dad isn’t home to eat with me. Care to join?”

Derek’s face softens a little. “I shouldn’t.”

“Of course you should. You made it. And we really need to discuss some things anyway.”

Derek stares at Stiles, looking torn. He glances over his shoulder, then says, “Just let me move my car.”

Stiles carries the food into the kitchen and grabs two bowls. A part of him is convinced that Derek is actually driving away, but in a few minutes Derek had reappeared in the kitchen doorway.

“Are you sure your father is all right with this?” Derek asks softly as he takes a bowl from Stiles.

“Absolutely,” Stiles lies.

Derek quirks an eyebrow at him. “You know, werewolves can hear heartbeats. They speed up when somebody tells a lie.”

Stiles gapes at him. That’s insanely creepy. “So, what, you just walk around all day eavesdropping on every stranger’s cardiovascular system?”

Derek flushes. “No. I can’t hear it unless I’m focusing on it.” He grabs his spoon and shovels what looks like half the bowl’s worth of food into his mouth, purposefully trying to keep Stiles from understanding his next words: “And I can’t help but focus on yours.”

Stiles turns just as red as Derek at that. He turns his attention to the food and they eat in silence for a few minutes, until every tick of the clock sounds like a bomb. Eventually Stiles has to say something just to cut the tension.

“It helped, you know,” he says, nodding at the food. “You bringing me dinner. I’ve barely been sick at all. Which is weird, because it’s like my body just knows that you’re the one providing it, even
though I haven’t even seen you. Maybe the food still has your scent on it or something. Which is kind of gross. But I don’t know how else it would work so well to keep me from withdrawal. Do you, like, touch it a lot when you’re cooking?”

Derek looks a little dazed by the flood of words. “No,” he says. “I spit in it, though.”

Stiles freezes, cheeks bulging with food.

Derek kind of smiles.

Stiles swallows his mouthful and reaches for his water glass. “Decent joke, terrible delivery.”

“Yeah, well, I’m rusty.” Derek stabs a mushroom with his fork. His bowl is almost empty and Stiles hasn’t even touched on what he needs to say.

He doesn’t want to talk about all that, he realizes as he takes another bite. He knows it’s important. But right now, with Derek still smiling down at the table, this feels almost like a date. And Stiles is pretty sure that what he needs to discuss with Derek isn’t exactly first date material.

“Did you make a decision about school yet?” Derek asks. He seems a little bit more comfortable in the chair and in his own skin now, though he still doesn’t really look at Stiles when he talks.

“Yeah.” Stiles stands to refill their bowls. “I’m taking the gap year. The baby is due in February—did I tell you the clinic told me the due date is February 18th?—and I don’t want to be in my last trimester for finals. I talked it over with my dad, and I’ll keep living here with him. Maybe do some work for the Sheriff’s department’s cyber-crime division.” Stiles pauses. “I’m pretty good with computers.”

“Is that what you want to do after college?”

“Maybe. I was going to major in computer engineering.” Stiles blushes when Derek’s eyebrows shoot up. “BHU has a really good program.”

“You don’t see a lot of omegas in that field,” Derek says.

“Yeah. That might be part of the reason I wanted to do it.” Stiles looks down at his bowl, surprised he said that.

Derek takes a while before he responds: “That’s brave.”

The warm pleasure Stiles feels at being praised by his alpha is like nothing he’s ever experienced before. He immediately wants more. He wants to get on his knees and present for Derek so Derek can tell him how beautiful he is; how perfect. He wants to curl up in Derek’s lap, so Derek can suck a love bite on Stiles’s neck while cooing to Stiles how pretty he looks with Derek’s mark.

Oh, fuck. *Fuck.*

He intentionally spills ice water on his lap to snap himself out of it, then asks, “What about you?” in a voice so high he wants to smack himself.

“I never went to college. But I have my GED. Most places don’t hire people without it, and I’ve never met a business looking for a reason to hire a werewolf.” Derek looks surprised, as if he too had shared more than he intended.

“You made really good coffee down at the café,” Stiles says, watching Derek’s cheeks tint at the
praise. “Have you been a barista in most places you’ve lived?”

Derek plays with his fork. “Once or twice. It’s not my favorite job. I don’t really like talking to strangers. I was a janitor, back when I was still underage. In the last town I lived in I taught omega self-defense courses.”

“Wait, seriously?” Stiles has taken four self-defense courses since he presented as an omega. “I was the star pupil in Beacon Hills’ omega self-defense course. The instructor said I could hold my own against an entire team of alphas.” He winces as soon as he says it. *Cool bragging, Stiles. Now show him the “participation” trophy you got playing soccer in third grade!*

Derek nods approvingly. “Good. But your center of balance is going to be changing as you get heavier. We should keep practicing so you can adapt.”

Stiles grins so wide it hurts. That sounds like Derek is going to be sticking around. “What made you want to teach the courses?” he asks as casually as possible, sticking his last bite of food in his mouth. He wants to believe that Derek is progressive, but it’s hard to just bluntly ask him about it: *So, do you support omega rights, or are you an asshole?*

“I don’t think anyone should be helpless,” Derek says quietly.

Stiles can’t think of a response to that, but he can suddenly *feel* Derek’s sadness. It’s like it’s clouding up his scent or something, and it makes Stile want to whimper and nuzzle against Derek’s chest until he’s smiling again.

“Did you know an omega who got hurt?” Stiles asks carefully, not wanting to upset his alpha any further.

“I knew a lot of omegas who got hurt. But not because they were omegas.” Derek ticks off on his fingers. “My dad. My little sister, Cora. My cousins, Timmy and Shayna. My uncle Peter. Two others. I also knew seven betas who got hurt. But not because they were betas. And five alphas.” He takes a breath. “But not because they were alphas.”

“The fire,” Stiles guesses.

He’d somehow forgotten that Derek had lost his entire family. Derek doesn’t wear his past on his sleeve, and just looking at him it’s hard to believe that he’d ever once grieved over a casket or cried at a grave. He was too…*wolf* for that.

“The fire,” Derek echoes. He’s the picture of despair, staring away from Stiles as if he’s seeing it all again. Stiles wonders if he’d managed to push the grief aside while he lived on his own, and now, with Stiles, all that human vulnerability is slowly coming back.

He can’t bear Derek’s sadness for another second, so he pushes back his chair and goes to sit on Derek’s lap. Derek catches his breath in surprise as Stiles leans against him, pressing his face to Derek’s neck. One hand cautiously comes up to rest on the small of Stiles’s back.

“I’m sorry,” Stiles says, humming the words into the crook of Derek’s neck. His lips are so close to Derek’s skin he could kiss him. Just a little press of his lips, soft and gentle; just enough to convince Derek to bend down and return the favor.

He doesn’t.

He’s a coward.
“Stiles,” Derek warns, voice a little strained. “This is dangerous.”

Stiles shakes his head and doesn’t budge. “It’s making you feel better.”

Derek is tense, as though he might toss Stiles and run, so Stiles flashes his eyes to remind Derek he isn’t trying to threaten him. He snuggles in a little closer and rests his head against Derek’s chest. “Now I could hear if you told a lie.”

Derek’s breath comes in a sort of pant. “I wouldn’t lie to you.”

Stiles nods. “I know. I trust you.”

Derek practically goes boneless at the words. Then he clutches Stiles, one hand cradling the back of his head, and rocks them both back and forth. There’s a grateful rumble coming from his chest and Stiles lets it vibrate through him happily. He’s never felt safer in his life.

When Derek finally loosens his grip Stiles leans back reluctantly. “My dad will be home soon,” he says, hating himself for the words.

Derek nods. His eyes are still a little dazed, mouth still a little slack.

“But he’ll be working late again tomorrow.”

Derek smiles. It looks like a real smile, a little wicked, like it’s Derek’s natural smile and not the one he puts on when he’s trying to remember how to be human. “I was thinking I’d make soup again.”

Stiles grins back, and his is definitely a little wicked. “I’ll make dessert.”

#

The next day Stiles agrees to meet Jackson for lunch. They go back to the Coffee Karma— it’s the only place they can afford— but Stiles knows that Derek doesn’t work on Sundays.

Stiles prepares how he’s going to detonate the pregnancy bomb on Jackson the whole way over. He’s going to just tell his friends the truth, since they’ll figure it out anyway if his baby is born a werewolf. Surely Derek doesn’t want Stiles to hide it. It weirdly hurts to think of denying Derek’s paternity. It makes Stiles feel like he’s somehow lacking. Like his baby is lacking.

“You look better,” Jackson says when they take seats at the counter. “You still smell weird, though.”

“I feel better.” Stiles takes a breath. “I have to tell you something. It’s going to sound a little crazy…”

“You!”

Jackson flashes his eyes in annoyance and they both look up to see the barista, come to take their orders. He’s scowling at Stiles, and Stiles recognizes him right away: the alpha who’d almost made Derek wolf out last week.

“Hale’s omega,” the alpha says, lip curled in distaste.


“I got my pay docked because of you,” he hisses, leaning into Stiles’s personal space. “Hale ratted me out to the owners. Said I was harassing customers.”

“Good,” Stiles says, forcing himself not to lean back. “You were out-of-line.”
The alpha’s eyes flash. “Well, your wolf’s not here now, is he?”

“But I am,” Jackson says, suddenly pressing up right against Stiles. “You have a problem with my friend?”

Stiles holds his breath. The last thing he wants is an alpha fight over him between two alphas he doesn’t even want. After a second the barista backs away. “Why don’t you two find another place to eat,” he says.

“Gladly.” Jackson tugs on Stiles’s arm and storms out of the café, Stiles only a step behind. Once they’re outside Stiles glances through the window and sees a stranger signaling the barista over while staring straight at Stiles.

“What the hell was that about?” Jackson asks. His chest is still heaving up and down from the near-fight, and he looks pissed. It’s enough to make Stiles want to shout for Derek to come protect him from the angry alpha.

“Nothing. He’s just a dick.” The stranger is pointing at Stiles now, asking the barista something. The barista nods.

“Why did he call you Hale’s omega?”

Stiles tugs his gaze away from the man inside the café. “It’s complicated.”

Jackson looks almost devastated. “Are you with Hale now?”

“No. Not really. Kind of.” Stiles sighs. This really isn’t the way he wanted this conversation to go. “Look, Jackson…”

Jackson isn’t listening. “Stiles, he’s dangerous. He’s a killer.”

“No, he’s not!” Stiles glares at his friend, whatever was going on with the stranger and the barista completely forgotten. “If people like you didn’t get their kicks spreading rumors about him, he’d be absolutely fine. Derek wouldn’t hurt a fly, okay?”

Jackson shakes his head patronizingly. “Stiles, you’re not thinking straight. What, he gave you a hug and washed you in his scent and made you think he was Prince Charming? An alpha can tell what an omega can’t. Hale’s not a good guy.”

Stiles actually feels one of his hands curl into a fist. “Don’t fucking act like I’m just a stupid omega who needs your protection, Jackson.”

“But you are an omega, Stiles.” Jackson’s voice drops. “I’m not trying to insult you. You’re a beautiful, perfect omega, and you want Hale? He’s going to ruin you. It would be such a waste…”

“Fuck you, Jackson.” Stiles turns away. He wants to run to his car, but if he takes a step he thinks he might hurl. “Get away from me. I mean it.”

Jackson tries to touch him. “I didn’t…”

“Jackson, if you don’t get out of here, I’ll scream. What will all the beautiful, perfect omegas think of you then?”

Stiles keeps his head turned away until Jackson’s footsteps finally recede. The stranger has disappeared from the café, but Stiles doesn’t care about him anymore. He wishes he knew where
Derek lives. He could really use an alpha cuddle right now.

He could text Derek and ask if he can come over.

Surely Derek will say yes, if he thinks Stiles needs him.

Stiles pulls out his phone and, just like that, it rings. Stiles almost drops it in excitement, thinking it must be Derek, signaled by some alpha sense that Stiles is hurting. But it’s just the Sheriff.

“Hey, dad,” Stiles says, trying not to let his disappointment into his voice.

“Hey, buddy. The clinic called about your settlement.” The sheriff takes a breath. “There’s something you should know.”

#

Derek has dressed up for dinner tonight. When Stiles opens the door Derek is smiling right at him, holding a tureen and wearing a jacket over his Henley.

“I hope you’re hungry,” he says.

Stiles doesn’t respond. He walks into the kitchen and pulls out two bowls and spoons. After a confused minute Derek follows him in.

“Are you okay?”

Stiles starts ladling the soup into the bowls. “Honestly, I’m a little confused. Sit down.”

Derek does so, watching Stiles warily. “Confused?”

“About you. About us.” Stiles sits down so he doesn’t have to feel his knees shaking. “The clinic called. They’ve figured out an amount for my settlement. It’s a lot. A lot. But they’re willing to pay you out too, and apparently you’ve refused.

Derek takes his first spoonful of soup, refusing to look at Stiles. “I don’t want money.”

“It’s only what you’re owed.”

Derek snorts. “That’s not really how I look at the world, Stiles.” It’s the first time Derek has ever said his name, and he stops a little after he says it, as if he’s tasting the word on his tongue. “You deserve it. All of it. Any money that goes to me is money that won’t be going to you and the cub.”

“So you did it for me,” Stiles says, suddenly angry, tapping his spoon against the side of the bowl as he tries to stay calm. “Is that why you’ve requested your name be redacted on all of the clinic’s paperwork?”

Derek doesn’t even look guilty. He just pushes back his chair, as if he thinks Stiles is about to throw him out. “They told you that?”

“That you want to make sure nobody can link you to your own child? Yeah, Derek. They did.”

Stiles studies Derek. The smile is gone from the werewolf’s face now. He looks just the way he did when Stiles first saw him in the café: uncomfortable. Cornered. Feral. “So you don’t want anyone to know that I’m having your baby, huh? Is it because I’m human? You don’t think we’re biologically compatible enough to have a baby you could be proud of? Of are you just not into omegas?”

Derek huffs out a breath. There’s the slightest hint of a growl edging it. “Stop.”
“Just tell me if this is something you’re going to get over,” Stiles says, trying to make Derek look at him. “Because I have to know what to write down on the baby’s birth certificate after alpha parent.”

Derek’s gaze slides over to meet Stiles’s. His eyes are bright red, teeth bared so tightly the word barely slips out: “Unknown.”

Stiles catches his breath.

“Or redacted.” Derek looks away again. “Whatever you prefer.”

Stiles stands. There’s a ringing in his ears and a hot, sharp pain in his chest. “If that’s the way you feel, get out of here. And don’t come back.”

Derek shuts his eyes, and just like that, he doesn’t look scary anymore. Only pitiful. “Wait,” he says. “I didn’t mean it like that.”

“I’m not kidding, Derek. Go.” A single tear falls and Stiles dashes it away angrily. “I’ll just put deceased on the forms. I’d rather my child have no alpha parent than one too embarrassed to claim it.”

Derek growls again, but this time it just sounds frustrated. “I’m not embarrassed,” he says, standing up from the table too. “Please don’t cry. Please, Stiles.”

“I’m not crying!” But he is, damn it. He’s fighting with his alpha, and he’s pregnant, and he just wants a hug.

“It’s not that I’m embarrassed.” Derek steps a little closer to Stiles, and Stiles knows that he’s trying to soothe Stiles with his scent. He hates that it actually works. “I don’t want there to be a paper trail linked to me, all right? I just want to keep my head down, because then I’ll be able to stay here for as long as I can.” Derek hesitantly reaches out to touch Stiles’s arm. “I’m dangerous, Stiles,” he says softly. “Someday it won’t be safe for you to be linked to me.”

Stiles shakes his head. “I don’t believe that.”

“I know. And it’s because you don’t— you won’t— that I have to be so careful.”

Stiles forces himself not to lean into Derek’s touch. He stares at the werewolf and flashes his eyes, momentarily forgetting that they’re gold, a sign of submission and not of strength. “I don’t know why you keep insisting you’re such a bad guy, Derek, but I’m tired of it. What did you do that’s so terrible? Why do people think you killed someone?”

Derek looks down at him evenly. “Because I did,” he says without a single note of emotion in his voice.

Stiles goes completely still. “You’re lying.”

“No. I’m not.”

Stiles believes him. He just knows that he’s telling the truth; can feel it through their bond. The rumors about Derek are true.

All of a sudden it’s not his alpha in front of him. It’s a killer. A monster. A threat to his baby.

He takes a large, fearful step back.

Derek’s scent is flooded with despair. “Yeah,” he says dully. “That’s what I thought.”
Stiles can’t imagine Derek as a killer, but he’s scared. There’s a murderer standing in his kitchen, and Stiles is alone and pregnant and defenseless. He wants his alpha to protect him from this threat. But the threat is his alpha.

He crosses his arms in front of his belly and whimpers.

Derek must be able to feel his terror through the bond because he puts up both hands and gently says, “It’s okay, Stiles. I’m leaving. I won’t hurt you.”

Don’t go.

Stiles can’t tell who it is silently begging Derek to stay— the omega, who has been taught to fear a threat, or Stiles, who should know better than to trust a killer.

“You’re safe,” Derek continues, backing away towards the door. “You aren’t going to be in any danger from me, I promise.” He takes a deep breath at the door. “I promise I won’t come back.”

Don’t leave me.

Don’t leave us.

Stiles wants to stop him somehow, but he’s frozen. The door closes behind Derek, clicking so softly he might never have been there, if not for the two bowls of soup slowly going cold on the table.
Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

Mommas, don't let your babies grow up to be law clerks. RL is currently performing a sucktackular butt-kicking, so I just wanted to say thanks again to everyone who has shown this story a little love. Y'all are getting me through and I <3 ya.

ALSO in this chapter we learn the truth about Derek, and it's pretty much a Classic Derek Backstory replete with violence and betrayal, so if that's not your thing, please be on the lookout :)

Alpha withdrawal is so much worse now that Stiles knows what he’s missing. His body starts punishing him only hours after Derek leaves and doesn’t let up all through the night.

His father, hovering outside the bathroom with an increasingly grim expression, is about ready to drive him to the emergency room, but Stiles finally stop throwing up around four a.m., at which time he crawls into bed and sleeps for twelve hours straight.

Then the depression hits.

He fucked up.

He’d told Derek that he trusted him, and then as soon as that was put to the test he panicked. There’s no way he can make that right, and as the hours roll by he can’t even imagine trying.

Derek doesn’t need another person in his life who makes him feel like a monster.

#

“Hey buddy.” The sheriff waves a box of donuts in front of Stiles. “Got you something to cheer you up.”

Stiles opens the box and wrinkles his nose. There are three missing from the dozen. “Using your son’s heartbreak to cheat on your diet? That’s shameful, dad.”

“I gained twenty-two pounds of sympathy weight when your mother was carrying you, so get used to it.” John sits on Stiles’s bed and reaches for another donut, expression going grave when Stiles doesn’t even try to stop him. “What happened, Stiles?”

Stiles pokes at a donut, watching the powdered sugar poof in a little cloud. “Derek was here. He told me the rumors about him were true. I went into damsel-in-distress omega mode and he left.”

John’s hand falls away from the box.

Stiles looks at his father. “Why isn’t he in jail?”

John scratches his head, eyes shifting away from his son. “It's complicated. There were…mitigating circumstances.”

“Like self-defense?”
“Not exactly.” John groans in exasperation. “Damn it, Stiles, you know I can’t tell you this stuff.”

“I know.” Stiles reaches for a donut. Jelly. It’s bland in his mouth and tastes like a lump of nothing going down.

“Oh, hell.” John takes off his badge and tosses it on Stiles’s desk as if he doesn’t want it eavesdropping. “This is a one-time thing, all right? Only because I can’t stand you looking so damn sad. They didn’t put him in jail because he wasn’t human when it happened. He was a wolf, and not by choice. He’d been forced to stay in his wolf form for a long time, longer than is healthy, and some people got killed. Then there was a girl who was murdered in Kitoosie, and he was questioned, but released, so I discount it. That’s all I know. The details are sealed.”

Stiles gapes at his dad. “Forced?”

“That’s what his file says.”

“Like… forced by someone? By the people he killed?”

“I’d imagine so.” John hesitates. “Stiles, there are people out there who really, really don’t like werewolves. You need to remember that. Because, well, soon you might have a werewolf you need to protect.”

Stiles shakes his head and feels the donut start to churn in his belly. “I don’t think Derek’s coming back, Dad.”

“I’m not talking about Derek,” John says, and hugs his son tight, as if he wishes he could be the one do the protecting, always. “I’m talking about the baby.”

He goes in for the test at nine weeks. After almost two weeks of alpha-withdrawal he’s honestly concerned for the baby’s well-being— surely it can’t be healthy for him to throw up this much. Scott had joked that Stiles should go hide behind the Coffee Karma, wait for Derek to throw out trash, and rifle through it for food, in case that satisfies his body’s need to eat something his alpha has provided. If the symptoms don’t let up, Stiles just might.

He’s still being treated at the clinic, since it’s the best place for omega care in the entire state, but as he sits on the cot waiting for his doctor he glances around the room distrustfully. He’s torn between feeling like something terrible happened to him here and the best thing ever happened to him here. That he’s even confused about it makes him feel guilty on behalf of the baby, and he pats the barely-there lump in his belly. “You’re the greatest,” he whispers. “Promise.”

There’s a faint knock on the door and the OBGYN comes in. “Hi, Mr. Stilinski.” She shakes his hand. “Dr. Morell. Is it just you today?”

“Yes.” His dad and Scott had both offered to come, but for some reason Stiles had wanted to do this alone.

“Nine weeks, human omega and werewolf alpha?”

“That’s right.”

“We’re just going to do a little ultrasound, see how photogenic Baby here is, and then I’ll run a blood test so we can figure out which parent it’s going to take after. All right?”
Stiles nods and adjusts on the cot nervously. Dr. Morell squirts gel over his stomach and picks up the ultrasound wand. “Here we go,” she says, and turns on the screen. After a moment of adjusting the wand she coos in delight. “Oh, hi, Baby.”

Stiles stares at the screen. That’s his baby there—he can see the distinct lump, a big glob on the end that must be the head. It’s real. It’s inside him. It’s his child.

“He looks so little,” he says, wanting to stroke the screen in wonderment. It’s unfathomable to him that it’s right under his skin.

“Well, he’s the size of a grape right now, but he’s getting bigger by the day.” Dr. Morell winks at him. “And don’t you go making gender-predictions just yet, you’ve got a long way to go before Baby’s ready to show you that!”

“Can I take the picture home with me?”

“Of course you can. Just one printout?”

“Two, please. No, three. Actually…go with four.” Stiles chews his nail, still looking at the baby. One for his dad’s work desk, one for Scott, and one, just in case, for Derek.

Dr. Morell shuts the machine off and wipes Stiles’s belly clean. “Are you ready for that blood test now?”

Is he? He has to know, but he’s not sure what he’ll do if the baby isn’t human. He’s going to love it regardless, but he thinks about what his father said, about anti-werewolf prejudice. The idea of anybody hating his little sweet pea—oh, fuck, he nicknamed it, and he was going to try so hard not to be that guy—makes him want to curl around his belly and growl like he’s a werewolf himself.

“I’m ready.”

Dr. Morell selects a wicked-looking needle. “Pretty simple,” she tells him, squirting a small bit of EMLA cream just above his groin. “If the baby is a werewolf, your body will be producing a hormone called lycadone in your blood. If the baby is human, no lycadone. So once we have a sample, we’ll drop it into the reagent and you’ll get to see a little magic act. If the reagent turns blue, human. If it looks like the whole vial has suddenly turned to blood, werewolf. It’s nice that you’re a human yourself—werewolf omegas already have lycadone in their bloodstream, so it’s harder to tell. Very rarely do you see a werewolf omega with a human alpha though, which is odd, and just like two humans only make a human, two werewolves only make a werewolf. And look, I distracted you with my chit-chatting enough that we’ve already got the blood and you didn’t even notice!”

Stiles smiles weakly at her while she carefully lets a few drops of blood fall into another vial, this one filled with clear liquid. It happens almost instantly, a sea change that really is like magic: the liquid turns a deep ruby, far more beautiful than blood.

“Well, look at that,” Dr. Morell breathes.

Stiles rubs his stomach and stares at the vial. “Is this conclusive? Like, one-hundred-percent?”

“One-hundred-percent, guaranteed.” Dr. Morell looks at him, eyes practically sparking. “I’ve never had a werewolf pregnancy before. This is very exciting!” When Stiles raises an eyebrow she has the grace to look a bit abashed. “But we covered it extensively in medical school, don’t you worry.”

“Yeah,” Stiles says absent-mindedly, still keeping one hand planted on his stomach. “Trusting medical professionals has never led me wrong before.”
“One thing, though.” Dr. Morell’s face goes completely serious. “Remember when you said it
looked tiny? Well, it was fine for a human baby…but for a werewolf fetus, it’s a bit underdeveloped.
I know things are complicated between you and your alpha, but alpha deprivation during a werewolf
pregnancy is strongly correlated with low birth rate and other fetal complications. If you know you
won’t be in contact with the alpha, I’m going to need to start you on hormone therapy.”

Stiles shakes his head. “I’ll take care of it,” he promises, both to the doctor and to the baby. If being
away from Derek hurts the baby…God. He looks down at the printout of the ultrasound Dr. Morell
gives him before she sends him on his way. He’ll never be that selfish.

He can’t stop staring at the ultrasound all the way out to the lobby, where he checks out at the desk.
The woman there laughs at him. “Baby’s first picture?”

Stiles grins and holds up the ultrasound. “This here’s my baby werewolf. Tell me he’s better-looking
than all his peers?”

“Oh, by far.” She chuckles warmly and gives him back his insurance card. “You have a good day,
Mr. Stilinski.”

When Stiles turns to leave he feels someone’s eyes on him. There’s a man sitting in the lobby,
evidently alone, eyes fixed on Stiles and the ultrasound. When he sees Stiles looking his lip curls and
he turns away. Stiles is sure he recognizes the man, but it isn’t until he gets to his car that he
remembers. The man from the café, who had asked the barista something about Stiles. Stiles knows
he shouldn’t judge a book by its cover, but, well, that man looks like the kind of person who hates
werewolves on principle.

Maybe he shouldn’t have announced it so loudly in there. There’s a lot he has to learn if he’s going
to be able to effectively father this child.

He pulls out his phone and speed-dials the Sheriff. “Hey, Dad.” He takes a deep breath. “I need you
to do something unethical.”

#

Contrary to one rumor Jackson had tossed around, Derek Hale doesn’t live in a cave. It’s not the
Ritz-Carlton Stiles pulls up to fifteen minutes later by any means, but it’s a decent-looking apartment
on the edge of town.

He looks down at the baby’s ultrasound one more time. “You might have to do most of the work on
this one,” he tells the baby. “Must be nice, being so stinking lovable.”

Derek’s jeep is in the parking lot, thank God, and Stiles rings the doorbell before he can think twice.
There’s a pause, and then the curtain flips up just a bit so Derek can peer through. His mouth falls
open in shock and a second later the door is wrenched open.

“Stiles?” Derek looks around, as if someone else might be hiding in the bushes. “How did you find
me?”

“You had to register your address with the Sheriff’s department when you moved in.” Stiles tries a
smile. “I know you won’t sue the clinic, but you could totally make a violation of privacy case
against my father, if you wanted to.”

Derek gives Stiles a look that says he just might. His gaze falls to the picture Stiles is clutching
Stiles flips it up so he can see. “I just left the clinic.”

Derek reaches out to take it. He strokes one finger over the image, eyes wide. “It’s real,” he says, sounding stunned. “I didn’t…I guess I never really realized it before.”

“It’s real.” Stiles takes a breath. “And it’s a werewolf.”

Derek kind of jerks at that. He tugs Stiles into the apartment and shuts the door behind him. His shoulders are slumped now, the wonder fled. “I’m sorry,” he says.

“You don’t have anything to be sorry for. I’m thrilled, honestly. It’s going to have such a cool life, with the shifting into a wolf, and the hearing heartbeats— although, come to think of it, do werewolf kids just always know that Santa isn’t real? Because that has to suck. And I’m only realizing now how many lies my parents got away with when I was a kid, and I was really looking forward to trotting those out, but I guess that’s out of the picture now.”

Derek already looks a little winded.

“But that’s not important. What’s important is that we’re having a werewolf baby, and you’re the only werewolf I’ve got. We need you, Derek. I completely understand if you don’t want to be involved in its life. This was totally thrust on you, just like me, and you deserve as much of a choice as I had. But for the sake of the baby, I’m going to ask— and if you make me, I’ll beg— that you just stay with me through the pregnancy. Just enough alpha contact to get me through, and some pro-tips on raising a werewolf.” Stiles catches his breath. “Please.”

Derek looks up from the ultrasound and gives Stiles a funny look. “You think you have to beg?”

“You didn’t choose this,” Stiles says again. “Look, I’m not going to be a dick. You obviously didn’t ask for a mate and a baby. You kept saying it was dangerous for us to get too close, and…well. I can take a hint.” Except that’s a total fucking lie, of course. Stiles had followed Lydia around for years like a puppy, even when she was practically wearing an *I Will Never Fuck You* t-shirt.

Derek’s face softens. “Stiles, that wasn’t because…what? You thought I didn’t like you?”

Stiles scoffs. “Of course not. Everyone likes me.”

“Yeah, I bet.”

“Was that sarcasm?” Stiles grins. “I feel so proud. Is this how I’m going to feel when our baby starts talking?”

*Our baby.* They both stop short when it slips out. The humor of the moment flees.

“I do like you,” Derek admits, looking down at the ultrasound as if he’s saying it to the both of them. “I like you too much. This has been…really overwhelming. And I haven’t dealt with it too well. But every single instinct in my body is constantly screaming that you’re mine. And everything that’s ever been mine, I haven’t been allowed to keep.”

His eyes widen as he realizes what he just said. “Fuck,” he breathes. “I don’t know where that came from.”

“It’s me. Me being your omega, I mean.”

“What does that matter?”
“Be honest.” Stiles steps a little closer to Derek. “Your brain is screaming at you to pour your heart out to me. I’m your omega. I’m supposed to make you feel better.” Stiles has always laughed at the sexist bullshit that claims he’s a naturally good listener who always knows the right thing to say to soothe an alpha!, but it’s undeniably true that most alphas will only ever bitch to their omegas, so the omega can sit on their lap and kiss away their frowns and assure them that they’re the biggest, strongest, baddest alpha in town.

Derek gives him a sad half-smirk. “If I poured my heart out I’d drown you.”

“Let’s just try.” Stiles puts a hand up when Derek shakes his head automatically. “If it hurts, we stop. But you can tell me about what happened to you, the people who died, the people who hurt you. And I won’t get scared, and I won’t run. I promise. Let’s just try.”

After a few tortured moments, Derek sighs and gestures for Stiles to sit on the ratty couch. “I can’t promise I’ll be able to say it.”

“Just try. I’m right here. I’m listening.” Stiles tries to make his voice gentle, for once in his life.

“Okay.” Derek stares down at his hands. “Oh, fuck. This is really hard.”

“I could sit on your lap.”

“That would make it harder.”

“Oh would it,” Stiles leers without thinking, then feels like a world-class moron. Way to read the room, bro.

It works, though. Derek smirks at him, and some of the tension leaks away. “Okay,” he says again. “When I was growing up, my parents were always really clear that being a werewolf was a good thing. They would tell us when we went to school, ‘Remember, just because you’re a werewolf, you’re not better than the other kids.’ I know that sounds like a little thing, but most werewolf families tell their children, ‘Remember, you’re not less because you’re a werewolf.’ They teach their children that the world will try to beat them down, and the kids get it in their heads that being a werewolf is something that you have to fight not to be ashamed of. But my family always made it feel like something special.”

Stiles nods when Derek falters; shifts on the couch a little so he can get closer to the alpha.

“Eight years ago when I was fourteen, werewolf hunters burned down my house.”

Stiles gasps without meaning to and Derek nods, smiling without mirth, eyes hard in his face. “Yeah. They exist. My mother always said that they were jealous that we’d evolved faster, so they wanted to take us out of the equation. But they were…a campfire story. A joke you didn’t tell around adults. They weren’t supposed to ever actually come.”

“Only three of us weren’t in the house. My sister Laura, my Uncle Peter, and me. Peter made us leave. He said the hunters would come after us. We ran before the funerals even took place. And it’s a good thing, too, because the hunters showed up there, posing as mourners. They were sniffing around trying to figure out where we had gone, but Peter was smart enough to have some of our friends still in town keeping an eye out.” Derek stops again and reaches blindly for Stiles’s hand before he continues in a sudden torrent of words:

“But it wasn’t over.

“Two years after the house burned I met this new girl at my high school. This omega named Kate.
She was perfect...even on blockers she smelled like nothing I’d ever smelled before, and she was funny, and she asked me to show her my claws and told me they were amazing. I loved her. I let her get so close to me. One night she got tickets for me and Laura and her to go see this band, and when we got back Uncle Peter was gone.

“We searched all over town for him. Kate helped us look. He was just gone. Laura told me it had to be hunters and I remember begging her not to say that. I covered my ears with my hands. I cried in Kate’s arms. God.” Derek shudders. His grip on Stiles’s hand is painful.

“Laura told me we had to leave town, but I wouldn’t without Kate. I told her I just wanted to wait until Kate turned eighteen. Then I could take Kate with us. I told her Kate would help us rebuild the pack, as my mate, and, after a long, long while, she agreed. She had to, I was her only family, and she would never have left me behind. Besides, she always said she could never resist her little brother's sad eyes. So we waited. On Kate’s birthday we threw her a party and I asked her to be my mate and she said yes, and asked me to go with her someplace special. Somewhere we could make things official. She'd found a cave and put down a blanket and when I kind of balked she laughed and said, ‘What? Aren't you a wolf?’

"When we were finished I was laying there looking at her, and I was so in love, and her phone rang. She answered and listened for a minute, then started laughing. She looked over at me and said, 'Guess what?'

"It was a game we played. 'Guess what? What? I love you.' Laura would do this annoyed screech whenever we'd say it, it was so obnoxious. I smiled at her and reached out to tuck a strand of hair behind her ear and said, 'What?'

"'My family is torturing your sister right now.'

"She held out the phone so I could hear. Laura was screaming. Really screaming. I looked at Kate and there was this triumph, this madness in her eyes.

"And then five men came in and took me."

Derek stops and looks down at the ground. His voice is going thin and Stiles can see the claws trying to come out just under his skin. “You’re okay,” he says, giving the back of Derek’s hand a soft caress. He’s so horrified he almost can’t speak, but he has to bear witness to all of it, for Derek’s sake. “You’re with me now, not them. It’s okay.”

Derek nods, and continues, like he’s trying to rip a band-aid off clean. “It was an entire band of hunters. They called themselves the Argent Clan. Kate was the daughter of their leader, Gerard. She’d been dosing herself to make sure her scent would appeal to me. I’d been her first real mission. She’d gotten to watch my house burn, but they didn’t let her strike one of the matches, and she was still bitter about it. She told me that, as I was locked into my cage. She told me she hoped I'd gotten her pregnant, just so she could have the pleasure of killing it. She patted my head and told me I'd been a bad dog and bad dogs had to be punished.

“They’d decided killing was too good for us. They wanted to find a way to eliminate the werewolf problem, so we were their little projects. They’d let us have our freedom, all those years, so they could prepare what they wanted to do to us. They’d had a good long time already to work on Peter. He was their star.

“He was brought in in to see me just after they took me. He wasn’t Peter anymore. He didn’t even smell like pack. He was a monster they kept on a leash, drooling and snapping at whatever they put near him. Just this rabid dog, even though he was in his human form. They’d turned a werewolf into
a werewolf killer, and they were so damn pleased about that.

“They gave me this drug. It had to be injected into me and they did it over and over. It kept me in my wolf form. Before I’d only ever stayed in that form for a few hours— I’m a man first, and when you stay that way for too long you can feel your mind starting to unravel. You lose yourself. They kept me like that for days, feeding me out of a dog bowl and laughing when I’d lift my leg to piss. Kate said they should neuter me and keep me like that forever.

“They wanted to see me beat it. They’d torture me and scream at me to fight the wolf— to change back into a man. To be stronger than my beastly nature. If I did, they’d allow me to live.

“After a few days they decided I needed inspiration.

“I knew it would be bad because they sent the omegas and kids out. Kate kicked up such an unholy fuss, but they said she didn’t need to see that kind of gore. I thought I wouldn’t care, but I didn’t want to die, and I was scared it would hurt. I tried to hide, inside the wolf. I let him take over so they wouldn’t see me die scared.

“They brought in Laura. I don’t know what they’d done to her, but she was human, and too weak to even look at me. Someone dragged Peter in on his leash and told him to kill her slow. Gerard said that the minute I was able to shift back into a man, they’d pull Peter off of her.

“I tried. I tried so fucking hard. I could hear her wailing, and the ripping and tearing as Peter hurt her. Gerard kept telling me, ‘Be a man, boy, be a fucking man and save your sister.’

“I tried, and that just made my human form seem ever further away. I couldn’t even think, except in instinct. Just these short little words and impressions: Pack. Sister. Hurt. Blood. Save. Kill. I barely heard them telling me this was my last chance. But they made sure I saw when they gave Peter the signal to finish her off.

“I watched her die. And when it happened, I didn’t beat the wolf. The wolf beat the human. I broke the cage. I was savage, and I killed them all. Twelve people in that room, all trying to go for their guns, and I tasted their blood in my mouth and I liked it. The only one still alive was Peter, but he was scared in a corner, seeing me kill his masters. With the threat gone and my sister dead I was human enough to remember who he was. He was looking up at me, pleading, and then I ripped his throat out too.

“I nudged at Laura with my nose and whined at her to get up, even though I could see she was dead, and then I ran. I hid in the woods until the drugs wore off. I was human again, but I never really felt like I came all the way back. I went to the police station still covered in blood and confessed to anyone who would listen. I only told them the basics, because I wanted to go to jail. I wanted the fucking electric chair if they’d give it to me.

“Some people wanted me dead, but the judge there knew the Argents and was sympathetic to me. They decided it was my wolf, not me, who was the killer, so they decided they would just lock him away. They gave me probation. Wherever I go I have to give those samples so the law can make sure I’m not shifting.

“I don’t mind. Part of the shift is feeling the bond of pack, of family. And I don’t have a family anymore.”

Derek stops there, voice halting as if he’s in the middle of a sentence. As he’d spoken he’d become more and more frantic, and now he just stares at Stiles as though he doesn’t even recognize him. “I don’t have a family anymore,” he repeats, and Stiles knows that’s the first time he’s ever said it out
Stiles pulls Derek off the couch and holds him. He doesn’t nuzzle his chest or peer up at him with gold eyes or use any of the normal omega tricks, just wraps his arms around Derek and holds him as best he can; holds him tight so he won’t drown.

Derek shakes in his arms.

Stiles can’t imagine going through what Derek did, but he knows the past is not the place Derek should be living anymore. Gently, not wanting to spook Derek, he takes one of Derek’s hand and places it over his own belly. “It’s okay,” he says, and rests his head against Derek’s cheek so they can breathe together: in and out, in and out. “Now you do.”
Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Scott: So are you two in love now or what

Stiles: No!

Stiles: No romance.

Stiles: It’s purely scientific. We’re just in it for the hormone sharing…which is way less dirty than it sounds.

Stiles: And I guess we’re friends.

Stiles: Friends who like the way each other smells.

Scott: RIGHT.

Scott: Be honest, are you wearing any item of clothing that belongs to him right now.

Stiles: …

Scott: Called it.

Scott: Tell me it’s a t-shirt and not his boxers please god.

Stiles: …

Scott: Groooooooss

Stiles: to be fair they were donated.

Stiles: not won in battle.

Scott: EW EW EW

Scott: WHERE IS THE PUKING EMOJI

Stiles: Jesus Christ you fucking blushing virgin. You know I’m pregnant, right?

Scott: Scott Jr. came from a needle, not a dick, you fucking virgin.

Stiles: Oh God, do you think that’s going to screw him up? Not being conceived in a moment of perfect love and bliss?

Scott: “Daddy, why did you have me?” “Well, junior, I was supposed to be getting a shot to make sure you WOULDN’T be coming into being, but Daddy has the worst luck in the world, so here you are!”

Stiles: Oh fuck. We can never tell him I was trying to get a birth control shot. That’s life-ruining.

Scott: “Also I’m a huge fucking liar about how much I love your other Daddy, but Uncle Scott knew it all along.”
Stiles: Ha.

Stiles: Nope.

Stiles: Purely scientific.

#

It’s not purely scientific.

Not even close.

Yes, they have an arrangement now that doesn’t involve sex or kissing or anything more than what is strictly needed to satisfy the bond. Sure, they’ve avoided talking about what will happen when the pregnancy is over and the bond between them fades. Okay, Stiles can never really be sure how much of what they feel is real and how much would still be there even if he was any other omega and Derek was any other alpha.

But it’s not purely scientific. It hasn’t been since Derek and Stiles sat on Derek’s ratty couch and Stiles held Derek and promised him he had a family again. That was the moment they hadn’t just been an alpha and his omega, obeying biology. They’d been partners.

After that, the bond between them changes. It doesn’t feel like Stiles needs Derek anymore, with that sick, shaky longing led solely by his biology. Instead, when Derek is there, he just feels…calm. Happy. The way he feels when he’s outside on a beautiful morning and there’s nothing to be afraid of or stressed out about.

The truth is, he likes Derek. Not just because he’s an alpha and he smells good, but because he tries to be funny in a way that catches Stiles off guard. He gets intense about weird things, and sulks like a baby when Stiles makes fun of him for it. He’s got a really fucking killer smile and one time Stiles saw him wearing these amazing black-rimmed glasses that just…damn.

So no, it’s not scientific. But Stiles pretends that it is, because he has a feeling that asking for more will scare Derek away.

And that would fucking break him into pieces.

#

Stiles finally tells his friends about his pregnancy. He has to—they’re going to wonder why he isn’t going to school, and now that he’s three and a half months along it’s getting harder to hide.

He doesn’t tell them Derek’s the father. He tells them the clinic hadn’t labelled the sample and had already destroyed the records of their patients from that day by the time they found out what had happened, so it was anyone’s guess.

Lydia is thrilled for him. Jackson is less so. After he’s assured that nothing is going on between Derek and Stiles—Stiles tells him the barista had been mistaken, and Jackson is too shaken to think it through—he leaves the house in a fit. He then returns an hour later with an engagement ring and a promise to “be the alpha father your child needs.” He’s obviously very moved by his own decision to take in Stiles’s bastard, and the idea of saving a pregnant omega in need must be going right to his knot.

Scott practically makes himself sick laughing.
“I’m just going to do this on my own,” Stiles tells Jackson as gently as possible, pushing his hand away. God, how much had Jackson paid for that rock? How did he even know Stiles’s ring size? Stiles suddenly imagines Jackson creeping through his window at night to measure his finger, and the thought almost makes him burst out laughing in poor Jackson’s face.

Jackson blinks up at him from his kneeling position. “Is this some omega rights thing?”

Stiles narrows his eyes, any pity for Jackson quickly fleeing. “Yes, Jackson. I’m controlling my insane lust for you right now to make a social point. Poets will sing of my sacrifice.”

Jackson misses the sarcasm. “You want people to think you’re so independent for raising a kid alone?”

Stiles flushes. That had been one of the reasons he had wanted to do this, hadn’t it? “I want my child to know that an omega can do everything an alpha can do, yeah. So if it grows up to be an omega, it feels free. And if it grows up to be an alpha, it won’t be be like you.” That’s a shitty thing to say, and Jackson goes bright red at the words, but Stiles is a little shaken.

He does want his child to know omegas and alphas are equal. He wants his child to know, if it’s an omega, that it’s okay not to have an alpha. He wants his child to be proud of its omega parent for standing against stereotypes.

But he also wants Derek.

“I think you’re lying,” Jackson says coldly. “I think you were out one night and smelled something you liked and got knocked up, and you’re too embarrassed for us to know that you had to follow your biological urges just like everyone else.”

“Wow.” Scott moves in front of Stiles, arms crossed as he stares Jackson down. “Why wouldn’t you want to marry this prince, Stiles?”

Stiles crosses his arms, too, but it’s more for comfort than to threaten. “Just go home, Jackson,” he says tiredly. Jackson is going to college in a week, and Stiles won’t ever have to deal with him again.

But Jackson…he’s the whole world, isn’t he? That’s why Stiles has always stayed friends with him, even when he’s such a dick it makes Stiles want to scream. Jackson is everything Stiles has always fought against. As Stiles walks upstairs to his bedroom he thinks about what Jackson had said. He’d made it sound like a terrible thing, Stiles raising the baby alone, but it had been what Stiles had wanted.

He could still do it. Once the pregnancy ends and the bond is broken, they have no reason to revive it through a proper mating bite. They’ll just be co-parents. Stiles will still be a free omega.

So why does thinking of that hurt him so much?

*If you had to choose between Derek and your principles, what would it be?*

Stiles groans as he collapses into bed. He grabs one of the many t-shirts Derek has given him to ward off alpha withdrawal and wonders if maybe omegas really can’t have it all.

#

On the day Stiles was supposed to have moved into his dorm room he goes to Derek’s apartment for a self-defense lesson. They’ve been doing this sporadically for the past month, and tonight Stiles needs the cheering up getting physical with his alpha always provides. He knows deferring was the
right decision, but he already kind of feels like his world is leaving him behind.

At least he isn’t alone. Scott had surprised him two weeks ago by announcing that he, too, had decided to put off school for a year. He explained it by saying he wanted to get in some work experience to help him pay for living expenses, but Stiles knows that it’s at least in part so he can be there for his best friend.

Or he just knows there’s no way he’ll pass freshman year without Stiles tutoring him through it. That’s a distinct possibility.

“Over ninety percent of reported attacks on omegas come from alphas,” Derek says, circling Stiles slowly. He’s wearing workout clothes, black and tight, and it’s distracting Stiles more than it should. “They use biology to make omegas submit so they can rob them or…whatever. So don’t be afraid to use biology right back at them. Let’s say an alpha is holding you from behind. You’re pregnant, you’re slow, you know they can take you.” He wraps his arms around Stiles, hands resting right over his bump. “What do you do?”

“Scream?”

“Only if you know there’s someone really close by who’ll come running. The alpha is more likely than not to feel threatened and snap your neck to shut you up. You’ve got a better first resort. I know you won’t like this, but you have to go full-omega on him.”

“Or her.”

Derek rolls his eyes. “Or her. When you’re grabbed, make them think you’re helpless. Give them the eyes, let your lip tremble, tell them you’re scared. Let yourself feel scared, too, so it clouds up your scent a little, but only if you can control it. No point in making yourself too terrified to actually do anything. For about a split second their brains will tell them they have to protect you, and it’ll confuse them enough in that moment that you can make a defensive move.” Derek looks down at Stiles. “Try.”

Stiles flashes his eyes at Derek and puts a horror-movie expression on his face. Derek shakes his head and releases him. “You have to sell it. Play up your pregnancy a little, poof out your stomach so you look even more vulnerable.”

Stiles cradles his belly and looks at Derek between his lashes. “Please,” he whimpers. He imagines someone coming at his belly with a knife and lets that fear leak into his scent. “Don’t hurt me. Don’t hurt my baby.” He trembles all over, eyes practically melting into gold.

“Stop,” Derek says abruptly. “Fuck, Stiles. Stop it.”

Stiles snaps out of the pose. Derek turns away from him, breathing heavily. One hand is digging into his thigh, and Stiles can see the claws coming through.

“Whoa,” Stiles says stupidly.

“Shit. You were too good at that. I’m…fuck!” Derek turns back towards him, eyes a little wild. Bristles are popping out on his face. “I’m sorry, I just …can I…?”

Without waiting for an answer he pulls Stiles into a hug and buries his nose in his hair. He starts growling as he holds Stiles, sounding just the way he did when they’d met the first time at the clinic. “Mine,” he rumbles. He’s kind of tickling Stiles’s scalp with his nose, like he’s scenting him. His next growl is a little more satisfied, almost soothing. “You’re safe. So safe. Nobody’s going to touch what’s mine.”
Stiles closes his eyes and lets Derek calm himself down. It takes a while, but finally Derek lets him go, face red but bristle-free. “Sorry,” he says again.

“It’s okay.”

“When your scent changed it just hit me really hard. Not being allowed to shift makes my wolf kind of restless. God, that was like the first time I smelled you all over again.”

Stiles grins to lighten the mood. “But this time my dad isn’t here to shoot you.”

“Not at the clinic. The first time. At the café.”

“You remember that?”

Derek looks at him like he’s crazy. “Of course I do. Your asshole friend was upsetting you. I could smell it. I wanted to carry you out of there. It really freaked me out, honestly. Omegas don’t normally appeal to me that way. Not since…”

Kate. He doesn’t have to say it. They haven’t talked about her since the night Derek told Stiles about his family. They haven’t really talked about Derek’s past at all. One night Stiles had asked hesitantly about the girl murdered in Kitoosie, and Derek’s head had shot up. “I didn’t hurt her,” he’d said urgently.

“Okay.”

“I didn’t.”

“Derek, I believe you.” Stiles had kept his voice gentle, seeing the way Derek was trembling. After that he didn’t want to bring up Derek’s past again, and Derek wasn’t offering.

Derek is still a little shaky now, looking at Stiles as if he wants to grab him up again. “Okay. Self-defense is over for today. I need to calm my wolf down.” He walks to a black iPod dock and pushes a few buttons.

“Music calms the wolf?”

“The right kind of music.” Derek leans back as it starts playing. “There we go.”

Derek continues to just be full of surprises. Stiles raises an eyebrow as he tries to identify the jazzy, slightly crackly song. “So your wolf is secretly a grandfather, huh?”

“You don’t like it?” Derek shakes his head in mock disappointment, the music working almost instantly to soothe him. “It’s Frank Sinatra, you philistine.”

“No, I like it. It’s…groovy.”

“Groovy.” Derek agrees, straight-faced. He snaps his fingers and bounces his hip a little. “My groovy tunes.”

Stiles snorts.

“This is dancing music,” Derek says, and grabs his hand. Stiles doesn’t know if it’s his wolf almost coming out or what, but Derek is suddenly playful. He spins Stiles, then pulls him in close.

“Heaven,” he croons along with the recording. “I’m in heaven…”

Ladies and gentlemen, please make sure your heart is in its full upright and locked position: we have
liftoff. Stiles has to fight really, really hard not to swoon in Derek’s arms as Derek carefully leads him around the room, voice perfectly matching the recording.

“My parents danced to this kind of music all the time.” Derek twirls him, still singing along: “‘Oh, I love to climb a mountain…and to reach the highest peak…but it doesn’t thrill me half as much as dancing cheek to cheek…’”

“You’re good at this,” Stiles breathes out as Derek swirls him around the room.

“And you’re a regular Ginger Rogers.” Derek gives Stiles his most wicked grin. “You have her legs.”

“Dick.”

“Absolutely.” Derek dips Stiles and smiles at him, eyes bright and sparkling. That’s the moment when it happens, suspended in mid-air; the moment when I could love you becomes maybe I already do.

The music shifts over to something else and Derek pulls Stiles back up. “A worthy partner,” he praises him.

“Flatterer.” Stiles is fairly sure that Derek has actually just caused permanent damage to his heart. It can’t be healthy, overloading it like that. He should ask the doctor for medication.

Which reminds him.

“I have my next ultrasound tomorrow at noon,” Stiles says, watching Derek unplug his iPod. “Do you want to come with me?”

Derek gives Stiles a look that does absolutely nothing for his newly discovered heart condition. “Are you sure?”

“Yeah. I understand if that’s…too much. But I thought…you keep that first ultrasound on you at all times, so you might like to see it live. You can wear a silly hat into the clinic if you want so nobody will recognize you.”

“I can’t pull off hats.”

“You could pull off anything,” Stiles responds without thinking. He blushes. If you can’t keep your dick down, at least keep your mouth shut. “Look, do you want to come? I’d like you there, for what it’s worth. It’s up to you.”

“I would love to.” Derek pulls him in for another hug. His voice drops and he sounds grateful and happy and calm and awed and so Derek. “Thank you, Stiles. Thank you.”

#

“No alpha today, Mr. Stilinski?”

Stiles drags his gaze away from the window. Derek’s car isn’t in the parking lot and even though Stiles has texted him twice there’s been no reply. “I guess not,” he says.

Dr. Morell just nods, probably hearing the disappointment in Stiles’s voice. “Let’s check on Baby,” is all she says, reaching for the ultrasound wand.

A half hour later Stiles is walking out of the clinic, four printouts in his hand. Dr. Morell was very
pleased with the baby’s progress over the past month. Stiles is just amazed in the difference between this new picture and the last one. He can see its nose now. There’s a little creature with a nose inside of him.

The only thing marring his happiness is the fact that Derek didn’t show. That’s not like him. Maybe he’d panicked at the thought of being someplace so public, but wouldn’t he at least have texted back?

Stiles pushes open the door to the clinic, and, as if he’s conjured him, Derek’s jeep comes screeching into the parking lot. Stiles smiles. Poor Der…he must have gotten the time wrong and came racing so he wouldn’t miss it. He waves his free hand over his head and the jeep slams to a stop right next to him.

Derek jumps out, not even closing the door behind him. “Stiles!” His eyes are wide and panicked, breath coming in gasps. “Who knows about us?”

“What?” Stiles glances into the jeep. It’s packed completely full, with what looks like all of Derek’s belongings crammed in.

“That I’m the father! Who knows?”

Stiles blinks at Derek. “Just my dad and Scott.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes!”

Derek nods, slumping in relief. “Okay,” he says. “That’s good. Stiles, you need to listen really carefully, okay? You have to delete my texts out of your phone, and make sure you don’t tell anyone about me. You have to act like we never even knew each other. Do you understand?”

“What? Why? What’s going on?” This is all happening too fast, like he’s standing stock-still while Derek tries to pull him along.

“I have to leave.”

“No, Derek!” Stiles feels like he’s been slapped. “You can’t just go!” He looks again at Derek’s jeep. His clothes are randomly shoved in, filling up the spaces. He must have packed in a hurry, and Stiles can’t imagine why. Why on earth would he leave Stiles now, after they’d danced together; after Stiles had decided it was time to fall in love?

“I have to. They’re here, Stiles. They’re fucking here in Beacon Hills and I…God, I’m so sorry. I knew she’d come, just like she always does, but I didn’t want to tell you, I thought, the stress, and the baby…I just wanted to believe it could be okay. Fuck, fuck, I’m so sorry.” Derek is almost sobbing out the woods, though his eyes are dry and blazing. It’s like he’s locked the new parts of his personality Stiles has discovered away, and now he’s just a frantic animal looking for an escape.

Stiles shakes his head in disbelief and reaches for Derek. “Der, you have to calm down. You can’t drive like this, okay? Just tell me what’s going on and I’ll help you. You don’t have to run.”

Derek touches his face almost blindly. His eyes are darting around and he pulls Stiles behind his jeep, so they can’t be seen from the road. “The hunters. Kate took over the Argent Clan. They always find me. But I hoped…oh fuck, I’m sorry. I’m going to lead them away. When they realize I’m not here they’ll go.”
“You can’t,” Stiles repeats, still dazed but feeling a sort of panic starting to overtake him. “Our bond, Derek. The baby needs you here.”

“You still have my clothes, right? They should help. But don’t wear them out of the house, she knows my scent. Don’t leave the house at all, for a while, if you can help it.” Derek digs in his pocket for his phone. “You need to be on the lookout for this woman.”

Stiles stares: it’s a pretty girl with dark blonde hair, beaming into the camera. “Kate?”

“If she asks you about me, if you see her talking to one of your friends, if she even looks twice at you, you call me right away. Don’t speak to her. Hopefully she’ll be gone soon, once she knows I’ve left. She’ll go to my apartment first and I made sure plenty of people saw me packing up. But you have to be on the lookout, do you understand?”

Stiles just stares at the picture. This is the girl who had done such terrible things? She looks so...normal. The picture’s been cropped, and Stiles can see, on either side of her, two people, both with dark hair. One has to be Derek. The other must be Laura.

“Stiles!” Derek shouts. “Tell me you understand.”

Stiles looks up from the picture and into Derek’s wild eyes. “I understand.”

“Good.” Derek cups Stiles’s face as if he’s trying to ground himself. “I’ll come back. I promise I’ll come back for you. But you need to take this.” He thrusts a glossy paper into Stiles’s hand: the baby’s first ultrasound. “It has your last name on top and if they get me…”

Stiles tries to give it back, eyes wide with terror. “Derek, we have to call my dad. He can arrest her. This can all be over, right now.”

Derek just shakes his head.

“Please,” Stiles says. His voice cracks. Five minutes ago his biggest problem had been that Derek had missed his ultrasound. In five minutes from now Derek won’t be here anymore and Stiles doesn’t know if he’ll ever come back.

“She’ll kill him, Stiles.” Derek’s voice is almost gentle now, as if he wants to cushion Stiles’s breaking heart. “She’ll kill anyone who gets between her and me. Anyone she thinks I might care about. So promise me you’ll still be here when I get back.”

“I promise,” Stiles says, because what else can he do?

“Please be safe,” Derek begs, and kisses him for the first time. It’s hard and desperate and animal, and it’s his goodbye. As soon as Stiles opens his eyes again, Derek is in the jeep, revving the engine. His eyes—caged, angry, frantic—meet Stiles’s for a second, and then he’s gone. Stiles stands alone in the parking lot, clutching the two pictures of his baby in his hand, two freeze-frames showing how far it has come and how far it has yet to go.

#

Stiles goes home because he doesn’t know what else to do. Derek’s apartment will be empty. He doesn’t know what he could say to Scott. He thinks about going to the station and showing his dad the picture, but can the Sheriff really just go out and arrest some woman on Derek’s word, especially when Derek isn’t even here?

Maybe Kate has already left.
Maybe Kate has already caught Derek.

The thought makes Stiles run for the toilet for the first time in over a month. As he flushes he makes up his mind. He wanted to make his baby proud? Well, he will. He’s not some weak little omega who hides in the house when the alpha says so. He has to call his dad. Derek has never had the police on his side before, but now he will. Kate isn’t the boogeyman—she’s human, subject to the same laws as everyone else.

She’s not going to lay a finger on Stiles’s alpha.

He’s pulling his phone out of his pocket when the doorbell rings, and his heart leaps. Derek. He made a mistake. Kate’s not really here. Or she’s already long gone.

Everything’s fine.

He takes the stairs two at a time. Through the frosted glass at the door he can see Derek, back turned. Thank you, God. He wrenches open the door and Derek turns.

It’s not Derek. It’s a man wearing a leather jacket that looks like it could have come straight from Derek’s closet, but as soon as the smell of a foreign alpha—a threat—hits, he knows he’s made a terrible mistake.

It’s the man from the café and the clinic. And by his side is a woman with dark blonde hair. She’s a little older than she was in the picture, wearing a black tank top and holding what looks like a baton in her hand. “Hey there,” she says, giving him a big, friendly smile. “I’m looking for a mutual friend of ours. Derek Hale?”

Stiles shakes his head. He’s still clutching his phone uselessly; maybe he can dial 911 without looking down. “Sorry. Barely know him.”

Kate’s smile drops and her eyes go flat. “You know, the only thing I hate more than a werewolf is a liar.”

She raises the baton over her head and Stiles instinctively goes to protect his belly, realizing a second too late that he’s given away his pregnancy. As the baton whistles above him all he can stupidly think is, but I promised Derek I’d still be here when he came back.

Then he’s gone.

Chapter End Notes

After my last story I said to myself, "Cool it with the cliffhangers; you're not one of the writers on Scandal." And yet here I am giving you another bad awful terrible cliffhanger. But I purposefully posted it over the weekend so I would have plenty of free time to write the next chapter and get it up.

Did Derek screw up by leaving Stiles behind? Oh, probably. But canon!Derek makes terrible decisions as often as my new neighbors have screaming fights and makeup sex (read: a lot. Pray for me) so I figured he was due for one in this story ;)
When Stiles had learned he was an omega, he’d cried for two days straight.

Mostly that had to do with the heat symptoms practically turning his mind into soup, his body suddenly feeling like a foreign animal as it filled with a need he didn’t even understand.

But it had also been the knowledge that he was one of those people now. An omega, meant to be docile and quiet; the one waiting at home instead of the one who goes on adventures. All the characters on TV and in books who Stiles had ever looked up to in his life were alphas, from pirates to superheroes to fucking Smokey the Bear.

Alphas were the doctors who were currently trying to find a cure to save his mother’s life, and omegas were the hospice nurses who changed her bedpans and smoothed her hair and apologetically told Stiles and his father that it wouldn’t be too much longer now.

Alphas were heroes, and omegas just existed to give the hero something pretty to hold.

After the heat had passed and he’d started taking the hideous stabilizers that would keep him normal for as long as possible, he’d tiptoed into his parents’ bedroom and climbed into bed to cuddle with his mother. He hadn’t done that all through her illness, fancying himself too old and manly for it, but what did it matter now? He was an omega. He didn’t have to worry about being manly.

“I missed you, shug,” his mom said in her slightly scratchy voice, pulling him in for a cuddle. She took a little whiff and Stiles wondered if his smell was different to her now, the way hers stung his nose with all the chemicals.

“I missed you too.”

“How are you feeling?”

Stiles shrugged, but tears immediately sprang to his eyes. “I thought I’d be an alpha. Or at least a beta like you and Dad.”

Claudia smoothed some hair away from his forehead and didn’t say anything.

“It could be a mistake, maybe? Like my body just hasn’t, like, settled yet or something.”

“Is that what you hope?”

“Kind of.”

“Why?”
Stiles shrugged again, but when Claudia just kept stroking his hair, waiting for him to find the words, he said with a little more passion: “I don’t want to be an omega. I hate it.”

“Why?”

“On TV omegas are always so stupid. They never do anything. They just smile like zombies, or cry when someone hurts their feelings, but then as soon as an alpha hugs them they’re okay again. It’s not me. You always said that when I’m mad or upset about something I should go fix it myself. But omegas don’t do that. They let someone else do the fixing.”

Claudia hummed a little. “Shug, I’m going to give you a life lesson here. It might blow your mind, so get ready.”

Stiles peered up at her.

“TV isn’t real.” Claudia poked him in the chest. “You’re real. You don’t ever, ever have to change to fit your biology. Ever since you’ve been a little boy, you’ve been a warrior. That’s part of who you are. That’s my Stiles. And that’s not going anywhere.”

Stiles made a little sound of disbelief.

“Are you angry that you’re an omega?”

“Yeah.”

“Have you ever seen an angry omega on TV?”

Stiles shook his head slowly.

“I’ve seen you get angry about a lot of things over the years, and what I’ve always been so proud of is the way you turn that anger into action. Remember when you stood up to those bullies who were picking on Scott? That’s certainly not something a TV-omega would have done. You won’t ever sulk and wait for an alpha to take care of your problems. You’ll solve your problems yourself.”

Claudia sounded so proud of him, like it was already a sure thing. “You’re my strong, passionate little boy, and all that’s changed is that now you know what color your eyes are going to flash, and that you can carry my grandbabies. This doesn’t limit you in any way. You can still be anything you want to be.”

Stiles sniffled, but he felt a little better. “I want to be a hero,” he said, childishly and a little thickly, snuggling in close to his mother’s side. He closed his eyes, but he could hear his mother’s smile in her voice:

“You’ll always be my hero, shug.”

#

Stiles is pretty sure his mother would be proud of him right now, because when he opens his eyes he’s really fucking angry.

That fucker had knocked him out. She’d hit him, and he’s pregnant, and he’s going to rip her into pieces if she hurt his baby.

His head hurts like a motherfucker and he squints out through furious little slits. He’s in a dark room, sitting upright in a chair, walls smudged with ash and wooden slats on the ground all torn up beneath his feet. Through an open window he can see the woods, which extend miles past the edge of town.
They’re in the Hale House. They have to be. And Kate is sitting in front of him, idly looking at his phone.

_Fuck,_ fuck, he hadn’t deleted the texts like Derek had said. _Stupid, Stiles._

“Welcome back,” Kate says without even looking up. “How’s your head?”

Stiles’s lips bare in a grimace. “Peachy.”

She tsks. “I wouldn’t have had to do that if you hadn’t lied to me. Why don’t we try again?”

Stiles tries to move, only to find that, no surprise, he’s currently tied to a chair. “You’re wasting your time. I don’t know where Derek Hale is.”

“It figures he wouldn’t have told you,” she says dismissively, putting down his phone and facing him head-on. She really is beautiful, though she looks far more like a stereotypical alpha female than omega. “Let’s move on. How long have you and Derek been mated?”

“We’re not.”

Kate shakes her head in mock disappointment. “Lie.”

Pain rips through Stiles’s body, wiring his jaw so he can’t even scream. It’s only a few seconds at most, and the shock of it is what’s worse than anything, but when it’s over he blindly searches within himself in fear, terrified that it hurt his baby.

He _thinks_ the baby is all right, but he can’t be certain, and that makes him so furious he sees white spots.

“You’ll get zapped every time you lie to me,” Kate tells him pleasantly. She points to a small contraption strapped on the middle finger of Stiles’s hand. “That was level one, babydoll. It would really be _terrible_ parenting to let me go any higher.”

Stiles snarls at her and struggles in his bonds. He wishes he was a werewolf, like Derek. He’d claw her into bits.

Kate sighs theatrically as she watches him try to break free. “Calm down. There are fifteen people standing behind you right now. You’re not going anywhere. But you just focus on me, okay? Why don’t’ we try that question again?”

“I’m telling the truth. Derek isn’t my mate. There was a mistake. A mix-up.”

Her eyes narrow. “Did he rape you?”

“No!”

“Are you sure? You don’t have to be ashamed. He’s a fucking animal, after all. I bet he popped a knot in your ass in some dark alley and shoved his fist in your mouth so he wouldn’t have to hear you scream.”

Stiles gapes at her.

“Is that what he did, babydoll?” Her voice is almost compassionate.

“No. The clinic screwed up. I went in for birth control and they accidently inseminated me. I’m an unlucky man, all right? Derek’s only been around me because he feels obligated. He’s gone now.
Whatever you want from me…I don’t have it.”

Kate’s eyebrows are knitted together. “That’s a very creative story.”

“It’s the truth!”

“Honestly,” Kate says, waving a dismissive hand, “I don’t really care. Did Derek tell you if he was planning on coming back?”

Stiles shakes his head. “He said there were hunters coming after him and he had to leave. He told me to be safe. That’s it.”

Kate studies him, then nods, evidently satisfied. “So that’s his baby you’re carrying?”

Stiles swallows, but she obviously already knows the answer, so he nods.

“And so you recognized him as your mate, without even knowing him?”

He nods again and prays this means she doesn’t have any reason to torture him.

Kate stares at his belly with a look of fascinated revulsion. “God,” she breathes. “Don’t you just disgust yourself? Your body is forcing you to be attracted to a fucking animal. It’s sick, isn’t it? How can you even stand to live?”

Stiles grits his teeth and decides if he’s going down, he’s going down fighting. “I have pretty high self-esteem. I’ve never kidnapped a pregnant person and tortured them, so I tend to feel pretty positively about my life.”

Kate doesn’t even seem to hear him. “I remember how disgusted I was with myself when I presented as an omega. I’d never seen my father so disappointed. I was supposed to be a warrior, and now all I would ever be was a fucking breeder.” She shakes her head. “I’ve spent my entire life trying to rise above my own pathetic nature. Hormone therapy, a few quick romps with some omegas too needy to realize they were fucking one of their own, a nice little surgery to scoop out the parts of me that made me so weak… I felt like I was doing the world a public service. Who needs one more feeble little omega, right?”

“If you want to do the world a public service, maybe just try taking yourself out of the equation entirely,” Stiles suggests, yanking at the ropes a little. He thinks one of them might be a bit loose, but there are definitely people standing behind him. He doesn’t know if Kate was exaggerating on the number, and he wants to know how maybe people he’d have to get away from if he broke free.

Kate gives him that pleasant smile again. “I’ll be taking one omega out of the equation tonight. But it won’t be me.”

Stiles rolls his eyes so she can’t tell how scared that makes him. “What a well-constructed threat. Did you practice it in the mirror?”

Kate seems a little delighted by that. “Oh, you’re absolutely his type, aren’t you? Derek loves them feisty. I should know.” She winks at him and Stiles fights off a full-body shudder. “I bet Derek’s been going crazy, wanting to knot you and pretend he bred you up with that little cub for real. Which reminds me. Is it a werewolf?”

There’s no way in hell he’s going to tell a hunter the truth. “No. Human.”

Kate sighs. “Lie.”
The intensity is definitely cranked up now and Stiles accidently bites his tongue before it’s over. He tries to cradle his belly as best he can with his hands tied but he can’t get close; he can’t even tell if his baby’s heart is still beating.

“Get this through your head, babydoll: I know everything. You can’t lie to me, and when you try, you get hurt. Got it?” Kate slams his head into the back of his chair.

“Got it,” Stiles rasps.

“Aww,” Kate says. “Are you gonna cry, omega?”

Stiles glares at her with so much hatred it aches. He is absolutely not going to cry in front of these people.

Kate smudges a finger under his eye. “I think you are. Poor baby. Do you need your alpha?” She pulls her phone out of her pocket. “Let’s give him a call. Johnson, gag him.”

A rag is roughly shoved into Stiles’s mouth and he chokes around it while Kate dials. “See, normally Derek wouldn’t even pick up an unknown number,” she explains to him. “But he was so unusually careless about his new phone number in his town…I was able to get it right from his landlord. Almost like he wants me to call. I have a hunch he’ll answer.”

Stiles tries to breathe through his nose as Kate puts the phone on speaker.

It only rings once before Derek picks up:

“What.”

Kate drops back into her chair. “De-rek, sweetie,” she sings, looking for all the world like a young woman calling her new crush for the first time.

“Kate,” Derek says flatly. Stiles tries to make a sound of warning behind his gag, but he only succeeds in choking off his limited air flow even further.

“You don’t even sound excited to hear from me, Der. And I’ve been making so many plans for our reunion.”

Derek sighs in a crackly huff. “You’re too late, Kate. I left Beacon Hills as soon as you got here. I’m long gone.”

“Uh-oh.” Kate crosses her legs, eyes sparkling. “Did I trick you, little puppy?”

There’s a confused pause from the other end of the phone. “What?”

“I just arrived in town this morning, that’s true. But I’ve known you were here for weeks. You’re so annoyingly good at figuring out when I’m right on your tail, so I decided I’d send some new friends to watch you instead, while I’d be…fashionably late to the party.”

There’s another uncertain pause. “You’re lying,” Derek says, but now he sounds a little nervous.

“See, I didn’t want to scare you off too quickly. I had to know what could possibly have made my little puppy run back to a den that had already been destroyed. There must have been something here you were coming back to. Or someone.”

“Like the graves of my family?” Derek snaps, voice just a little preoccupied. Stiles’s phone, sitting next to Kate, buzzes. She picks it up, reads it with a smile, and holds it out so Stiles can see the text
from Derek:

Are you safe?

“You know what’s so much fun about hunting you, Derek?” Kate leans in and puts her head next to Stiles. She gives the camera on his phone a brilliant grin and takes a selfie of the two of them.

“You’re incredibly generous. Here I am, thinking I’ve destroyed every member of your family, and what do you do?” She sends the picture, winking at Stiles. “You go out and make more family for me to hurt.”

Derek’s roar makes the phone tremble in Kate’s hand. Stiles yanks desperately at the ropes holding him in place, rubbing the skin of his wrist raw. Kate is going to kill him, and she’s going to make Derek listen. Not if Stiles can help it.

From Derek’s end of the phone there’s a screeching sound that can only be tires pulling a u-turn. “Let him go,” Derek orders, voice rough with wolf.

Kate smirks. “Make me.”

“He’s not really my mate, all right? This all happened by accident.” Stiles has never heard Derek, or anyone, sound so desperate in his life. “He means nothing to me, Kate.”

“Ooh.” Kate glances at Stiles and gives him a faux-apologetic grimace. “You twist the figurative knife while I twist the literal one, huh?”

“We barely even know each other. He’s completely innocent in all of this.”

Kate’s smile grows. “Oh, I agree with you, Derek. I think it’s a shame this pretty boy needs to die because of you. But even if the story you two have cooked up is true...that little baby he’s carrying is yours, and I know how protective your kind is over your young. You can’t help but care for him.”

“You’re making a mistake.”

Kate shakes her head. “Culling a wolf pack is never a mistake.”

“I’m coming back,” Derek says, voice somehow resigned and infuriated at the same time. “You can have me. Just let him go.”

“Damn right I’ll have you. But he’ll die first.” Kate leans forward and pulls the gag out of Stiles’s mouth, making him choke on his first mouthful of air. “If you promise to be a good puppy when you’re back in your cage, I’ll even let you pick how I do it.”

Derek roars again.

“I could slice him into ribbons,” Kate muses. “I had so much fun doing that to your little GED tutor in Kitoosie. Or just give him a clean shot between the eyes like I did to your werewolf friend last year...but those were desperate circumstances...”

Derek snarls so loudly that Stiles is afraid he might shift behind the wheel of his car. How far away from Beacon Hills is Derek now? It must be miles and miles. No matter how fast he drives, he won’t make it back in time.

Kate continues: “Such a shame you murdered your uncle. We had him trained so well to find the
bones we’d buried for him in the yard. If he was here he’d scent out that baby right away and go digging for his treat.”

Stiles closes his eyes and tugs again. He’s almost sure he can feel the rope giving way.

“But I think I know what we’ll do.” Kate’s voice drops. “That baby is a Hale, and Hales die by fire, that’s the rule. Or they die at the hands of their own like Laura and Peter. In a way, your baby is going to die by your own hand. Such a stupid puppy to leave your den behind. You don’t deserve a family, you know. All you do is leave them in danger.”

Derek’s snarl is low and dangerous. “I will end you, Kate. I will rip the eyes from your skull if you hurt him.”

“I’m sure you’d like to try. But, see, I have an army.”

“That didn’t stop me the last time I watched a family member die.”

The malicious humor flees from Kate’s eyes. “Not very smart to taunt me, Derek.”

Derek just growls in response.

“Now I’m going to have to make him hurt.” Kate nods to someone behind Stiles’s shoulder and another jolt slices through him. He can’t breathe while it’s happening and when it ends his breath escapes in a little wail.

“Poor omega,” Kate coos. “Do you want to say goodbye to your alpha?” She holds out the phone to him.

“Derek,” Stiles says slowly, tongue thick in his mouth from the gag and the shock.

“Stiles, I’m coming. It’s going to be all right.”

“Lie,” Kate says, and presses her finger on the end button. She stands and addresses the people behind Stiles: “Get a move on. I made sure to put enough of the house in that picture for him to recognize it, so he’s on his way. Johnson, Taylor, get the omega out to the truck. I want Derek distracted trying to sniff him out when he gets here.” Kate stoops down to address Stiles again. “You just sit tight out there, and once we capture Daddy I’m going to have a lot of fun with all three of you, all right?”

Stiles spits at her as two men break his bonds and pull him up to a standing position. Her eyes flash an unnatural, muddied olive, and she backhands him. “Stupid bitch,” she says.

The men frog-march Stiles out the back door just as the squeal of tires sound from the front. “Shit,” the younger man says nervously. “That was fast.”

The other man just grunts. “Kate’s got it handled.”

There’s a scream and a roar from inside the house.

“Move your ass,” the older man snaps.

“He’s dead weight, the fuck you want from me?”

Stiles smirks, doing everything in his power to try and keep the men from moving him. There’s another scream from the house and a few pops of gunfire, making all three of them stop in their tracks.
“They weren’t supposed to shoot him unless it was an emergency,” Younger mutters.

Another roar causes a flock of birds in a nearby tree to decide to find a quieter neighborhood. Older puts a hand down to the gun in his own holster. “Can you manage the omega yourself?”

Younger swallows hard but nods, twisting one arm behind Stiles’s back. “No problem.”

“Get him to the truck, then come back to assist with the wolf.”

“Yeah.”

Older takes off in the direction of the house. Younger looks down at Stiles and kicks at his shin. “Move it.”

*Let’s say an alpha is holding you from behind. You’re pregnant, you’re slow, you know they can take you. What do you do?

Stiles goes completely limp. He crosses his arms over his stomach and looks up from under his eyelashes. “Please,” he begs, letting a few tears fill his eyes and turn his lashes into stars. “I’m scared.”

Thank God the man is an alpha. For a split second, his face goes a little soft, as if Stiles has just shoved a kitten into his arms. Stiles knows he doesn’t have much time, so as soon as it happens he brings his knee up with all his force into the guy’s balls.

Younger doubles over and Stiles brings his elbow down onto the back of his neck, followed by an uppercut to the nose. There’s a satisfying crunch of cartilage and Stiles fumbles at the man’s hip while he howls in pain and surprise. The gun gives way from his holster and Stiles flicks the safety off, aiming it as best he can with his hand shaking.

The man spits blood and glares at Stiles. “Put that down, omega,” he gargles. “You’ll only hurt yourself.”

Stiles’s mouth stretches into a smile. “I’m the son of the Sheriff,” he says coldly, curling his finger around the trigger. “You think I don’t know how to shoot?”

He fires and watches the man spin in a half-arc before collapsing, blood spraying from his shoulder. It won’t be fatal. Probably.

Hopefully.

He lowers the gun and stares at the man lying in the grass, whimpering in pain like the pathetic little omega he’d imagined Stiles to be. Stiles has never shot anyone before.

He’s alarmingly calm about it.

He’s fairly sure that he’s in shock.

There’s another report of gunfire from the house and Stiles run. Derek is still in there, facing down at least twelve people. “Derek!” he shouts when he gets close enough. The wood almost gives way beneath his feet as he opens the back door and charges inside.

Derek is in half-shift, on his feet with his face bristly and twisted into a parody of a wolf. A few people are lying on the ground, stunned and bloodied, and Derek is currently trying to fight off two more.
Stiles is afraid to shoot so close to Derek, but there’s a woman with her hands on her knees, trying to get her breath back, several feet away. He could get a clean shot in, easy.

If he does, she’ll die.

*They’re going to kill your alpha and your baby! Just do it!*

He raises the gun and chokes as an arm wraps securely around his windpipe. “Derek!” Kate screams, dragging Stiles further into the room. “I’ll kill him, right here!”

Derek freezes.

“Nughhenu,” Stiles contributes, unable to make a single coherent word with his air flow cut off.

“Okay,” Derek says, starting to raise his hands. “Okay, look, I’m surrender— *stomp her foot and elbow her in the stomach!*”

Stiles only has a half-second to comply with the quickly barked order while everyone else freezes in confusion. He brings his foot down on Kate’s with all the force in his body, then thrusts his elbow to find her vulnerable torso. Kate stumbles backwards, and Stiles points the gun at her.

Her eyes widen with terror.

Stiles pulls the trigger and—

It jams.

The fucking thing *jams.*

He’s definitely going to be lodging some complaints with the gun company, the bullet manufacturer, and God, but Kate is already charging at him again, so he quickly flips the gun and just cracks her across the face with it instead.

Kate goes to dreamland, which Stiles sincerely hopes is featuring nightmares tonight.

Derek is currently fighting five hunters at once, but his eyes meet Stiles’s. “Run!” he roars.

“I’m not leaving you!”

“You’re distracting me! *Go!*”

He wants to help, damn it. For the moment everyone in the room is focused on Derek, but Stiles knows that won’t last long.

Well, he’s going to do *something.*

He runs for his phone, which has been knocked to the floor in the scuffle. He can hear Derek roaring again as he pushes open the back door and runs into the sunlight, frantically dialing 911.

“*Hale House,*” he shouts into the receiver when the operator picks up. “*My name is Stiles Stilinski, I need—*”

*Bang!*

There’s a hot streak against Stiles’s hand and he gasps in shock and pain. His phone is lying on the ground, shattered into pieces.
They’d shot the fucking thing out of his hands.

He looks up to see a hunter on the steps, raising his gun at Stiles again, a completely cold expression on his face.

Stiles runs into the woods on pure instinct and hears another bullet whistle over his head to lodge in a tree.

Clearly playtime is over. Now they’re just going to kill him. The thought spurs him on, giving him the sort of stamina he really could have used back when he played lacrosse in high school. He hates the thought of leaving Derek with those people, but he has to get his baby somewhere safe.

There’s another shot, comforting muffled now, but Stiles wouldn’t be surprised if they’re pursuing him. If Derek is captured or killed— the thought nearly brings him to his knees but he doggedly forces himself to push emotion aside and focus on the facts— he’ll have the entire team after him.

So he just keeps running.

And when he can’t run anymore, he crawls.

It’s not until hours later, when the sky has gone completely dark, that Stiles literally can’t move anymore. He actually thinks he’s still crawling until he realizes he’s been collapsed in exhaustion against a tree for who knows how long.

He stretches trembling fingers over his belly, massaging it as if to assess the baby’s health. He reaches down between his legs and almost cries in relief when there’s no blood.

“I love you,” he whispers to his bump. “Daddy loves you so much. I’m going to get you out of here, I promise. You’ll be okay. Daddy’s right here, Daddy won’t let anyone hurt you.”

He leans against the tree and shuts his eyes. He can’t think about Derek. The baby needs all his focus right now. He’ll rest up here until it’s light out, since he’s fairly sure the hunters won’t be able to find him in the dark. Then he’ll try to pick his way out of here.

He has absolutely no fucking clue where he is, of course, but if he walks long enough, surely he’ll find his way out.

There’s no way he could actually sleep out here, but he manages to drift into a half-state of unconsciousness. As if in a dream he thinks he might hear someone calling his name at one point but it fades so quickly he doesn’t bother dwelling.

Then there’s a howl. Stiles goes completely rigid, snapping out of his doze.

There are coyotes in these woods.

Reason Why Being an Omega Sucks Number 5001: the smell of omegas actually appeals to wild animals more than alphas or betas. Ever since he presented Stiles has been warned about the coyotes in the woods, since they’d savaged some poor young omega who’d been abandoned by her boyfriend out in the woods after a fight years ago.

He reaches around for a stick or something. Maybe he could climb the tree.

From only feet away something snuffles, and then, out of the shadows, a huge wolf appears.

Stiles stares.
The wolf sniffs the ground again, looks up to see Stiles, and howls in triumph. It bounds right up to him and sticks its snout in his throat.

Stiles waits to die and hopes that Kate never finds out he went this way; she’ll love the irony.

But the wolf doesn’t kill him. Instead it sniffs him and rubs the top of its head under his neck soothingly. It’s so warm Stiles kind of wants to hug it and cuddle it like a giant puppy.

Then it shudders all over and begins to twist in front of him. Stiles blinks in the darkness, amazed, as the wolf kind of shakes out its body and stretches and becomes a man.

Becomes Derek.

“Mate,” Derek whispers throatily, pushing his nose into Stiles’s neck again as if he doesn’t realize he’s shifted back. “Mate, mine. Found you.”

Stiles wraps his arms around Derek, so incredibly shocked and relieved that he’s still alive. Derek holds him back, naked body radiating warmth, and then picks Stiles up and cradles him against his chest.

“Get you home,” he promises. His eyes are slowly fading back to human, but there’s something distinctly more animalistic about him now, as if the wolf isn’t going back to oblivion without a fight. “You’re safe now.”

“You shifted,” Stiles says, still completely stunned.

“I had permission. Your dad’s frantic. He came after you called 911. Brought every cop in town.” There’s unmistakable pride in Derek’s voice and he rubs his cheek against Stiles’s hair affectionately. “So smart to call them, clever mate.”

“Did he get them?”

“Most of them.”

“Kate?”

Derek growls apologetically. “She got away.”

Stiles shivers. He’d felt wonderfully safe in Derek’s arms, but suddenly the darkness of the woods seems to be hiding any number of threats. “She’ll come back,” he says. It’s not a question.

Derek doesn’t bother to lie: “Yes. But not tonight.”

Stiles shivers again and curls in closer to Derek’s body. He thinks he can feel his shock starting to wear off, and he’s afraid of what will replace it. This really isn’t the time to have a panic attack. “Keep talking,” he urges.

So Derek does. As he travels back the miles to get Stiles home he talks without stopping, telling Stiles about the safe warm place he’ll take his mate. A cave just for them, where nothing will come to hurt Stiles or his cub, where Derek will bring him soft furs and hot chocolate and fresh fruit and sing lullabies to the baby that will send Stiles off to sleep as well. He describes it until Stiles can see it perfectly; can imagine the fire Derek will light, illuminating him as he smiles down at Stiles, face tender and eyes soft with what Stiles is sure is love.

He talks until they’re finally out of the woods and the Sheriff comes running. Then Stiles is being
passed off to other people, strangers, and he shouts for Derek as they try to bundle him into an ambulance. Derek appears at once and snarls at the paramedic who tries to stop him from climbing in.

“That’s my son’s alpha,” Sheriff Stilinski snaps, voice all wrecked with relief as he strokes his son’s hair. “Let him in or I’ll arrest you.”

Derek gives the paramedic a look that says he’ll do even worse if the man tries to keep him away, and the paramedic relents. Derek climbs in and leans over Stiles, face drawn with concern. “Don’t go,” Stiles pleads, feeling a new numbness take over his body as the ambulance starts to move.

“I won’t,” Derek promises. He reaches for Stiles again, this time just grasping his hand, and doesn’t let go. “I will never, ever leave you again.”

Chapter End Notes

EDITED 8/31/2017

I wanted to return to this fic (over two years after I finished it, wow) to address something that is discussed in this chapter. We've just met Kate, who will be the villain going forward. As she described above, this version of Kate is an omega who feels that being an omega makes her weak, so she's trying to become an alpha (and it's later explained that she’s taking illegal and dangerous drugs to do this, because doctors wouldn't help her). Some helpful readers pointed out that this reads as a commentary on trans individuals, contributes to the stereotype of trans characters as villains, and suggests that trans people are damaging themselves by transitioning.

If I felt I could edit the whole plotline out of the story now I would, but I don't think that's really feasible, so I wanted to write this note to explain that (1) Kate as a representation of a trans character was never something I intended, and (2) I'm really, really sorry about it. I was much more ignorant of trans issues two years ago, and didn't think about the possible implications of what I was writing. My goal in writing Kate as I did was to present a character who hates being an omega because of what external forces--like her father, and, to a lesser extent, society--tell her about how an omega is supposed to act, making her feel like she cannot remain an omega and be strong enough to avenge her family. I wanted the message to be "don't let other people force you to be something that you're not," and to some readers the message came of as "you can't change the sex you're born with and if you do you're destroying yourself,” and that's my fault, and I'm extremely sorry about it. I wish I had been more thoughtful and it's something I'll work on going forward.

I hope this message helps. if you feel I have more to do to make up for my mistake, I'm happy to discuss in the comments.
Stiles had thought he was scared when he’d been in Kate’s clutches, but that’s nothing compared to how he feels when the emergency room doctor turns on the ultrasound machine and looks to see if his baby still has a heartbeat. He stares in breathless agony at the screen, Derek still gripping his uninjured hand like a vice. “Please,” he says aloud, afraid to look at the doctor’s face.

The doctor moves the wand just a bit and a beautiful, muffled thumping fills the room. “There it is,” the doctor says, relief in his own voice. “That’s one strong heartbeat.”

Tears spring to Stiles’s eyes. “He’s okay?”

“He’s okay.”

Stiles’s head falls back and he cups his belly, filled with so much love and joy he feels dizzy. “Oh, my God. Oh thank you, thank you, thank you.”

“Frankly, Mr. Stilinski, the one who deserves thanks here is you.” The doctor looks at Stiles with obvious respect in his eyes. “From what I hear, you traveled over eight miles without stopping to get your baby to safety. Eight miles, at four months pregnant.” He shakes his head in amazement. “And they say alphas are tough.”

Stiles flushes.

Derek leans in and places his ear just above Stiles’s belly. “Wait,” he says, amazed. “I can hear it. I mean…I can hear the heartbeat like this. I didn’t realize that’s what it was before, but now that I’m concentrating…”

“Are you sure?”

“Yeah, I’m sure. I can hear its heartbeat!” Derek looks up at Stiles, an amazed smile locked on his face. For just a moment Stiles feels an aching surge of regret. It would be so easy to pretend that he and Derek really were mates, who had chosen to have this baby together. It could have been anyone else who ended up in this room with Derek, receiving the same delighted grin Stiles is seeing.

He knows it’s not exactly his most pressing concern right now, but he can’t forget what Kate had said to Derek over the phone: *You can’t help but care for him.*

He knows his feelings for Derek are real, but he can’t say the same about Derek’s feelings for him, and a part of him is afraid that he’ll never know for sure.

Derek leans in and brushes some flyaway hair from Stiles’s face, eyes going a little feral with emotion. “Thank you. For keeping our cub safe. You’re amazing, Stiles. Amazing.” He presses his forehead to Stiles’s, and Stiles imagines that all three of their heartbeats are thumping together in time.

#

Stiles is practically a hospital celebrity once word of his kidnapping has spread. His hand, grazed by the bullet when his phone had been shot, is quickly treated, but he’s being kept at least at least twenty-four hours for dehydration and exhaustion. They’re going to monitor the baby but the doctor is confident that since it survived the initial shocks it should be just fine.
Stiles gets a large room to himself. He sleeps there, Derek in the chair next to him, and wakes up to find that the hospital staff are practically fighting over who gets to take care of him. “My daughter is an omega,” one nurse tells him breathlessly. “You’ll be such an inspiration to her.”

When Stiles isn’t being offered more pudding or extra pillows, he’s interviewed by two of his father’s deputies. Deputy Parrish, always a friend to Stiles, tells him that six hunters were captured, four were killed, and five, including Kate, escaped. They’d abandoned their vehicle, which Kate had called a truck but was really a repurposed ambulance. Inside was a large dog crate, an array of knives, plastic sheeting, surgical equipment, and several containers of lighter fluid.

“You’re damn lucky you got away,” Jordan tells him, face uncharacteristically grave.

“It wasn’t luck.” Derek hasn’t left Stiles’s side since he came to the hospital, not even for police interviews, and he’s currently gripping Stiles’s hand to provide him with support. “He was fast, and he was smart. She didn’t expect either.”

Stiles blushes again. Derek has been feeding him a steady diet of praise for the past twelve hours, and while it’s making his inner omega do victory laps it’s more than a little embarrassing. “Are you guys tracking her now?”

Jordan nods. “Odds are they got away while we were setting up the search for you, but we’re taking every precaution just in case. We’ve got calls out to all surrounding towns to be on the lookout. Your dad is pretty pissed, Stiles. If she’s still here, he’s not letting her get away.”

“It’s strange,” Derek says once the deputies leave.

“What is?”

“Having them on my side.”

Stiles looks over at Derek. The werewolf looks a little vulnerable, sitting there in the hospital gown he’d been forced to put on when he came to the emergency room still stark naked. “You’ve never gone to the cops about Kate before?”

With a grimace, Derek shakes his head. “Police have always sided with her.”

“How many times did she come after you?”

Derek shudders. “A lot. The girl in Kitoosie…Paige… was a friend of mine. She was helping me study for the G.E.D. She was an omega and she wanted more, but I couldn’t…you know. After I came out of the test I saw I had all these missed messages on my phone. So I listened and it was Kate…” Derek breaks off.

“Like yesterday,” Stiles supplies quietly, having no wish to hear Kate’s psychotic taunts again.

“Right. I ran to her apartment. But I was too late. And then the police came. They shot me.”

Stiles chokes on his pudding. “They shot you?”

Derek rolls up the hospital gown to his shoulder so Stiles can see the scar. “They recognized me from when I’d moved in and registered my samples. They saw a dead girl and a werewolf and that was it. No questions asked. Werewolves heal fast, but I had to go to the hospital, and I felt like I was just a sitting duck, waiting there for Kate to come finish me off. I tried to tell them it was her. I played the messages for them, but Kate had talked so quietly that only a werewolf could hear her voice over Paige screaming. They kept saying I was lying and I should just confess. They didn’t even believe
“my alibi for the longest time.” Derek reaches for one of Stiles’s puddings and shoves a spoonful in his mouth as if to shut himself up.

“‘My dad isn’t like that,’” Stiles tells him.

Derek nods. “I like your dad. He’s great. I bet you’re going to be as good a father as he is.”

Of all the praise Derek has given him, it’s this simple statement that Stiles knows he’ll treasure most. He blushes a deep, pleased red, and Derek smiles at him and squeezes his hand.

It’s on the tip of Stiles’s tongue to ask about the kiss Derek had given him right before he’d left, but he’s afraid. Derek had been running for his life. He’d been about to leave his omega behind, maybe forever. If Derek tells him that the kiss was a mistake, or nothing more than a way to remember him by, Stiles thinks his heart might break.

“Do you think she’s gone?” he asks instead, jabbing his spoon against Derek’s to steal a bite of pudding.

“Yeah. She’s licking her wounds, not mounting an offensive. The Argent Clan has always attacked with big numbers, and they’ll need to rebuild before they try anything. I wouldn’t be surprised if they’re halfway across the country by now.” Derek sounds supremely confident.

“You sound pretty sure, Mr. Paranoid.”

“I’m not saying you should go run through the woods screaming her name or anything, but I know Kate pretty well. When you’ve been prey for a long time, you can anticipate the hunter. She knows I have the police looking for her now. She’ll have to regroup, and she’ll be doing it far away from here.” Derek sighs happily, tilting back his head. “Fuck, I’ve never felt this…safe. Not since my house burned.”

“If she ever tries to come back, my dad will make sure she goes to prison.”

And that means you can stay here forever.

He swallows down the words and just reaches for another pudding.

“If she ever tries to come back, I’ll kill her.” Derek steals the pudding away and straight-up giggles when Stiles tries to fight him for it. Maybe it’s the relief that Stiles and the baby are all right, or the release of his wolf, or the sugar high from the seven thousand puddings they’ve consumed, but Derek seems lighter than Stiles ever could have imagined him. He’s radiating peace and joy, even as he gives a huge, put-upon sigh and hands Stiles his pudding back.

It makes him even more gorgeous, practically angelic, like a big puppy who just wants to snuggle and play and never let go.

Like Stiles needed another reason to fall in love with him.

#

Stiles goes home two days later with a bandaged hand, a three-D ultrasound of his baby, and an ego that’s only slightly inflated. His phone is in pieces out by the Hale House but he logs onto his email to see almost a hundred messages from friends, who have all heard the news second-hand. The police are keeping the details quiet, withholding any information about Derek or werewolves, so most of the e-mails are fishing for the specifics or confusedly asking for clarifications on some of the most outlandish rumors.
He clicks on the message from Jackson and laughs out loud:

*Stilinski— what’s this I hear about you getting kidnapped by a cult in the woods who wanted to sacrifice you and your baby? Told you you needed someone to look after you. I guess you did okay, running ten miles, swimming across the Angleman River, and then starting a bonfire to signal for help. That baby’s totally gonna be an alpha. Call me.*

A new message appears from Derek, who had reluctantly returned to his apartment to unpack all his stuff:

*Too quiet here without the baby’s heartbeat. I’ll bring you and your dad dinner tonight. Be safe.*

— D.

Stiles actually touches the screen like some sort of lovestruck idiot. “Dad!” he yells down the stairs. “Derek’s coming for dinner tonight. He’s cooking.”

His father appears at the door. “I can run to the store and pick up ice cream for dessert. I haven’t properly thanked him for finding you out there.”

Stiles rolls his eyes and gets up from the chair. “You just want ice cream for yourself.”

The sheriff holds firm. “It’s been a stressful few days.”

It has been, and Stiles is pretty sure there are a few more grey hairs on his father’s head then there had been last week. “Just don’t get black cherry. I hate black cherry.”

“Don’t be crazy.” John smiles at his son, relief still in his eyes every time he looks at Stiles. “Mint chip. That’s your favorite.”

Stiles grins and follows him downstairs. “Call me right away if anything happens,” John says, jamming his hat on his head.

“She’s gone, Dad.”

“That may be, but I reserve the right to worry. Especially since I’m pretty sure *don’t open the door to strangers* was one of the first lessons I ever taught you, and that somehow slipped your mind three days ago.”

Stiles pretends to look affronted. “Take care how you talk to a hero, sir.”

“You can be a hero and a dumbass at the same time. Lock the door behind me, please.”

Stiles does, and then just wanders the house, one hand on his belly. He’s a little restless without Derek. Maybe Derek will agree to stay over for a while after dinner, and they can watch a movie together. Or they can continue self-defense training, or dance to one of Derek’s groovy tunes again. Really anything would be fine, as long as he gets to do it with Derek.

“Chill, omega,” he scolds himself in the mirror, catching the dopey smile on his face.

Then, in the mirror’s reflection, he sees someone standing in his yard, right on the outskirts of the woods.

*No.*

Stiles whips around and sees Kate staring through his kitchen window, hair wild and face smudged
with dirt.

For a minute he’s sure he’s imagining her, and then Kate raises a gun and points it straight at him.

He leaps just as the kitchen window shatters, cradling his belly as he lands on his back.

_She’s here._

She’s trying to kill him, in his own house, in broad fucking daylight.

But Derek had been so sure she’d left—

There’s another shot and Stiles scrambles for the landline. “Dad!” he shouts the instant his father picks up. “She’s here!”

“In the house?”

“Outside!” There’s another gunshot and Stiles cowers on the ground. He can hear one of his neighbors shouting, and then another shot, and a terrible cry.

Kate’s killing people.

Stiles bites down on his hand, afraid that he’ll start screaming and never stop. “I’m bringing everyone,” he dad promises. “I’m in my squad car. It’s called in, and I’m on my way. Someone will be there in less than two minutes.”

The phone beeps and Stiles looks down dazedly. “Derek’s on call-waiting,” he tells his father. There’s a rattling at the front door, Kate trying to break in.

“Stay on the line with me, Stiles. It’s all right.”

There’s a bang and a splintering as Kate tries to shoot the door down.

“I love you, Dad.”

“Don’t you say it like that, Stiles. We’re going to put her away. Can you hear the sirens? I’ve got Parrish and Hannity coming up the street now.”

The phone beeps again.

“I have to talk to Derek.”

_Just in case, I have to tell him goodbye._

“Okay. I love you, Stiles. I’m on my way.”

Stiles presses the end button and waits for Derek’s voice.

“Hey.” Derek’s voice is still so light, so carefree. “Your dad gave me this number. Is he allergic to peanuts?”

“Derek, Kate’s here. She’s at the door—”

The line goes dead.

“Derek?”
A buzzing is his only reply. Stiles slams the receiver down and struggles to his feet, hand over his belly protectively. He’ll need a kitchen knife, or one of his dad’s paperweights. As he slowly moves towards the kitchen he can see Kate’s hand fumbling through the hole in the door, trying to find the knob.

Then he hears sirens coming up the street.

Kate’s hand freezes, then withdraws. Stiles can see her through the shattered kitchen window, disappearing back into the woods.

Within thirty seconds the ruined door is kicked open and Parrish and Hannity are there with guns drawn. “Where is she?” Parrish shouts at Stiles.

Stiles shakes his head and points to the woods. Parrish turns on his heel and pursues, but he comes back a few tense moments later, shaking his head. “Can’t see a fucking thing. She’s gone.”

Stiles nearly collapses and Hannity helps him onto the couch. There’s a roar from outside and a now-familiar black wolf hurtles into the foyer. Hannity swears and raises his gun.

“Don’t shoot!” Stiles grabs for the gun, panicked. “It’s Derek!”

The wolf sniffs the ground, then looks at Stiles and whines questioningly.

“She got away.” Stiles whispers.

The wolf tilts back his head and howls with fury.

#

After that, everything changes. The relief that Stiles had survived his first encounter with Kate is washed away by grim shock. Stiles shakes under a blanket Derek had draped across his shoulders after he’d shifted back and numbly answers his father’s questions. An ambulance comes to take Stiles’s neighbor to the hospital and Stiles cringes at the whirling lights, remembering the way they’d blinded him when Derek had carried him out of the woods.

He can’t stop seeing Kate’s reflection in that mirror. The dead hatred in her eyes.

“I’m so sorry,” Derek keeps whispering. Now he won’t touch Stiles, not even when Stiles tries to take his hand. “I’m so fucking sorry, Stiles.”

“We were careless,” the sheriff says quietly.

“I know Kate. I can predict her. I should have realized. We took out most of her team and she got knocked out by an omega. She won’t leave until she has revenge.” Derek shudders and puts his head in his hands. He doesn’t look up for a long time, not even when Stiles puts his head on Derek’s shoulder.

The Sheriff makes a game plan. A manhunt is organized. The police will canvass the woods from dawn to dusk. Someone will stay with Stiles every minute until she’s caught.

Derek just stares at the shattered window. Something hardens in his eyes, until Stiles almost doesn’t recognize him at all.

#

“Be honest,” Scott says, idly tossing a baseball at the ceiling and then catching it. “Was his dick huge
when he was a wolf?"

Stiles groans and buries his head under his pillow.

“...I want to know, dude.”

“I wasn’t looking at his penis, Scott. You’re the worst bodyguard ever, seriously. If Kate comes back I’m going to run into her arms just to get away from you.”

“But you saw his penis after he shifted back, right? Was it big?”

“I wasn’t exactly able to whip out my ruler.”

“So...no?”

Stiles sighs. “We were in the middle of the woods, at night, in fear for our lives, and he had just undergone a bodily transformation. But yeah, it was a totally okay dick.”

Scott nods sagely. “I figured.”

“And that’s probably the last time I’m ever going to get to see it, so thanks for reminding me.” Stiles flips over onto his side and scowls at Scott, who’s on Kate-watch in between John and Derek’s morning shifts. There are two deputies sitting right out front, so it’s not like Scott is the first and last line of defense, but Stiles wants to have serious words with whoever actually looked at Scott and thought, ah, yes, a regular Rambo.

“No way,” Scott says in response to Stiles’s sulking. “I was there, you know. I was listening to the police scanner in my bedroom and I heard the report, but I didn’t know it was you. I was like, Oh my God, Stiles is going to be all over that, so I biked over just as the police were finishing up the gunfight. Derek was a fucking mess when he realized you were gone. Like, just screaming your name and tearing through the woods. He begged your dad to let him shift, because he said the wolf would know how to find his mate.”

“I never should have given you that police scanner for your birthday.”

“That’s all you have to say?!”

Stiles groans again and throws his pillow at Scott. “It’s not about his biology telling him I’m his mate, Scott! It’s about whether or not he, as a person, likes me, as a person! Whether or not he would choose me, if he had a choice.”

“He would,” Scott says with certainty.


Scott wisely changes the subject. “So how was Kate leading a bunch of alphas and betas, if she’s an omega?”

“She wasn’t an omega. Not really. She’d done something, fucked up her body chemistry, so she was some in-between thing.” Stiles shudders, remembering the ugly color of Kate’s flashing eyes. “She said she didn’t want to be weak, so she fought back against her body.”

Scott looks at him, eyes compassionate but a little confused. He’s always sympathized with Stiles when it comes to omega rights, but there are some things alphas just can’t understand, since they don’t live an omega’s life twenty-four/seven. “Sounds like in another world you two could have
been best friends. I mean, that’s how you feel, right?”

Stiles shakes his head. “I don’t hate myself for being an omega. I don’t hate being an omega. I just hate the way society sometimes treats me because of it.”

“There’s a difference?”

“God, yeah. You should have heard her, Scotty. She said her father was so disappointed in her for turning out that way. She acted like she’d brought great dishonor on her family and was going to spend the rest of her life punishing herself for it.”

“You think that’s why she’s so psycho? Trying to prove to her dead dad that she’s tougher than any alpha could be?”

Stiles thinks about it. It seems too neat to pin Kate’s sadism on daddy issues, but it’s not like she was just born cruel. “Probably. I mean, killing a baby goes against every omega stereotype, right? She’s not exactly the nurturing type.”

Scott frowns and jumps onto Stiles’s bed. “I don’t know if I’ve said this yet, but I’m really, really glad you and the baby are okay. I love that little dude. And I love…” Scott goes beet-red. “You know. You’re my bro.”

Stiles smiles, touched, and wraps his bro in a hug. “Don’t worry, Scott. Your godbaby is going to be just fine. We’re a psycho-free zone for the next five months at least.”

There’s a double-knock from the front door, newly repaired, and the boys go downstairs together. “Make a move while he’s here,” Scott suggests in an exaggerated whisper. “Tell him knotting relieves stress or something.”

“Subtle as a ton of bricks, Scotty.”

Scott waggles his eyebrows. “That’s why I get all the omegies.”

Stiles faux-gags and opens the door for Derek. Derek’s face is all business and he gives Scott a sharp nod. “Anything unusual?”

“No, sir. Perimeter is clear.”

Stiles kicks his shin.

“Good,” Derek says, missing the sarcasm. “Head home, but stick to the main roads. She probably knows you’re one of Stiles’s friends by now and we don’t want her taking you to draw Stiles out.”

Scott blanches. “Roger that. You two have fun.”

Stiles peers out the door as Scott leaves. “Where are the deputies?”

“They got called away.”

“Wait, seriously? I thought they were supposed to stay here all day.”

“So did they. I called them away. Told them I saw Kate down the street. Hurry up, we don’t have a lot of time.”

Stiles follows Derek, confused, as the werewolf heads up the stairs. “A lot of time for what?”
“To pack.” In Stiles’s room Derek pulls out a duffle bag from under the bed and tosses it at him. “I’ll grab clothes. You take anything else you need.”

“For what? Where are we going?” “Somewhere safe. Hurry up, Stiles, don’t be precious about stuff. Essentials only.” Derek pulls a bunch of shirts out of Stiles’s closet at random and stuffs them into the duffle.

“We probably don’t need to take my whole closet, dude.” Stiles grabs a couple books from his bedside table, figuring he’ll humor Derek.

Derek points a finger at him. “Pro tip: always have a bag packed and by the door to grab at a moment’s notice. Anything that’s not in the bag you learn to live without.”

Stiles wrinkles his brow and grabs underwear before Derek can decide to rifle through that drawer. “Isn’t that a quote from the movie Heat?”

“No. The quote from Heat is, ‘Become attached to nothing in life that you can't walk away from in thirty seconds if you spot the heat around the corner.’ And that’s also good advice, though obviously I’m not taking it right now.” Derek slings the bag over his shoulder and heads down the stairs. In the kitchen he pulls a note out of his pocket, slams it on the counter, and stalks out the front door.

“Oookay,” Stiles mutters, hurrying after him. The jeep is parked neatly at the curb, a duffle bag of Derek’s own packed in the backseat. Derek gestures for Stiles to climb in front.

“So care to tell me where we’re going?” Stiles asks as Derek starts the car.

“Somewhere safe.”

Stiles rolls his eyes. It figures that Derek has a survivalist bunker out in the woods or something. “Is it going to take a while to get to the safe place? Because I already have to pee again.”

“It’s going to take us seven days. Ten, figuring in your constant need for urination and, I assume, desire to sleep in a motel instead of just in the car.”

Stiles’s jaw drops. Derek doesn’t spin around in his seat and sing, “April Fools!”

“Is that a joke?”

“No.” Derek pointedly locks the doors to the car, possibly seeing Stiles’s hand creeping to the handle.

“Derek, you can’t take me on a ten-day road trip. I don’t want to leave Beacon Hills.”

“Tough.”

“This is completely insane!” Stiles wants to bang his head against the dashboard. “You’re kidnapping me!”

Derek shrugs, unconcerned. “I left your dad a note.”

“Yeah, Derek. Kidnappers tend to do that!”

Derek snorts. “Not a ransom note. I just explained to him that I’m getting you someplace safe and he shouldn’t worry. Once we’re stopped for the night you can give him a call.”
Stiles studies his second kidnapper of the week. Derek’s mouth is set stubbornly and he fixes his eyes on the road, obviously not able to call uncle on this insane plan. “My dad’s going to freak out. Oh my God, he’s going to stress-eat so much junk food without me watching him. Derek, turn around!”

“Would you rather Kate snatch him off the road and torture him until you agree to give yourself up?” Derek snaps. “Because she will, eventually. And if that doesn’t work, she’ll take Scott. So if you want to kill everyone you love, including our baby, sure. I’ll turn the car around. If not, you’re going to have to just trust me.”

Stiles blinks back a sudden, hormone-driven rush of hot tears. “That’s a really unfair thing to say.”

Derek sighs and softens. “Don’t cry. That was harsh, and I’m sorry, but it’s also the truth. You have to trust me on this, Stiles. Please.”

Stiles can feel himself giving in, and that freaks him out. He has to put an end to this, be the logical person in this duo. “Derek, I’m pregnant. I can’t go on a road trip. I have to have access to medical care.”

“I packed your prenatal vitamins.”

“Did you also pack an OB/GYN? Because I might need one!”

“The place we’re going is better equipped than anywhere else in the country to deal with werewolf pregnancies. You’ll be in more competent hands there than you ever would be here. Stop arguing, Stiles.” Derek looks over at him. “I got you into this mess. Now I’m going to fix it. Kate won’t leave here until the both of us are dead. I’m not going to let her get to you.”

“They’ll catch her, Derek,” Stiles pleads.

“And as soon as they do, I’ll bring you right back. But for now we have to put as much distance between us and here as we can before she finds out we’re gone.”

Holy shit. Derek is really going to do this. Stiles is really going to be in this car with him for at least seven days.

There’s a small part of him that’s excited about that.

The sane part of him is just convinced that poor Derek has snapped and Stiles has to guide him back to reality before he drives them into the Pacific Ocean, ranting that Kate won’t be able to follow them underwater.

Stiles tries to make his voice as firm as possible. “Derek, I’m placing you under citizen’s arrest. Pull over and relinquish control of the car to me.”

“Yeah.” Derek glances over at him, something almost like pity on his face. “I’m gonna go ahead and resist arrest, okay? But feel free to add it to my charges. And buckle up, please.”

Stiles does, but he grumbles all the way through. “If you were a professional about this you’d just hogtie me and throw me in the trunk.”

“Shut up, Stiles,” Derek says affably enough, as the Thanks for visiting Beacon Hills! sign whips past them. “No one likes a backseat kidnapper.”
Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

If left unchecked, I'll happily write a hundred chapters of Sterek roadtrip shenanigans. I restricted myself to 7,000 words. I hope the longer-than-usual chapter makes up for the longer-than-usual wait ;)

Day One

Derek obviously feels at least a little badly about kidnapping Stiles, since he lets Stiles pick where they stop for lunch and dinner, with the caveat that it has to be a five minute break at the most. Purely out of spite Stiles chooses the two greasiest fast food restaurants he sees. Derek only ever cooks him insanely healthy shit, so he figures the werewolf must be seriously averse to unnecessary fat.

Sure enough Derek eats his sandwiches like they’ve personally offended him and rolls down the window so the smell won’t linger. Stiles doesn’t even tease him about it. Other than the absolute essentials, they don’t speak.

Stiles is pissed.

The shock had worn off about twenty miles outside of Beacon Hills, once they hit the interstate and it finally sunk in that Derek wasn’t playing an elaborate prank, and now he’s getting angrier by the second. His father must be going absolutely insane with worry. If they make it all the way to wherever this safe place is it’ll be another ten days to drive back home, since he’s bumping right up against the five-month flying cutoff for pregnant omegas. Apparently confining a heavily pregnant omega to a small metal container puts undue mental stress on any alphas who might be flying, since the smell of a pregnant omega can bring out all sorts of crazy protective instincts even in strangers.

Thinking about that idiotic rule only serves to piss Stiles off even further, since he’s in the sort of mindset where every tiny irritant becomes a huge fucking thorn in his side. He sits and stew in the passenger seat, so furious with Derek he thinks he might explode.

The fast food isn’t helping. His stomach is revolting against him, his paternity jeans are digging tightly into his waist, and thanks to the gallon of Coke he drank to wash out the taste of his burger he has to take his eighth piss of this road trip.

“Stop at that rest area,” he mutters when he sees a sign approaching.

Derek glances at the clock and grimaces. “We’re way behind on time and we just stopped a half hour ago.”

“Ask me if I give a shit, Derek. Pull over.”

“Can you just wait for like another half hour?”

“Pull the fuck over before I grab the wheel!” Stiles bellows, and Derek wrenches the wheel to take the exit just in time. They squeal into a spot, the entire car shuddering as it lurches to a stop.

Derek turns to glare at Stiles, obviously not feeling too guilty after all. “I get that you’re pissed at
me,” he snaps. “If you want to be a child about this, be my guest. But I’m doing this to save your life, so don’t expect me to grovel at your feet for forgiveness.”

*Well, well. Shots fired.*

Stiles matches Derek’s glare with his own. “Then don’t expect me to kiss your feet with gratitude, asshole. You act like I’m supposed to be happy about this? My dad is back there, Derek. Everyone I care about is. You know why I decided to have this baby? Because I knew I’d have my support system with me to the end. And now you’ve taken that away from me.”

Derek looks momentarily stricken. Stiles unbuckles and slides out of the jeep before his anger dissolves into hormonal tears or something equally embarrassing.

He relieves his bladder, hands shaking all the while. Derek follows him into the bathroom after a minute and Stiles studiously tries to ignore him until he’s at the sink, washing his hands. Then he glances up to meet Derek’s eyes. “What do you want?”

“I’m sorry I snapped,” Derek says, looking like a scolded dog.

“Be sorry for a lot of other stuff first.”

“I did it to save you,” Derek says again.

“Oh, save it, Derek. Seriously. You think that makes you my hero? It just makes you the same as every asshole alpha out there.”

Derek’s eyes flash. “Hey,” he starts, but Stiles doesn’t let him finish.

“You don’t think I’ve been told all my life how I should act when something like this happens?” Stiles’s vision blurs as hot tears sting his eyes. “’Little omega, sometimes alphas might do things that you don’t like, or they’ll make decisions for you, or they won’t listen when you say no. But that’s just because they know better than you. They only want to protect you, sweet, stupid little omega.’ We had fucking classes on it. While the alphas learned how to control their aggression, we learned how to control our personalities. How to submit and obey. They couldn’t call it what it really was, not in our progressive age, so you know what they called it? Home economics! An the alphas got gym class! I sat there, learning how to bake pies and squash down my soul, and I told myself, I will never, ever let an alpha make my decisions for me. So fuck you and your anger and your flashing eyes and your hero complex, because I won’t fucking submit to you for anything.”

Derek is completely speechless.

“I’m supposed to be grateful. That’s the part that kills me.” Stiles turns back to the sink and sticks his hands under lukewarm water so he can focus on something other than the tears still threatening to spill. “When an alpha just can’t control himself and does something for our protection, we’re supposed to take it as a compliment. They teach us to love it, because that’s easier than fixing society. And that’s what you want, right? For me to just say, oh, yes, Derek, protect me from the mean hunter. Cuddle me so I don’t have to be afraid. God knows I can’t look after myself, Alpha, I need you. If that’s what you want, just throw me in the trunk for real, because you won’t get it.”

“That’s not what I want,” Derek says quietly. He’s been thoroughly cowed by Stiles’s speech, and now his head just hangs despondently. Stiles has to tuck his now-pruney hands under his armpits so he won’t belie his entire speech and reach out to try and comfort him.

“I can’t trust you if you don’t trust me to make my own decisions.”
“I know. You’re right.” Derek forces his own hands into his pockets, obviously feeling the same need to reach for Stiles. “I’m sorry. I didn’t think about how it might make you feel, with me being an alpha. I promise that I didn’t think about that at all. It’s not that I don’t think you can’t take care of yourself.”

“But you think that you can take care of me better than I can take care of myself, and that’s just as bad.” He tries to keep his voice sharp, but he anger is slowly seeping out of him, as though Derek’s obvious guilt and remorse has popped his balloon.

“No. I just…I panicked. I had to get you out of there. I’ve seen what Kate does to people when she wants to hurt me. I saw inside the truck after they abandoned it.” Derek takes a breath and gazes steadily at Stiles. “You and the baby are the most important things in my life,” he says simply. “I don’t want to protect you because you’re an omega. I want to protect you because if I lost you, I couldn’t go on.”

Stiles swallows down his emotion.

“But you’re right. I should have given you a choice. I acted without thinking, and I’m sorry. So if you really want to go back, I’ll take you back. I’ll hunt down Kate somehow. I can make it work.” Derek looks sort of horrified by himself as he says it, but he doesn’t take it back.

Stiles wants to tell Derek that, yes, he absolutely wants Derek to turn around.

But he needs to be logical about this. He’s not going to make a decision based on emotion.

That’s just not his style.

“This safe place,” he says, stepping a little closer to Derek. “Why is it so safe?”

Derek nods, as if to tell him it’s a good question. “It’s a gated compound. Only werewolves are allowed, but they’ll make an exception for you. Most of the people living there had their packs split or totally decimated by hunters, so they’re well-trained now in case there’s ever an attack.”

“I’ve never heard of it.”

“It’s kept pretty well secret. They work with the government in exchange for anonymity. Werewolves have enhanced senses and a strong pain tolerance. You can imagine how that might be useful.”

Stiles frowns. “If it’s so safe, why didn’t you ever go?”

Derek winces a little, looking as if he’s about to step on broken glass and he knows how much it will hurt. “I did. I was there for almost an entire year right before I came to Beacon Hills.”

Stiles’s frown only deepens. “Why didn’t you stay?”

Derek’s anguish flares and Stiles can’t resist stepping even closer to try and soothe him. “I got careless,” Derek tells him, taking Stiles’s hand when it’s offered and giving it a grateful squeeze. “I went out with a friend on a supply run and we were surprised by Kate and her hunters on the way back. She shot him in the head. I didn’t even see her coming. She wanted to use me as a hostage so they could get inside the compound, but there’s a guard tower, and the hunters were fired on. They had to retreat.”

“With you?”
“No, I got away. I left the compound the next day. I figured Kate would come after me, but I got lucky.”

Stiles gawks at him. “Why would you do something so stupid? She couldn’t have gotten to you if you’d stayed!”

Derek shrugs and releases Stiles’s hand. “I was tired of running,” he says, looking away. “I knew Kate would get me some day and there was no point in dragging out the inevitable. And I didn’t want that to happen someplace far away. I wanted to be with my family.”

With a sickened twist in his stomach, Stiles understands. “You came home to die,” he guesses quietly.

Derek still doesn’t look at him. “Yeah.” He sighs and chances a glance at Stiles. “And then you happened.”

Stiles walks over to the bathroom door and stares at the slowly falling dusk. He desperately wants to be in his bed, craving the familiar right now with a painful feeling of need.

But he isn’t safe there.

His baby isn’t safe there.

Derek isn’t safe there.

And as soon as Kate leaves Beacon Hills to pursue Derek and Stiles, the sooner his father and Scott and everyone else will be safe again.

“We only stay until Kate gets caught,” Stiles says.

Derek’s relief is palpable. “Deal.”

“If she’s still on the run, and I give birth, we go back to Beacon Hills as soon as the baby can travel and figure out some other way to keep safe from her. I’m not raising a newborn in a werewolf military compound.”

“She’ll be eliminated,” Derek promises. “Trust me, the werewolves want her dead as much as we do. I figure it’ll take her two weeks tops to figure out where we are. Then she’ll come running, and she’ll be dead.”

Stiles nods and pushes away from the door. “We have a deal.”

Derek hugs him. “Thank you,” he says, right into Stiles’s ear. “And I’m sorry, again. I promise not to ever make decisions for you. I’ll never, ever think that you don’t deserve a voice because of your gender.”

Stiles squeezes him, undeniably relieved to hear those words from Derek’s mouth. “Thank you.” He pulls away, eyes a little moist, and shoos Derek. “I have to pee again. Go start the car.”

Derek snaps right back into business mode. “Make it quick. We need to go at least four more hours before we stop for the night.”

Stiles rolls his eyes so intensely it aches.

#
The motel Derek chooses is a run-down little roadside inn that looks far more suitable for a four o’clock meeting between an alpha businessman and his lover than a respite for two weary travelers. The woman at the desk stares at them like they’re insane when Stiles asks if the motel has a pay phone. “Y’all don’t have a cell?” she asks skeptically.

“Lost it.” Stiles gives her a sunny smile, figuring, *it got shot out of my hand by a deranged werewolf hunter* might be a bit too much information.

“There’s a phone on the nightstand. Press nine to dial out.” The woman slides the key to them and watches them suspiciously as they slouch off to the room.

“How is it possible that I’ve been sitting for like nine hours but I’m completely exhausted?”

“Welcome to life on the road.” Derek shoves the door open and prods Stiles inside. As soon as the door is shut behind them he bolts it and draws the curtains.

“Now check under the bed for monsters,” Stiles teases with a yawn as he sinks down onto the bed. Then his eyes pop open. *Bed. Singular.*

Awkward.

Derek grabs a pillow and tosses it onto the floor, obviously reading Stiles’s mind. “Call your dad but please don’t tell him what city we’re in. I’m going to get comfortable here.” He flops on the ground and wriggles, scowling, obviously very far from comfortable.

Stiles is still annoyed enough with him to enjoy the sight before the lure of hearing his father’s voice wins out. He dials, carefully keeping the receiver an inch away from his lips. This is a *seriously sketchy* room.

His father’s voice comes crisply across the line. “Sheriff Stilinski.”

Stiles feels a rush of emotion, as though it’s been years since he’s spoken to his father. “Dad?”

“Stiles.” His father sighs with relief. “Oh, thank God. Where are you, buddy?”

“I’m safe. I’m with Derek. He wanted to get us far away from Kate before she knew we were gone.”

“I saw his note,” the Sheriff says flatly.

“Yeah. I didn’t know he was planning this. He says he’s taking me somewhere safe.”

“Yeah, so he said in the note. Right before he explained that he couldn’t tell me where that safe place was, in case Kate…what was his wording?... oh, yes, decides to *torture it out of me.*”

Stiles glares down at Derek, who pretends to be asleep. “He’s a little paranoid.”

“He’s worse than that. Tell me where you are and I’ll send every deputy I have after you.”

Stiles hesitates.

“Yes. I didn’t know he was planning this. He says he’s taking me somewhere safe.”

“Yeah, so he said in the note. Right before he explained that he couldn’t tell me where that safe place was, in case Kate…what was his wording?... oh, yes, decides to *torture it out of me.*”

Stiles glares down at Derek, who pretends to be asleep. “He’s a little paranoid.”

“He’s worse than that. Tell me where you are and I’ll send every deputy I have after you.”

Stiles hesitates.

“Or not,” his father says, correctly interpreting his silence.

“Maybe it’s for the best, Dad.” Stiles chews his lip, hating how small and unsure his voice sounds. “I don’t want to be away from you, you know that. But if I stay, Kate will try anything to get me and Derek. I don’t want people getting hurt because of me.”
“We’re going to catch her, Stiles. We’re still combing the woods. She can’t hide forever.”

“I know. I trust that you’ll get her. But I don’t feel safe in Beacon Hills right now.”

“Running never worked for Derek,” his father points out.

“But it always bought him time, and that’s what we need right now.” Stiles caresses his belly.

The sheriff takes a while to respond, and his voice is a little choked when he does. “I trust you, Stiles. If you think you’re safest with Derek, that’s where you need to be. Just promise me that you’ll call every day.”

Stiles squeezes his eyes shut, torn between relief and disappointment. He made his decision, but a part of him was hoping his father would reverse it. “I promise. I love you, Dad. Please be careful. For as long as Kate’s in Beacon Hills, you’re in danger.”

“I can take care of myself,” his father assures him gruffly. “Derek’s not the only one who knows how to give a criminal hell.”

Stiles smiles and tells his father goodbye. He keeps one hand planted on his belly and leans down to speak to the bump, totally ignoring the fact that Derek is listening. “Daddy just set a terrible example,” he tells the baby. “You never, ever, ever get to leave Daddy’s side, and if you try, Daddy will strap on a freaking jet pack to come after you. Got it?”

“I can track it anywhere it goes,” Derek assures him from the floor, eyes shut tight.

“Right, Expert Tracker. That’s why you couldn’t even follow a trail Kate had left five minutes earlier.”

Derek somehow manages to glower without opening his eyes. “Kate’s not my blood.”

Stiles rolls his eyes again and shuts off the light. The bed isn’t as comfortable as his aching body really needs, but he’s clearly in much better shape than Derek. After ten minutes of listening to Derek trying to get comfortable, Stiles groans and tosses back the covers. “Get in the bed, Derek.”

“No, I’m fine. It’s like sleeping on the forest floor. My wolf loves it.”

“Liar. Just get up here.”

Derek climbs into the bed a little sheepishly and Stiles turns over, making sure their bodies don’t touch until he falls asleep.

Day Two

Derek wakes Stiles up at four in the morning, meaning he’s gotten a grand total of five hours of sleep. There’s a brief scuffle when Stiles refuses to get out of bed. Derek gets kicked in the face. Stiles gets carried out to the car.

It’s not the best way to start the morning.

“Tell me you brought some CDs or something,” Stiles complains once they’re back on the interstate. He’s been on this road before, and the only channels the radio picks up are random Christian ones, a few country stations, and something called Alphas Only, which Stiles only listens to when he’s in the mood for a rage spiral.

“There’s a hookup for my iPod in here. Grab it out of my bag.”
Stiles grabs Derek’s iPod and starts scrolling through his songs. “Oh my God, Derek. The only music on here is your stupid jazz stuff.”

“Not stupid,” Derek mutters petulantly, a little grumpy from the early wakeup as well.

“I can’t listen to Etta James and Frank Sinatra for ten days. I’ll go insane.” Stiles goes to the playlists in the hopes of finding something decent hiding. He stops on one titled Musicals and finds the Original Cast Recording of Oklahoma! “Jesus, you grandma. This was one of my mom’s favorite movies.”

Derek looks over and grimaces. “That wasn’t me. Laura put that on years ago and I could never figure out how to get it off. I hate musicals.”

“Really?” Stiles says innocently, and presses play.

Derek still deserves a little bit of punishing, after all.

#

When Derek stops for gas a few hours later, Stiles has a sudden realization. “How are you paying for this?” he asks suspiciously as Derek starts the car up again. Derek’s paid for everything in cash so far and Stiles suddenly wonders if there’s a Beacon Hills bank missing a few thousand dollars out of its reserves.

“Me, Laura, and Peter were the sole inheritors of the Hale estate, and now it’s just me. Peter taught us not to use credit cards, since hunters can track you that way, so I make a couple big withdrawals every year.”

“How big?”

Derek rolls his eyes. “Big enough that I didn’t need the clinic’s settlement to get by. Don’t worry. Once things calm down I’ll make a will so it all goes to the baby.”

Stiles’s mouth drops. “Whoa, dude. I wasn’t even thinking about that.”

“I know. It’s what I want to do. That money needs to stay with family.”

Stiles studies him for a minute, then lets the subject drop. “I’m gonna take a nap. Might be a long one. Some brute woke me up at the ass-crack of dawn.”

“Okay.” Derek gratefully reaches over to shut off the music. “See you in the next state.”

**Day Three**

“There’s no such thing as a good fast food salad, Derek. Please. Just a half hour break somewhere decent. I’m pregnant, and I’m pretty sure I’m about to develop scurvy.”

Derek sighs, but Stiles is pretty sure he’s giving in. They’ve continued to only grab cheap fast food, and even though Stiles tries to find the safest thing on the menu he knows full well his doctor would be horrified at how he’s been eating. Besides, when Stiles talked to his father last night, John had told him that they’d nearly caught one of Kate’s hunters on a supply run in town, so she’s still in Beacon Hills. They have a strong head start on her. They can afford to stop.

“We’ll order it to go, and eat it in the car,” Derek finally decrees, pulling into a small vegetarian restaurant.
“Awesome.” Stiles pauses the music—he’s pretty sure they’re on their sixth run-through of Oklahoma! by now—and wriggles out of the car, feeling like he’s somehow doubled his pregnancy weight in the past forty-eight hours. When the first forkful of salad hits his lips twenty minutes later he can’t stifle his moan of delight. “Jesus Christ, get inside of me,” he says to it lovingly.

Derek chokes on his mouthful of tofu wrap.

“You really shouldn’t eat and drive, you know,” Stiles says thickly, mouth full of lettuce. “What if we get pulled over?”

“Good question.” Derek nods to the dashboard. “If we get pulled over, you need to reach in there really quick, pull out the gun, and hand it to me.”

Now it’s Stiles’s turn to choke. “Excuse me? Gun?”

“Yeah. I always keep a loaded one in there.”

“You’ll shoot a cop for pulling us over?!”

Derek sighs as if Stiles is being ridiculous. “Of course not. If it’s really a cop I won’t do anything. But if I see it’s not actually a cop car, or the person pulls out a gun, or if it’s Kate…then I’ll be glad to have the gun close by. Okay?”

“Not okay, dude. That’s a level of paranoia I refuse to join you on.”

Derek’s lips flatten. “At the compound you’ll meet a girl named Erica. Twelve years ago her family was driving home and a cop pulled them over. Except it wasn’t a cop, it was a whole team of hunters, and they shot everyone in the car. The only reason Erica survived is because her older brother fell on top of her and they thought his blood was hers.”

Stiles shudders. “How old was she?”

“Five. Her little sister, who didn’t survive, was only two.”

“Jesus.”

“Yeah. They like killing young werewolves. They say it’s like cutting out a cancer before it can hurt anyone.” Derek’s eyes flicker protectively to Stiles’s stomach, where Stiles has planted his own hands in an instinctual urge to guard his child. “So if I tell you to give me the gun, you give me the gun.”

“I give you the gun,” Stiles parrots, feeling sick to his stomach.

Derek nods. He reaches over to briefly touch Stiles’s belly, as if apologizing to the baby for scaring it. “Good.”

**Day Four**

Any residual guilt Derek might have felt about the kidnapping has faded.

“Stiles, if I have to hear this song one more time I’m going to drive us into the median.”

Stiles ignores him and starts singing along. “They couldn’t pick a better time to start in life! It ain’t too early and it ain’t too late!”

“I’ll make you sleep on the floor tonight. I swear to God I’ll do it.”
“Startin’ as a farmer with a brand new wife…”

“I’m driving this car. I’m in charge. I’m President of the car and I say it goes off.”

“Soon be living in a brand new state!”

“Stiles, I’m begging you.”

“BRAND NEW STATE!”

“I’ve tried to live such a good life,” Derek says to the ceiling. “All I ever did was kidnap one person. Why is this happening to me?”

They’re stuck in bumper-to-bumper city traffic, and Derek is getting more edgy by the second at the wasted time. Stiles is trying to distract him with a little Oklahoma! sing-along, because, damn, the title song is actually pretty catchy.

“Come on, Derek, sing along. The baby wants to hear your voice!”

Derek shakes his head. “The baby hates this musical.”

“Nope, the baby is loving it. It’s saying, I wish I had the physical development to actually move, because I want to dance to my very favorite song.”

Derek gives Stiles’s belly a betrayed look. “Baby, how could you?”

Stiles grins and jumps back into the chorus. “Ooooooooklahoma where the wind comes sweeping down the plain! And the waving wheat can sure smell sweet when the wind comes right behind the rain! Ooooooooklahoma every night my honey lamb and I sit alone and talk and watch a hawk making lazy circles in the sky! Come on Derek, your favorite part is coming up! And when we saaaaaay…”

Derek groans, but can’t resist. “Yo! Aye-yip-aye-oh-ee-ay!”

Stiles high-fives him and together they belt out the rest: “We’re only saying you’re doing fine, Oklahoma! Oklahoma, you’re okay!”

The car next to them beeps in support of the impromptu concert and Stiles waves to their adoring fans.

“You remind me of Peter sometimes,” Derek says, staring at the galaxy of brake lights in front of them. “He tried to make shitty situations fun. Before the house burned, he was kind of the cool uncle, you know? It hardened him. Changed him. But he was still the same guy, deep down.”

It’s the first time on this trip that Derek has talked about his family, and Stiles doesn’t want to say the wrong thing and scare him off the topic. “He sounds great.”

“He was. He loved his family, so much. He would have hated what they turned him into.”

Stiles carefully touches his arm. “You did the right thing, Derek. He was suffering. You put him to rest.”

Derek doesn’t answer for a minute. “I’m kind of coming around on ‘The Farmer and the Cowman Should Be Friends,’” he says finally, and Stiles takes the hint. He turns on the requested song and they ride out the rest of the traffic jam in companionable silence.
Day Five

Stiles feels like, alpha withdrawal aside, he’s been pretty lucky throughout his pregnancy. He’s suffered pretty much all the symptoms, but rarely do they come simultaneously. It’s like his body has drawn up a strict schedule, making sure he’s not nauseous at the same time he gets constipated, and his slowly expanding chest doesn’t ache at the same time as his back and feet.

But then there are some days when it’s like the symptoms gets their schedules mixed up and all arrive at the exact same time. He feels sick, everything hurts, and he has to constantly run to the bathroom. The Big Three of pregnancy symptoms. He privately calls it a Trifuckta.

Today is a Trifuckta day.

“Did you see a sign for a rest stop?” he asks nervously, squirming in his seat.

“Yeah. Fifteen miles back. Where we last stopped, fifteen minutes ago.”

“Har, har. Take it up with your baby, dude.” Stiles squirms again, even though it just makes it worse. “Seriously, I need a rest stop, like, now.”

“I figured we’d have a day like this.” Keeping his eyes on the road, Derek digs around in the backseat for something. “I have you covered. Let’s aim to not have to stop again until dinner, all right?”

He triumphantly pulls out an empty two-liter soda bottle and tosses it on Stiles’s lap.

Stiles stares at it.

“I won’t look,” Derek assures him.

Stiles picks it up and turns it over as if it might transform into something else in his hands. “Der?” he asks sweetly. “Mind explaining what this is for?”

Derek gives him his best are-you-an-idiot? face. “Bathroom.”

Stiles hums in polite understanding. “Oh, gotcha. So I’m supposed to whip it out and pee in a soda bottle, while you’re driving at eighty miles per hour?”

“I figured you wouldn’t want to give other drivers the opportunity to look over and see you. Would you prefer I slowed down?”

“Let me answer your question with a question,” Stiles says, still keeping his voice sugar-sweet. “Tonight, while you sleep, would you prefer that I cut off your dick, or your balls?”

Derek looks startled.

“That’s my friendly way of telling you I’m not pissing in the bottle,” Stiles clarifies, tossing it back into the rear of the car.

“We’re practically in the fucking badlands, Stiles. Any rest stop will be an absolute hole. It’s probably more sanitary to do it this way.”

“You know, I’ve been far from a princess on this trip. The place we slept last night probably had a sign up somewhere saying, zero days since last murder. But I will not, under any circumstances, for any reason, stick my dick in the neck of a soda bottle and piss.”
“Well, I’m driving, so I guess you’re going to be pretty uncomfortable for a while.” Derek is scowling so intensely his eyebrows are smushed up over his nose. He clearly thinks his soda bottle idea was genius and Stiles is a moron for not seeing that.

“Yeah, keep driving.” Stiles settles in his seat. “I’m going to figure out what I’m going to say to my dad tonight when I call him. Today, the father of my child forced me to piss my pants after I refused to pull out my dick and expose myself to the road while we drove. He’ll get such a kick out of that.”

Derek finds a rest stop.

#

That night, when Stiles does call his father, he gets good news. They’d found a camp in the woods where Kate must have been staying. They’d managed to catch two more hunters, and John thinks they might break under questioning.

“It was Scott who found them,” John tells him. “He’s been helping out with the search. Never leaves the station.”

Scott’s voice yells down the line. “Hey, buddy! Are you being a good kidnap victim?”

“Scott’s joining the force?” Stiles asks, delighted at the thought.

“He’s helping out in a civilian capacity,” John clarifies. “Doesn’t have the good sense God gave a horse, but that does put him on par with most of my other deputies.”

Stiles grins, knowing how fond his father is of every cop in Beacon Hills. “Well, keep me updated. But don’t go too hard on it. If I have to turn around and drive the entire way back tomorrow I’m going to lose my mind.”

Derek, already in bed, grunts in agreement.

**Day Six**

By day six, *Oklahoma!* has lost its appeal even as a method of torture. Every part of Stiles’s body aches, and he’s tired of looking at nature. Nature sucks. Roads suck. Everything sucks.

Except Derek.

They talk to each other as they continue on to keep the road madness from pulling them both under. They exhaust *I Spy* after about two minutes and play the *Alphabet Game* twice before they give up and just start quizzing each other on random shit.

“Favorite food.”

“Carrot cake.”

Derek gives him an annoyed look. “There’s no way that’s true.”

“No, man. Really moist, with like three inches of cream cheese frosting? The best.”

“Maybe just the icing,” Derek says doubtfully.

“My mom used to make the best carrot cake cupcakes for my birthday,” Stiles says, and Derek nods and lets it go. Anything that’s linked to a dead parent is untouchable; they both understand that.
“Cutest animal,” Stiles says.

Derek snorts. “Wolf.”

“Come on.”

“Wolves are adorable,” Derek insists.

“Red pandas are adorable. Wolves are…hairy.”

“Furry.”

“Whatever, Derek. Wolves score, like, a six on the cuteness scale.”

“Not our little wolf.” Derek reaches over to gives Stiles’s belly a pat. After almost a week stuck sitting a foot from each other, the concept of personal space is a distant memory. “A ten, for sure.”

“Well, yeah.” Stiles rubs the side of his belly and gives in. “Okay, fine. Wolves are the cutest.”

“Yay,” Derek deadpans. “Favorite movie.”

Stiles thinks for a second. “Bambi.”

Derek gives him a full-on glare now. “You are such a liar.”

“Bambi is far and away the best Disney movie out there.”

“I will not have you lecture me on Disney movies in my own car, especially when you’re so blatantly wrong.”

Stiles snorts. “What, you know Disney movies?”

“Before the hunters, I actually lived a normal human life. I had four younger siblings. I know Disney movies.”

This is pretty surprising, and Stiles isn’t completely sure if Derek’s lying or not. “So what is the best one?”

Derek answers immediately and confidently: “Mulan.”

Stiles shakes his head. “Agree to disagree. I remember thinking that if I ever had a daughter I wanted to name her Bambi. Bambi Stilinski seemed like such a pretty name.”

Derek chokes. “No way in hell, Stiles.”

“What? It’s nice.”

“You can’t name a werewolf after a fucking deer.”

“Well, we’re not naming her Mulan, either.”

“We’re not naming it after any Disney movie!”

“But there are so many good ones! Belle, Nala, Flynn, Kristoff, Elsa…”

“No.”
“You probably like really traditional names, don’t you? Like Elizabeth or James or William...”

“Those are nice names. And none of them are a fucking prey animal.” Derek shakes his head in disbelief. “Not to mention that Bambi’s mom was killed by hunters.”

Stiles winces. “Solid point.” He traces a heart on his belly, deep in thought. “Thumper would be a cute in-utero nickname though, don’t you think? Like, once the baby starts kicking?”

“No. Bunny rabbits are a wolf’s favorite prey.”

“Yeah, but you don’t hunt in your wolf form.” Stiles frowns. “Do you?”

“Sometimes.”

“Ew!”

“Your little Thumper will be bringing you back all kinds of dead animals once it starts shifting. I remember being so proud the first time I caught a squirrel.” Derek gives a predatory smile at the memory. After his two times shifting last week his wolf is definitely a little closer to the surface, usually coming out in a snarl whenever an asshole on the interstate cuts them off.

“Whatever, I think it’s cute.” Stiles kisses his thumb and presses it to his belly. “You’re my little Thumper,” he coos to the baby.

Derek shakes his head. “You couldn’t have come up with a worse nickname if you’d tried.”

Stiles loves a challenge.

#

“Cletus the Fetus,” he says a half hour later.

“What?”

“That would be a worse nickname.”

Derek thinks for a second, then nods slowly. “That would be a worse nickname. Thumper it is.”

Stiles grins.

**Day Seven**

Stiles’s body has gotten used to Derek-time, so he actually wakes up before Derek for once. As soon as his eyes open he blushes in horror, realizing that while he slept he’d curled around Derek like a vine, resting his head against his chest. They look like lovers waking up together after a night of passion.

Derek cracks open his eyes just as Stiles tries to carefully pull away. “Oh,” he yawns. “Hey.”

“Sorry.” Stiles whispers, mortified. His dick is hard as a rock, and he knows he can’t just blame it on morning wood.

“Don’t worry about it.” Derek sits up, looking totally unaffected. “It’s been like this every morning. It’s natural, with the bond.”

Derek’s been waking up to this every morning? Stiles bolts off to the bathroom to take a cold
shower, mind reeling. They haven’t talked about the way Derek had kissed Stiles over a week ago. They haven’t really done or said anything to suggest they’re more than friends, except sleep in the same bed, and that’s just because Derek thinks it would look suspicious for an apparently mated pair to sleep separately.

Stiles has a feeling that his little speech to Derek about omegas and alphas has seriously affected the werewolf, and Derek doesn’t want Stiles to think he’s taking advantage of their bond and forced proximity by making a move.

But Stiles’s feelings for Derek haven’t gone away. They’ve only gotten stronger. Being in a car with him for sixteen hours a day hasn’t been nearly as terrible as it should have been, and Stiles knows that it isn’t just the bond making him think that.

He has to know if Derek feels the same way.

Things feel suddenly awkward as they get back in the car and it’s completely silent for almost an hour before Stiles just takes a deep breath and jumps right in.

“So…we kissed.”

Derek doesn’t look surprised, and Stiles knows he’s been waiting for this. “Yeah.”

“We should probably talk about it.”

“Okay.” Derek takes a deep breath. “Do you want me to pull over?”

That’s a massively conciliatory gesture from the man who is still trying to convince Stiles that peeing in a Coke bottle would be an amazing experience, and Stiles is touched. “That’s okay. I just want to know if we’re going to do it again.”

Derek blushes deep red. “Stiles, I want to. I really, really do.”

Stiles steels himself for the but.

“I have feelings for you. God, that’s lame. I have real feelings for you, I mean. Look, you should know that I was planning on leaving Beacon Hills after you got pregnant. I figured it would be the safest thing. Honestly, the day you came to my apartment, I was packing up. But after I got to know you…I couldn’t leave.” He takes another deep breath. “What I’m saying is, it’s not just the bond for me. It’s you.”

“I feel the same way,” Stiles says, heart going crazy in his chest.

“But if this is going to last, we have to be sure of each other. And that means we have to wait until the baby is born and the bond goes away.” Derek looks at him, eyes pained. “If we were to…do stuff…I worry it would cloud our thinking. I want us to be able to look at each other, as people, and decide that we want to really be bonded for life.”

It takes Stiles a few seconds to figure out what he’s saying. “So…no sex until the baby’s born.”

Derek, if possible, goes even redder. “I just think that’s the safest course of action. I want you to know that I’m really choosing you, not just following what my biology is telling me. If I didn’t like you so much, I would tear your clothes off in a heartbeat. Does that make sense?”

“It does.” Stiles is torn right down the middle. A part of him is relieved that Derek wants this to be forever, but a much more hormonal part of him is mourning the long wait before they can actually be
together. “So I guess that means no kissing either?”

Derek nods, looking miserable.

“I mean, surely there are some instances where it’s okay,” Stiles muses after a few minutes.

“Well, yeah. It’s not like it would be the worst thing in the world if we…slipped up.”

“We should probably figure out what the exceptions are.”

Derek gives him a half-amused, half-exasperated look. “It’s not like we’re going to sit here and make a list.”

#

An hour later, they have their list.

**Times When We’re Allowed to Kiss**

1. Kate has been caught/killed.

2. The baby has just been born and it’s a super emotional moment

3. Derek has just shifted back to human and doesn’t remember boundaries

4. One of us was missing and the other kisses him out of relief as soon as he’s found

5. One of us is drowning and the other gives successful mouth-to-mouth and the drowning person just naturally turns it into a kiss

6. Stiles says something so stupid that Derek just has to kiss him to shut him up

“The last two will never happen,” Derek says, but he’s grinning as Stiles writes the last word with a flourish and returns the pen to Derek’s dashboard.

“Movies don’t lie, Der.”

Derek snorts and gives Stiles such a soft, fond look that Stiles nearly scrawls another exception to the list. “Five and a half months,” he tells Stiles. “Then, if we decide this is real, no more lists. No more rules.”

Stiles drums his fingers on his belly. “I really hope we decide that it’s real,” he confesses in a tiny voice.

Derek reaches for his hand and gives it a little squeeze. “Me too.”

They keep driving, and after a few more minutes Stiles reaches out to start *Oklahoma!* one more time.

Every love story needs a good soundtrack, and this is the best they’re going to get.
Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

This chapter took WAY longer than I planned to go up, and I ended up having to split it in two, but it’s all introductions and science and FORESHADOWING, which takes so much more time to write than road trips. Also, I’m a huge Kira fan (at least partly because I saw Arden Cho years ago in Agents of Secret Stuff on YouTube and thought, “That girl’s going to be a star,” and I love being right) so I decided to make her, along with Deaton, one of the wolves. But I picture her wolf form taking the shape of a Maned Wolf, which you can see (http://i.imgur.com/GmIVuDP.jpg) is the foxiest one.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Stiles had been sure that Derek was exaggerating the amount of time it would take to make it to the compound, especially when he saw how quickly they’d zoomed through Middle America, but once they reach the last leg of the journey he realizes that, if anything, ten days was generous. They’ve been in Maine for all of days six, seven, and eight, because, as Derek explains, the compound is way up in the mountains, near the Canadian border.

They take tiny, rocky side roads, and on day eight they aren’t even able to find a motel. Instead they sleep in the car, wrapped in spare clothes. Stiles has never been too far from California before and even the September air feels bitingly cold this far north. Derek, noticing his discomfort, pushes forward grimly.

On the ninth night they’re able to find a small bed and breakfast. “This is probably your last chance to talk to your dad before we get there,” Derek tells him as they stagger through the door together. Stiles is itching for a shower but he lets Derek go first so he can call the sheriff.

John sounds exhausted when he picks up. “Sheriff Stilinski.”

“Hey, Dad. Sorry I didn’t call yesterday. I couldn’t get to a phone.”

“You’re all right?”

“Yeah. I’m fine. I think we’ll be there late tomorrow, maybe. We’re in these crazy mountains—”

“Don’t tell me anything else,” John says sharply, and Stiles stops short. His father sighs. “Sorry, buddy. I think we have a leak in the department.”

Stiles’s mouth gapes. “Are you serious?”

“I’m serious.” John hesitates. “We had a breakout last night. We’d moved most of Kate’s people up to State, but the ones we were still questioning in the holding cells all got out.”

Stiles sinks straight to the floor. “No.”

“Six of them. There wasn’t any sign of force. They used the key. And they spent a good amount of time moseying around the station.” John hesitates again, and Stiles knows that he’s debating whether or not to tell Stiles something. He’s heard this pause many times in his childhood, most notably right
before his dad tried to tell him that his beloved pet betta fish had been suddenly recruited by S.H.I.E.L.D. for secret superhero work. Stiles hadn’t let him get away with it then, and he doesn’t let him get away with it now.

“What is it, dad?”

“She left a note on my desk.”

Stiles shudders and wraps his arms around his legs, imagining what might have happened if his father had decided to work late. “Did she threaten you?”

“No. It wasn’t addressed to me. It was for Derek. Is he…can you put him on the phone?”

At that moment Derek steps out of the bathroom, wearing only sweatpants and a towel slung around his neck. He frowns questioningly down at Stiles, who holds out the phone. “Kate arranged a prison breakout,” he says, keeping his voice flat. “My dad wants to talk to you.”

Derek scowls and takes the phone. “Sheriff,” he says gruffly.

Stiles climbs up on the bed, feeling like he should give Derek some privacy. Derek makes a few sounds as he listens, but otherwise rarely speaks. “I have no idea,” he says after a minute or two. “I don’t know how they did it to my uncle. But yeah, I think that’s possible.” He listens for a few moments more. “She’s never tried it before, but there’s never been anything I had she knew she could use to bargain with. Yeah. Keep looking. I don’t like this at all.” He pauses. “Thanks, Sheriff. John. We’ll speak again soon.”

He hangs up the phone and turns to look at Stiles. “Do I even want to know?” Stiles asks, trying not to sound as scared as he feels.

“Kate wanted to make me an offer.”

Stiles tries a smile. “I’m sure it was super attractive.”

“She doesn’t want to kill me. She wanted to clear that up. She wants to make me into her new Peter.” Derek shudders. “A werewolf killer. Apparently I’d be very happy that way, putting my beastly nature to good use.”

“That fucking bitch,” Stiles says. He almost never uses that word to describe an omega, but there isn’t a strong enough curse word to levy against Kate Argent.

“If I give up and come to her, she won’t make me hunt my own baby some day. Otherwise she’ll track me down, do it to me anyway, and make you and the baby my first victims.”

Stiles climbs into his lap, feeling the need to smother him with omega pheromones. “That will never, ever happen. Don’t even think about it. She’s just trying to come up with the worst thing she can imagine.”

“Well, she did it. That’s the worst thing I can think of. That’s so much worse that thinking that she’ll kill me.” Derek shakes all over and presses Stiles into his chest without even seeming to be aware that he’s doing it. “She wants to bring glory back to the Argent name. Of course she wants one of us for a hunter. She needs me, Stiles.”

“Well, she won’t get you.” Stiles touches his forehead to Derek’s. “We’re going to be somewhere safe, and if she tries to come for you, she’ll die. We’re stronger than she is.”
“We don’t even know where she is. For all we know she’s trying to fool us and she just left some of her people behind in Beacon Hills while she came after us. She could have been following us this whole time.”

It’s a sobering thought, one that makes Stiles regret every bathroom and food stop he insisted they take. Derek’s paranoia must be rubbing off on him, because it suddenly seems like Kate might burst through the door with her gun drawn.

“How tired are you?” he asks.

“At the moment I couldn’t sleep if I tried.”

“I feel the same way. Let’s just keep going. We’re almost there, right?”

Derek considers. “We could probably make it by noon tomorrow if we left right now.”

“If you think you’re awake enough to drive, I say we just leave.”

Derek nods and stands. “I’d feel better on the move. Let’s go.”

Stiles grabs his bag, mourning the loss of his opportunity for a shower but very glad at the thought of putting more distance between them and Kate.

#

Stiles ends up crashing just as dawn starts spreading across the sky, which is probably for the best considering how rocky the road gets. He’s managed to go the entire ride without puking in the car and it would suck to break that streak in the last twelve hours.

Hours later Derek shakes him away. “Wake up, Stiles. We’re here.”

“Here?” Stiles yawns, rubbing his eyes and trying to sit up. Fuck, that hurts. There’s no comfortable way to sleep in a car.

Derek stares out the windshield, relief etched into every line on his face. “The Preserve.”

Stiles looks out. They’re stopped in front of a large gate, at least twenty feet tall. Stiles can see a guard tower up above. Someone is leaning over with a weapon drawn. “Friendly welcome,” he mutters.

Derek rolls down his window to press a button on a small call box. “Identify yourself,” a voice orders from the speaker.

Derek leans in close. “Derek Hale and mate.”

There’s a stunned pause. “Holy shit. Derek?”

“Mate?” a voice in the background adds.

The gate in front of them swings open and Derek guns it to drive through. Stiles twists to watch it shut soundly behind them, cutting them off from the outside world. There’s a high fence that he can see must run the entire perimeter of the compound, way too high to scale. “You said I was your mate,” he says as the car shudders to a stop.

Derek grimaces. “Yeah. I want to make sure…they’re not used to having humans here. I don’t want them deciding you’re not one of us and kicking you out.”
“So are we lying?”

“So if we’re asked outright.”

That doesn’t sit very well with Stiles, but before he can press it he sees a whole crowd of people running towards the car. Derek opens his door and jumps out, then comes around to help Stiles wriggle out. He puts one hand on Stiles’s belly and Stiles understands immediately what he’s doing. He wants Stiles to look vulnerable and unthreatening. It’s crazy to think that in a camp full of werewolves he would be seen as the dangerous one.

He takes a minute to look around before the group descends on them. He’d expected military-style accommodations, dusty roads and tents, but instead it looks like Main Street, USA. They’re standing on cobblestones, and the street is lined with brightly painted storefronts that eventually give way to small houses. They become more spaced out the farther he squints but the compound clearly goes on for miles. It’s an entire little universe.

“Here we go,” Derek mutters as the group of people gets closer, but he sounds almost…fond. Stiles can’t help but freeze up a little when he realizes that it’s an entire crowd of wolves running towards him like they’re coming for dinner.

A pretty blonde girl practically jumps on Derek. “Holy shit, Der. Holy shit! We thought you were dead!”

“Don’t crowd him,” a sturdy boy scolds, pulling the blonde away. His eyes flicker to Stiles and his belly.

“This is your mate?” A curly-haired boy leans in and sniffs at Stiles, making Derek growl.

“Human?” the blonde asks, leaning in for a sniff herself.

The curly-haired boy comes in even closer. “Pregnant?”

“Stiles.” He shakes out his hand, an open invitation for anyone to shake. “Pleased to meet you.”

At first nobody takes his hand, then the curly-haired boy gives it a firm pump. “You too. Welcome to the Preserve. I’m Isaac.”

“Erica,” the blonde says. Stiles tries not to react at the name, though he can’t help but remember what Derek had told him about Erica’s past.

“Boyd.”

“Liam,” a younger-looking boy with a sweet smile says.

Identical twins step forward and introduce themselves as Ethan and Aidan. Each wolf flashes their eyes as they introduce themselves, and Stiles is surprised when Aidan’s eyes flash blue and Ethan’s flash gold. “Twins of different genders?” he asks, genuinely intrigued. “I’ve never seen that before.”

There’s an awkward pause. “Triplets, actually,” Aidan says eventually. “Our brother Nathan was an alpha, if you can believe it. He passed away last year.”

Derek is stiff as a board next to Stiles, and Stiles tries not to wince. Nathan must have been the friend Kate had killed. “I’m so sorry.”

“It’s not the fault of anyone here,” Aidan says, looking directly at Derek.
Derek doesn’t respond.

“So, Derek, I told myself if you ever came back I’d yell at you for leaving, but no wonder you ran if you were heading towards this. Do you know if it’s a boy or girl yet?” Erica looks like she’s dying to touch Stiles’s belly, but after everything that's happened Stiles is a little wary of a stranger’s touch, so he doesn’t extend an invitation.

“I don’t think we could find out yet even if we wanted to.” Stiles looks at Derek. “Do we want to?” They’ve never talked about finding out the sex of the baby.

Derek looks surprised by the thought. “Ah…I don’t know. I guess it’s your decision.”

There’s an excited shriek and a new girl throws herself at them. She’s an omega and absolutely stunning, and Stiles has to bite back a sudden surge of jealousy as she rubs her face into Derek’s chest. “Derek, I can’t believe it! You’re home!”

“Kira,” Derek says warmly. “I missed you.” He jerks his chin towards Stiles. “Stiles, this is Kira. Kira, Stiles. I think you two will get along really well.”

Kira looks at him excitedly. “ORA?”

“Omega rights activist? Yeah, absolutely.” Stiles can’t help but return her infectious grin. “Great to meet you.”

“You, too!” Kira gives him a sudden hug, making him freeze up for a second before he cautiously returns it. “Isn’t it nuts that I even have to ask? I mean, it’s like asking, ‘hey, omega, do you think you deserve equal rights to alphas and betas, or should you be a second class citizen?’”

“I know! It’s because the ARM has tried to make it sound like supporting omega rights make omegas undesirable to alphas—”

“— which is just ridiculous, because, as I say, if you were to make a Venn Diagram of alphas who don’t support omega rights and alphas you want to be mated to, you’d just have two separate circles.”

Stiles laughs, suddenly feeling much more confident about being surrounded by wolves. “Exactly,” he says.

“Thank God,” Erica says. “Someone who actually wants to talk about all this. Stiles, she won’t leave your side now.”

“Don’t listen to her,” Kira tells him cheerfully, linking her arm through his. “We have so much to talk about. I run this blog, Omageddon? I’ve never had a human perspective on it, and it must be so different for you than it is for me. Of course I don’t face any gender discrimination here in the Preserve, but even before I arrived I could see that I was treated differently from human omegas—not even the most hateful alpha looks at me and thinks, weakling, you know? I have so many questions for you—”

“Hold up there, Kira,” a new, soft voice says. “Don’t go running off with him just yet.”

An older man steps through the group and looks at Derek and Stiles thoughtfully. The mood changes immediately. “Alan Deaton,” he says, shaking Stiles’s hand.

“Deaton runs the Preserve,” Derek tells him, sliding his arm back around Stiles protectively. Stiles gets it. This is the man who will decide if Stiles gets to stay.
“I hardly run it. We’re a collective. I’m just the village doctor.” Deaton nods at Stiles’s belly. “And it looks like you might need one, too. How far along are you, Mr. Hale?”

Stiles tries not to react at being called by Derek’s last name. “Four and a half months.”

“Damn, Derek,” Ethan teases. “Fast work.”

“How long have you two been driving?”

“Ten days.”

Deaton gives Derek a disapproving look. “This poor boy must be half-dead, Derek. Mr. Hale, I’d like to look you over at my clinic.”

“How now?” Derek asks, sounding a little suspicious.

“No time like the present.” Deaton’s smile is still polite, but Stiles has the feeling that he wants more than a checkup. “Do you know if the child is human or werewolf?”

“Werewolf.”

Deaton nods. “Then it’s all the better that I look you over. My human contemporaries don’t have the first clue how to handle a werewolf pregnancy.” He looks back to Derek. “I assume you’re not just stopping by, but staying?”

“If we can,” Derek answers coolly, still holding Stiles close.

“Of course you can!” Erica exclaims. “Der, we’ve seriously missed you so much. It was like the pack fell apart once you were gone. You’re our alpha; you can’t just leave us again.”

“Erica,” Isaac scolds.

“Oh, you know it’s true. Say that you’re going to stay, Derek. And Stiles! You’re part of the pack now, too!”

Stiles mocks up his best grin, but he’s a little confused. "Pack?" Derek doesn’t have a pack. His pack was his family, and they’ve been gone for years.

“We’re staying for a little while, at least,” Derek says, still looking at Deaton.

“Wonderful,” the doctor says. Stiles honestly can’t tell if he means it or not. “I’m afraid we don’t have the finest lodgings available, but at least you’ll have privacy. Aidan, Ethan, drive his car over to the old Tansey house and unpack it for them. I imagine that’s the last thing they want to do after their long journey.”

“You don’t have to do that,” Stiles says, sort of horrified by the thought of strangers going through his underwear.

“No big,” one of the triplets says cheerfully, holding out his hand for Derek’s key. “We’ll all do it together, while Erica plans the big welcome home party I know she’s been thinking about for the past five minutes.”

“And we’ll make sure everything is well with the child,” Deaton says firmly, putting a hand on Stiles’s shoulder.

Derek nods, then reaches down to grip Stiles’s hand in an obvious show of solidarity. Deaton gives
them one last inscrutable smile before he turns and starts walking away.

Erica gives Derek one last hug. “Me and Isaac have to get back to the tower, but we’ll come by as soon as we’re off shift in a half hour. We have so much to talk about!”

Derek gives her one last genuine smile and then tugs Stiles forward. As the jeep starts up behind them, Derek leans down to mutter in Stiles’s ear, “You okay?”

Stiles honestly isn’t sure. He feels slightly overwhelmed, even though all the werewolves seemed perfectly nice. “Why did Erica call you her alpha?” he whispers.

Derek sighs. “The Preserve is kind of like one giant pack, but there are smaller packs inside of it. When I was here Nathan and I were the only alphas in our age group. All of us tended to spend time together and eventually we started to call ourselves a pack. It wasn’t anything formal. Erica was dumped here by the state when she was young and she…she needs to have a pack, I guess.”

Stiles digests this. “What about you?”

“What about me, what?”

“Do you need to have a pack?”

Derek doesn’t respond, but his grip on Stiles’s hand tightens. Stiles isn’t sure if that’s an answer or not.

Deaton stops by one of the storefronts on the main street and holds open the door for them. “My clinic,” he tells Stiles. “We don’t have a hospital here, but I assure you, I can take care of all your medical needs.” He flips the light on and nods to a closed-circuit television mounted on the wall. “And I also keep an eye on what’s happening around the Preserve, which is how I saw that you arrived. I’m sure Erica is busy texting the news to everyone else as we speak.”

“You have cell phone service?” Stiles blurts.

Deaton Laugha. “Of course we do. Cell phones, internet, cable…we even have a working movie theater, though I’m afraid we get everything a few months behind. Derek, what have you been telling this poor boy?”

“Not much,” Derek answers honestly. He’s still gripping Stiles’s hand, face tight.

“Hardly surprising.” Deaton leads them into an examination room. “Perhaps we should discuss some things first,” he says, voice a few degrees cooler.

Derek raises his chin. “Such as?”

“You introduced this boy as your mate, and yet I don’t see a bite on either of you.” Deaton raises an eyebrow and Stiles tries not to grimace. Mating rituals are marked by the sharing of a bite between new mates, usually on the neck. It scars forever, giving each mating a sense of permanence that has always sort of freaked Stiles out. “Of course, given what I remember about Derek’s penchant for secrecy, I suppose the scar could be somewhere a bit more…private, but it does seem odd.”

Stiles throws a nervous glance at Derek, preferring to defer this one to him.

“We’re not really mates,” Derek admits.

Deaton makes a small, inscrutable ah. “A pregnancy from a causal knotting is nothing to be ashamed
Derek shakes his head. “It wasn’t like that. There was a mix-up. Stiles was artificially inseminated with my semen sample and became pregnant before we’d even met.”

Deaton doesn’t even look surprised at that; Stiles has the feeling that he prides himself on his poker face. “So what’s brought the two of you to the Preserve?”

“Kate,” Derek says simply.

Deaton makes his ah again.

“She kidnapped Stiles. She tried to kill him. Twice.” Derek bites off the words. “He can’t defend himself the way he needs to while he’s pregnant and I can’t protect him every minute out there.”

“Where is Kate now?”

“We don’t know. Probably figuring out where we went and heading this way.”

“So you brought the war to our door,” Deaton says without rancor. Derek starts to protest and Deaton raises a hand to stop him. “It was a smart choice. You needed an army so you came to one. Your friends have been itching to take out the hunters who killed Nathan. They wanted to leave here months ago to track the Argent Clan down, but we talked them out of it. Werewolves hunting a werewolf killer hunting a werewolf seemed like a recipe for disaster, and striking against humans, even hunters, would have broken our treaty with the government.” Deaton smiles, looking like a werewolf for the first time. “But if Kate attacks us, we’re well within our rights to defend ourselves.”

Derek nods. “We can stay until then?”

“Of course you can.” Deaton gives Stiles a far more welcoming smile now. “I was a bit concerned when I saw there was no mating bite. For all I knew this boy was a hunter and you’d been coerced into bringing him past the gate. But if that’s really a baby bump, not a fake belly stuffed with wolfsbane, you’re both more than welcome to stay for as long as you like.”

Derek exhales in relief.

“What’s wolfsbane?” Stiles asks, the word tugging some distant thread of memory.

“Poison, to werewolves and humans. It’s a flower that’s commonly crushed into a power or distilled into food and drink. It can make werewolves very sick or kill them in high enough quantities.” Deaton looks at Stiles gravely. “We haven’t had an incident of it here in years, but you must be extremely cautious. I’ll show you pictures of it in its various forms so you can be sure to avoid anything that may be contaminated. Even trace amounts, if ingested, would almost certainly kill your baby.”

Stiles blanches at this new horror. Derek looks equally as sick. “I didn’t even think about wolfsbane poisoning,” he mutters, weaving his arm around Stiles’s side again to plant a protective hand over his belly.

“There’s no need to be afraid, but caution never killed anyone.” Deaton nods to the examination table. “Now, how about that checkup I promised? Mr. …I’m sorry, I assume you don’t go by Hale. What is it?”

“Stilinski.”
“Mr. Stilinski, then, would you mind taking off your shirt? Thank you. Have you been tested for lycadone?”

Stiles nods as Derek helps him climb up on the table. “Yeah. That’s how they knew the baby is a werewolf.”

“And what was your percentage?”

Stiles blinks, confused. ‘They didn’t tell me a percentage.”

Deaton sighs in annoyance, turning to go through one of his drawers. “Typical. We’ll need to test that today. I imagine you aren’t very familiar with lupidology, the study of werewolf health and biology? It’s a criminally ignored field, I’m afraid. Allow me to explain this briefly. Werewolves are given their exceptional abilities by lycadone— basically, when there’s a certain amount of lycadone in the blood, it stimulates parts of the brain humans aren’t able to access. This generally happens in the womb, as soon as the brain is formed. However, recent research has found that it’s possible for a person born a human to become a werewolf if enough lycadone is in their bloodstream.”

Stiles’s jaw practically scrapes the ground. “Are you saying I might suddenly transform into a werewolf? Could I already be one now?”

Deaton chuckles. “I’m afraid not. Lycadone doesn’t copy itself— it has to be constantly pumped out by blood cells— and it doesn’t naturally circulate through the heart, because a human heart recognizes it as an invader. For that reason the human brain can’t get the lycadone it would need for such a dramatic transition. A human has to die with enough lycadone in his system that it overloads and restarts the heart. That sudden surge of lycadone to a blood-and-oxygen starved brain can be enough to trigger the shift from human to werewolf.”

Stiles digests this. “So if I died right now…”

“If your lycadone percentage is over seventy-five, you could transform into a werewolf, yes. But given your pregnancy, it would be unlikely. The concern in these sort of pregnancies is that your lycadone percentage becomes so high that the body starts to view it as an invader and tries to fight it off, like a virus.”

“Is seventy-five percent the magic number there, too?”

“Yes. At this stage of your pregnancy, anything between thirty to thirty-five percent is normal. If it crosses seventy-five, we would need to deliver immediately. Many years ago I had a human patient pregnant with werewolf twins. We had to deliver at thirty-three weeks. It was perilous, but allowing her to remain pregnant would likely have killed her and the children.”

“I had no idea,” Derek says, face white. “I… fuck, Stiles, I had no clue. I’m so sorry.”

“I had no idea,” Deaton says, face white. “I… fuck, Stiles, I had no clue. I’m so sorry.”

“It’s not your fault.” Deaton pulls out a needle and an antiseptic patch. “The lack of knowledge outside the Preserve walls is deplorable and, frankly, terrifying. Now, Mr. Stilinski, I’m going to take this from your arm and run some tests on it. There’s absolutely no reason we should be seeing a percentage to make us worry, unless you’ve been injecting yourself with pure lycadone every night. But if you’re above thirty-five percent, I’m going to have you in every week so we can monitor it.”

Stiles nods and looks away when Deaton presses the tip of the needle to the soft underbelly of his elbow. Derek takes Stiles’s free hand, face grim at the thought of how many dangers he hadn’t even contemplated.

“Finished,” Deaton says, stepping away. “I should have the results by later in the day. Now, I
imagine you two want to get settled, but I’m more than happy to check on the baby with an ultrasound…”

Derek and Stiles exchange quick, communication-laden looks. “That’s all right,” Stiles says, swinging his legs over the table. “I need a shower so bad I can smell myself.”

“And once I get Stiles settled in I need to talk to whoever’s running the guard tower— is it still Blake?— about Kate. They need to know who to look out for.” Derek shakes Deaton’s hand. “Thank you, Alan. We appreciate what you’ve told us.”

“You know where you’re going, Derek?”

“Yeah. The house by the edge of the perimeter, right? We’ll walk. We’ve been sitting for a while.”

Deaton bids them goodbye and together they walk back out into the sunlight. “Still doing okay?”

Derek asks as they start to walk down the main street. Stiles can see people inside each store— there’s a clothing boutique, a candy store, the mentioned movie theater, and even an indoor laser tag building.

“Yeah. He seemed nice enough.”

“He is. He’s smart with a mysterious streak, which is an infuriating combination, but he’s a good person to have in your corner.”

“This place isn’t what I expected, honestly. You were talking about supply runs and the guard tower, but this is practically Mayberry.”

Derek smiles at that. “I remember thinking the same thing when I first arrived. It’s almost utopic, isn’t it? The supply runs are to stock all the stores on the main street; when more and more families started coming here they wanted to give it a semblance of normalcy, so people started opening up businesses. They don’t generate much revenue, so, like Deaton said, things are a collective. You exchange labor for goods, for the most part.”

“What kind of labor?”

“Either work for the government, or going on the supply runs, or manning the guard tower. Everyone past puberty does their share. But don’t worry; you won’t be expected to do any of that. I’ll take care of it.”

“I’m such a kept omega,” Stiles says with mock disgust. “Kira is going to be so horrified.”

Derek laughs. “I knew you two would get along. She’d be pissed at me if she knew I’d made you leave home, so let’s keep that between us, okay?”

“I’ll keep your dirty secrets, alpha. But seriously, all your friends seem nice.” Stiles pauses. “Even if I had no idea they were actually friends before we got here.”

Derek’s jaw tightens. “I wasn’t expecting such a friendly welcome, honestly. I ran out on them right after I got their friend and brother killed. They’re too forgiving for their own good.”


“Of course it is.”

Stiles sighs and taps his belly, too tired to argue the point with Derek. “Thumper, please don’t have
low self-esteem like Papa. Be like Daddy. Daddy knows that he’s awesome.”

Derek stops walking and looks down at Stiles, equal parts touched and surprised. “Am I Papa?”

Stiles blushes. That had just slipped out, since he’s been imagining Derek as Papa and himself as Daddy for days now. “I don’t…you don’t have to be. It’s pretty typical for the alpha father to be Papa, but if you don’t like it…”

“I do like it. I love it.” Derek grins, looking much more relaxed once his thoughts are off Nathan. “I just…I keep thinking about the baby as this thing that needs to be protected and then I remember… it’s going to be a real person, and I’m going to be its Papa.” He shakes his head in amazement. “It’s so weird. But a good weird. The first thing in my life that’s ever been a good-weird”

“Of course it’s a real person,” Stiles says, pretending to be affronted to hide how adorable he’s finding Derek’s giddy little beam at the thought of being someone’s Papa. “It’s our little Thumper.”

“Our Thumper,” Derek agrees, having given up on fighting the nickname days ago. He keeps walking, seeming a little more comfortable to be back in the Preserve, as though Stiles and the baby have helped anchor him. “Listen, you don’t have to feel obligated to spend time with Erica and Kira and everyone. I know it might be uncomfortable for you. If you’d rather we keep to ourselves while we’re here, I can make that happen.”

“No. No way. Kira seemed awesome, and everyone else was totally welcoming, and on the off chance we’re here for five months, I want to have friends.” Stiles feels more confident in the words as soon as they’re out. It’s just a group of werewolves. He has no reason to be afraid of them.

In fact, as he and Derek draw closer and closer to the house they’ll be sharing, he almost feels a pang of something when he thinks of what Deaton had said about the unlikelihood that he might transform into a werewolf. Loss? Regret? For a second, as Deaton had explained the process, Stiles had almost been excited at the thought of it happening to him.

He’s never wanted to be a werewolf before; never even considered it as something that was possible. But he imagines running through the forest with Derek and their cub, linked by pack and family. He imagines the strength and abilities he would have. He thinks of what Kira had said: not even the most hateful alpha looks at me and thinks, weakling.

Stupid. Stiles isn’t going to be a werewolf. But for the first time he feels a little jealous of Derek, for the bond he’ll have with their baby that Stiles will never be able to share.

Chapter End Notes

I'm going to go ahead and say that from here on out updates will come biweekly, either Tuesday or Wednesday and Saturday.
Thanks to everyone for the continued love! The idea that over 1,000 people have enjoyed this story is making me so happy!
Stiles had been a little concerned about the state of the place they would be staying, but when he and Derek finally make it he sees it’s a perfectly nice two-story little house, fairly well-secluded, pressed right up against the fence. Derek’s friends have nearly finished unpacking, but they proudly demonstrate just what makes this house so unique.

“They guy that lived here before you was crazy fucking paranoid,” Ethan explains, dragging Derek and Stiles over to a panel on the wall. “Once we were worried that the wall had been breached and he set up paint cans outside the door to knock out anyone who tried to intrude. Eventually he went hi-tech. Check it out— ” He presses the large red button on the panel. There’s a shuddering sound, and bars start to descend over the windows in the living room and kitchen. “And this button right next to it automatically bolts the doors, too!”

Aidan appears at his brother’s side. “Now you have to wait twenty minutes before you can bring the bars up, though. Oh, and this button opens the bomb shelter. It’s really just the basement, but it’s packed with provisions and this little green button is the only way to open the door. Once you’re down there you can press a button that disables the switches up here, so no one can unlock the door while you’re inside.”

“I swear Derek just got a hard-on,” Stiles says without thinking. He goes fire-engine red as soon as it’s out, unable to look over to see if Derek’s face is the same shade. He might be playing his role as Derek’s mate a little too well.

“If that’s the case, we’d better leave you two to christen the house,” Aidan leers, tugging his brother’s arm. “Hey, Der, pack meeting tomorrow, like we used to? Erica and Boyd are living together now, you know, so they usually host…”

Derek immediately looks at Stiles as if checking to see if it’s okay. “Only if Stiles can come,” he says firmly, playing the part of the devoted mate right to the hilt.

“Of course, man. Hey, Stiles, you’re welcome anywhere, anytime. You know that, right?” Both triplets give him broad, genuine grins. Everyone else, congregating by the door, flashes him the same smile and Stiles can’t help but return it. For a minute he feels almost ashamed to be human. A werewolf interlocker would never get such a warm welcome out in his world.

When the werewolves are gone the house suddenly seems too quiet, and he realizes, for the first time, that he’s going to be playing house with Derek. Just the two of them for what could be over five months. Journeying together was one thing, but now they’ve reached their destination, and there’s nowhere to go but closer and closer towards each other.

Derek seems to be digesting it as well and after an awkward second he asks, “So…should we explore?”

“See what booby traps Mr. Home Alone left? Absolutely.”

They tromp upstairs together. There’s a bedroom, a small bathroom, a spare room, and only one window, a small little porthole that apparently wasn’t worthy of protective bars. Stiles doesn’t mind. Ever since Kate had shot through the glass in his kitchen, he’s been a little way of windows. Besides,
the walls are a pretty eggshell color, and they could always spruce them up with some of those wall clings he likes so much.

Fucking hell. He’s interior designing their escape house. Sometimes he really is the most clichéd omega imaginable. This isn’t a vacation home, although if it was he could totally give it a name. The Hunter Hideaway. He images making a welcome mat with the words written in curlicues and snorts.

Derek gives him a funny look. “You okay?”

“Yeah. I’m just a little loopy. I need a shower, and then a nap. Are there sheets on the bed?”

“Ah— yeah. I guess the last guy left them.” Derek jams his hands in his pocket, his signature uncomfortable move. “Look, I’ll just take a pillow down to the couch. I don’t want you to feel like we have to keep sharing a bed.”

Stiles feels almost crushingly disappointed at the thought of losing Derek’s warmth at night. “You don’t have to do that.”

“Seriously. It’s completely fine. Probably better not to…make things complicated later on.”

Stiles rolls his eyes and just bites the bullet. “Look, I want to keep sleeping together.” The words sound salacious but he presses forward. “I like it. I haven’t woken up nauseous once in the last nine days, so if nothing else, it’s purely for health reasons. I mean, unless the unconscious cuddling is weird for you, which I totally get…”

Derek shakes his head so fast it looks like it must hurt. “No, the cuddling is totally fine.”

“I’ll try really hard not to keep doing it. I’m a restless sleeper, though. I always thrash around and hug my pillows and shit. When I was little I’d fall out like every night.”

Derek nods seriously. “I guess we should probably keep sharing, then. So I can protect you.”

Stiles grins. “My hero.”

“But no good-night kissing,” Derek says almost regretfully.

“No kissing. We’ll just have to hope for a tsunami to almost drown one of us so we can use Exception Number Five.”

“That is a very stupid thing to say. Almost stupid enough to invoke Exception Number Six.”

Stiles perks up at that but Derek just shakes his head and points towards the bathroom. “You shower. I’m going to go back to the main street and track down the people in charge of the guard tower. Show them Kate’s picture. Then I’ll pick up some groceries. Any requests?”

“Nah. Don’t take too long.” The words sound so— couple-y. As Stiles ducks into the bathroom he kind of marvels at it. If they really stay here together for months, how long before playing house just becomes…having a house? Being a real family?

How long before sleeping together becomes sleeping together?

He moans in delight as the hot water hits him, then reaches down to grab his dick, which is definitely ready to bring its a-game

It’s not the first time he’s jerked off to thoughts of Derek, but it’s definitely the best.
Stiles wakes up a few hours later to Derek tossing a bag at him. “Rude,” he yawns, lazily reaching out for it.

“I need to know if I have to return it before they close.”

Stiles blinks down at the content of the bag and then almost squeals in delight. “A cell phone! Derek, you rock!” He eagerly rips open the box and pulls out what looks like Nokia’s bulkier prototype.

“I know it’s not fancy like the one Kate ruined,” Derek says a little sheepishly.

“Are you kidding? It’s perfect. It can make calls, right?”

“Yeah, that’s practically the only thing it can do. It’s military. They ship over some of their extras. You can call or text anyone inside the compound, and they can always reach you, but anyone outside of the compound can only receive calls. So you can’t give your dad the number or anything. I’m sorry.”

Stiles shrugs. “At least I can talk to him. Is it good to go now?”

“Yeah. This nice thing about it is that the charge lasts, like two weeks.” Derek hesitates, then gets off the bed. “I’ll give you some privacy. Dinner will be ready in a half-hour.”

Stiles nods and dials his father’s number as Derek leaves. It rings so many times that Stiles is afraid it might go to voice mail before his father picks up, sounding harried. “Sheriff Stilinski.”

“Hey, Dad! It’s me.”

“Oh, thank God.” The Sheriff must turn away from the speaker, because his voice goes a little tinny. “Scott! I’ve got Stiles on the phone. Now you’ll be sorry.” He returns to Stiles, sounding triumphant. “I need you to yell at your best friend for me.”

“Uh,” Stiles says, already lost. “Why?”

“Because he’s a damn fool, that’s why. I let him help out with the investigation for five minutes and the next thing I know he’s out in the woods by himself thinking he’s got a lead on Kate. His mother thought he was missing because his bed hadn’t been slept in and it turned out he’d just been in the woods all night, wandering around like a moron.”

Scott’s voice protests: “I’m a good tracker! You said so!”

“I found him out there pissing against a tree,” John tells Stiles, completely ignoring Scott. “He told me he didn’t have time to go find a real bathroom because the trail was hot. More like he got lost and spent the night crying for his mommy.”

“I was not! I told you, I figured Kate had to be by a water source, so I was trying to find the river—”

“Oh yeah? With what, your dick as a compass?”

Stiles grins, settling against the pillows to enjoy the show. “So why do you want me to yell at him, Dad? Sounds like you’re enjoying that job a whole lot right now.”

“Oh, he doesn’t listen to me. He thinks because I’m a beta and he’s an alpha he knows better. Don’t give me that offended look, McCall. It’s been in one ear and out the other for the past hour. Here, I’m putting Stiles on speaker. Maybe he can get through to you. Imagine he’s doing that judgey face
he has whenever I try to eat a damn burger.”

“I know the one,” Scott says resignedly, voice magnified as Stiles goes on speaker.

“Hey, Scotty.”

Scott sounds downright petulant. “I just wanted to find Kate so you could come home.”

“If you get killed trying to find Kate, there won’t really be a home for me to come back to,” Stiles tells him seriously. He’s pretty sure he’s wearing his judgey face right now, but screw it. Scott’s always been too reckless for his own good. “She’d love to hurt you, if it meant hurting me and Derek. Don’t give her that chance.”

Scott grumbles, but there really isn’t an argument he can make in response and he knows it. “It didn’t go as well as I wanted,” he admits. “It was cold out there and I couldn’t aim well and I kind of peed all over myself. And it was scary. A thousand crickets all at once is so…menacing.” Stiles can practically hear his full-body shiver over the phone. “And did you know there are branches out there with thorns on them? Like, designed to dig into your flesh and hurt like a bitch?”

Stiles snorts. “Go take a shower and sleep it off, Bear Grylls.”


“Yeah. We made it here. Everything’s great.”

Scott’s voice drops. “Have you seen Derek’s wolf-dick again?”

There’s a clatter from downstairs, as if Derek has dropped a pot, and Stiles blanches. Is his hearing that good? “No, perv.”

“Get on it.”

“You’re so weirdly obsessed with another alpha’s dick. Is it a pissing contest thing?”

“I wouldn’t know. As I just learned, I’m not great at pissing.”

Stiles snorts again. “Bye, Scott.”

After a minute John takes over the phone. “He’s actually a halfway decent tracker,” he admits, sounding a little sore about it. “But he’s nowhere near capable of catching a band of murderers on his own.”

“I know. I think he learned his lesson.”

“Thanks, buddy. So you said you’re good? You made it all right?”

“Yeah. It’s great here. Do you have any leads on the leak in the department?”

John sighs. “Not one, I’m afraid. I get where Scott was coming from, honestly. I want you home bad enough to go do something stupid myself.”

“Well, don’t.” Stiles chews his lip. “Look, Dad…I’m pushing five months, and Kate doesn’t seem to be giving in anytime soon, and there’s a doctor here who’s an expert in werewolf pregnancy. So…I think…”

“You’re not coming home,” John guesses.
“Probably not until after the baby’s born.”

The pause goes on for so long that Stiles feels like he’s falling headfirst into the silence. He doesn’t want his dad to be angry with him, or think Stiles would rather be shacked up with Derek than at home with his family. “Dad, I wish I could have it both ways, but—”

“No, Stiles. It’s all right. I kind of figured it would happen this way.” John sounds a little choked up himself. “It’s really all right there? You’re safe? Derek’s treating you okay?”

“Yeah. Honestly. Hey, you know me. I wouldn’t stick around someplace where I felt like shit.”

“And we can talk on the phone, so you can update me on my grandbaby?”

“As many times as we want.”

“Good.” John coughs a little, sounding embarrassed, and Stiles knows his eyes must be watering in the middle of the station. “I was reading about werewolf babies and I saw they tend to come a few weeks early, so you’ll probably deliver at the end of January. Why don’t I come up for Christmas and stay until it’s born? Help you two out for your first few weeks as parents? Then I’ll come back to Beacon Hills and get the nursery here ready for you. How does that sound?”

“Oh my God. Are you serious? That would be amazing.” Stiles hesitates. It would be amazing, but he’s honestly not sure what the policy on human visitors is. Given Derek’s fear that Stiles would be kicked out, it’s possible that John won’t be allowed past the gate. And Stiles should probably check with Derek to make sure it’s all right with him, too. “I just have to check to make sure it’s okay with the higher-ups, but I would love that. Are you sure you can take off work?”

“Let me check with the Sheriff.” John pauses. “Hey, good news. The old fart said it was all right.”

Stiles laughs. “By the time you get back Deputy Haigh will have moved all his stuff into your office.”

He chats with his father for a few minutes more before reluctantly hanging up. The smell of Derek’s cooking wafts off the stairs and Stiles inhales deeply. Time for their first meal together in their house. Maybe he should dress up a little. He considers changing out of his T-shirt and sweatpants for about half a second before he decides it’s too much effort.

Besides, the t-shirt perfectly shows off his baby bump, and something tells him that that’s going to make Derek happier than a button-down and khakis ever would.

#

Stiles learns quickly how to survive in a werewolf encampment. There are people here who don’t like having a human in their midst, even one as obviously vulnerable as Stiles, but at least they’re all cordial. Derek doesn’t like Stiles going onto the main street alone, just in case. He accompanies Stiles every time Stiles wants to leave the house.

Most days, though, they stay in. Derek likes to cook, and Stiles does his part by cleaning the house. They keep practicing self-defense, and one memorable day Derek makes him take apart one of their guns and put it back together so he can prove he knows how it works.

Living with Derek, it turns out, is a lot like being on a ten-day road trip with him. There’s no time or room for any pretense between them, so Stiles gets pure unfiltered Derek every minute of every day. He’s intense. He’s sarcastic. He snores at night. He likes to listen to the baby’s heartbeat and talk to it as if it’s sitting right in front of him, nodding along to every word. He’s incapable of denying Stiles
anything he wants, whether that’s an extra five minutes in bed or a foot massage or blasting Oklahoma! throughout the house.

And, now that Derek is back with his pack, he seems to finally be willing to let his guard down a little. When he looks at Stiles, he doesn’t seem to be imagining every possible terrible thing that might happen to him. He laughs without suddenly stopping and looking guilty, as if Kate might have snuck past them in that moment when he’d relaxed his vigilance.

The pack is good for Derek. They treat him like he’s everyone big brother, worthy of being looked up to. Worthy of being Alpha. And by association, Stiles has their respect as well. They don’t treat him like the pack mother or a communal omega, but as just another member of the family.

They agree together that there’s no point in living a lie now that Deaton has given them the okay to stay, so they confess the truth to the pack at the first pack meeting. They’re not angry at having been misled; they actually seem more delighted by the ridiculous way Stiles’s insemination had happened, and convinced that this is just the course of true love refusing to run smooth. “Someday your kid is going to love this story,” Erica declares, wiping tears of laughter from her eyes.

Erica is the sassy one. Boyd is the stalwart one. Aidan is sharp-tongued but an utter softy deep down, while Ethan is just soft through and through. Liam is as sweet as he’d first appeared, constantly looking thrilled just to be part of the pack.

And Kira is Stiles’s favorite.

They can— and do— talk omega rights for hours at a time. Kira tells him that her family had moved to the United State from Korea after she presented, since omegas have almost no rights under the Republic. They’d first moved to New York, where they’d been stunned and disappointed to find out that not only was Kira looked down on for being an omega, but the entire family was discriminated against for being werewolves. They’d been especially upset to learn that Kira was required by law to take omega suppressants, or she wouldn’t be allowed to attend school.

Kira had turned to the internet, creating Omageddon as an outlet for her frustration. It was online that she’d learned about the Preserve. She’d been here with her family for two years.

“There are things I miss about being out there,” Kira tells him a little wistfully, tucking her legs up to her chin. They’re cuddled up together on the couch in his living room while Derek takes a shift at the guard tower. “It sucks that this is the world for omegas— always having to choose one compromise or the other.”

“You don’t think we can have it all?” Stiles gives the words a mocking twist.

“What is that, even? Just having everything we want?” Kira shrugs. “I know I’m pretty lucky, considering. It’s better to have just a small piece of the world where I’m completely free than to have everywhere to go but restrictions on how to live.” She gives him a wide smile. “You’ll see. Here there are no mandatory suppressants. No property laws that favor alphas. Your child won’t ever have to experience that, regardless of its gender.”

Stiles hesitates. They’d told the pack that this isn’t an indefinite stay, but since they don’t have a specific date for leaving everyone seems to think that they’ll just end up staying forever. “Maybe,” he says neutrally.

Kira lets it drop. “I have to go relieve Derek at the tower. You’re coming to the pack meeting tomorrow, right? It’s the full moon!”
“Does that make a difference?”

Kira socks his arm. “Stiles! Have you read nothing about werewolves? Our wolves are attuned with nature, so it’s really hard to reign them in at the full moon. We always shift starting in midafternoon and basically just hang out with our fangs out until the moon goes down. Derek wouldn’t join in last time he was here, because of that stupid probation, but now that he’s back and isn’t planning on going to some new town I bet he’ll shift with us. You have to see it.”

When Derek gets home Stiles practically pounces are him. “Are you going to shift tomorrow?”

Derek gives a huge, put-upon sigh. “Hello, Stiles. Hello, Thumper. I’ve missed you both so much. How was your day? Mine was fine. Just spent five hours standing in a tiny cramped box pointing a gun at an empty road, but you can’t beat the view. Would you mind having pizza for supper? That’s how you greet someone, Stiles.”

“Hello, Derek.” Stiles parrots. “Thumper and I both missed you so much. How was your day? Mine was fine. Just learned from Kira that apparently everyone here shifts on the full moon, but you’ve never been able to do it before. She invited me to go along and watch. Pizza sounds great, but I’m really craving fruit, so let’s do at least half pineapple.”

“Deal.”

Stiles follows Derek into the kitchen. “So, are you going to shift?”

Derek pulls out the ingredients to make pizza. “I don’t know.”

“You did it twice before in the past month.”

“Yeah, so if I have to give a sample anytime soon they’ll immediately see that my levels are elevated.”

“You had the police’s permission. And we’ll be here for at least four and a half more months, Der.” Stiles hesitates before putting a hand on Derek’s back. They haven’t necessarily been shy about touching each other, especially since they wake up every morning in an unintended embrace, but Stiles still isn’t exactly sure what’s appropriate in their situation. “This is your pack. If it would make you feel closer to them, I think you should do it.”

Derek’s hands are slow and methodical as he makes the crust. “You want to see us in our wolf forms?” he asks a little skeptically.

“I do. The last two times I was freaking out and I didn’t really get to appreciate it, but…you were amazing, Derek.” Stiles keeps his voice soft. He doesn’t want Derek to think he’s mollifying or mocking him. Derek had been amazing in that form. Majestic, though Stiles normally hates that word. Powerful. Free.

“Amazing,” Derek repeats. It doesn’t sound like a question, but Stiles nods anyway and keeps his hand on Derek’s back.

“Okay,” Derek says, spooning sauce over the crust. “I’ll shift tomorrow. And you can be there with us.”

Stiles wraps him in a hug that Derek quickly returns, leaving ghostly flour handprints all over Stiles’s back.

#
They meet in one of the many wooded areas the Preserve encompasses in early afternoon. Kira had explained to Stiles that the full moon is the only phase of the moon that always rises just when the sun is setting and stays for the entire night, but the werewolves can feel its pull all through the day.

They come fully clothed but start stripping down as soon as they reach the clearing, still laughing and talking with each other as if there’s nothing weird at all about getting naked in the forest. Derek looks at Stiles self-consciously, about to tug down his pants. “Don’t look,” he says.

Stiles rolls his eyes. “Come on, like I haven’t— ” memorized it, felt it pressed against me every morning, composed odes about it in my head— “seen it before.”

He averts his eyes anyway and finds a tree to sink down against. He feels weirdly nervous about watching the pack shift, and he doesn’t know why. He’s had butterflies in his stomach ever since yesterday and he rubs his bump a little absent-mindedly as they start up again.

Erica is the first to shift. She presses a kiss to Boyd’s lips, then gets a running start. Her body starts to twist in midair, blur into a whip of flesh and fur, and then a sandy-colored wolf tilts its head up to the sky and howls in triumph. Boyd is right behind her. The twins shift together— they can actually form one giant wolf if they want to, but Stiles thinks it must be difficult to be so close and know that one person is missing.

But it’s Derek that Stiles can’t look away from. His transition seems so much faster than the others, as though he’s desperate to be on four legs again. When it’s complete he stands still for a moment, obviously larger than the other wolves, black fur rippling in the breeze. He howls and every wolf echoes the call. When Liam almost trips over himself after landing on his paws Derek nips at him playfully, then looks up to see Stiles.

He gallops over and nuzzles at Stiles, making Stiles laugh as he buries his nose in Stiles’s neck. His eyes are still Derek’s eyes, just a constant red now, and he looks at Stiles in a way that seems downright adoring. He sniffs all the way down to Stiles’s belly, and Stiles pulls up his shirt so Derek can rub right up against his bump. Derek chuffs in delight and carefully starts to lick, tongue rough and warm against Stiles’s skin.

It feels so…intimate; so loving, and Stiles can’t resist but to throw his arms around Derek’s neck and cuddle him. Derek whines happily and burrows into the embrace, rubbing his head against Stiles’s cheek like some kind of werewolf kiss.

One of the wolves howls impatiently and Derek backs away. He whines at Stiles again, as if telling him to stay put, and then runs back over to join his pack. Stiles makes himself comfortable and watches them play.

They scuffle, but whenever it looks like it’s getting dangerous Derek growls at the offenders and they spring back up. It must be strange for them to have an alpha in their midst again, but given how often one of them runs up to nuzzle at Derek they seem glad to have him back. Liam marks a tree and seems absolutely delighted with himself. He even drags Derek over to smell and Derek fondly nudges at him to tell him he did a good job.

Eventually one of them catches the scent of a squirrel and they all take off after it. Stiles can hear them as they chase it, howling in call-and-response, and after a few minutes a terrified little animal bolts back into the clearing and up a tree. The wolves are only a few seconds behind and they surround it, scratching at the bark, loudly congratulating themselves for having treed their prey.

Incredibly, Derek rolls his eyes. He licks Stiles’s cheek and runs back over to his pack, calling them away from the squirrel. Twenty minutes later Stiles sees it slink back down the tree and take off through the woods. For its sake, Stiles hopes it doesn’t run into another wolf pack.

It starts to get dark outside and the wolves keep playing, invigorated by the rising moon. Every so often one of them runs over to check on Stiles. Derek never leaves him alone for longer than twenty minutes and Kira likes to jump on him, trying to get him to play.

When the moon reaches its highest point Derek tilts back his head and lets out the longest, most satisfied howl Stiles has ever heard.

The butterflies come back, but it’s not just a distant fluttering now. Instead Stiles feels a distinct thud against his ribcage, still soft enough that he might have imagined it.

But he knows he didn’t.

He gasps, pressing his hand to the spot where he felt it, and Derek’s howl changes to one of alarm. Stiles looks up to see every wolf thundering towards him, Derek in the lead. Derek shifts back in midair so quickly that Stiles swears he can feel the tickle of fur against the bare skin of his belly before it’s replaced by the flesh of Derek’s hand.

“It’s okay!” Stiles puts his hand over Derek’s, pressing it into the spot. He feels like laughing and crying all at once. “It’s okay. It’s just— Thumper is thumping.”

Another kick comes, right against Derek’s hand, and Derek is still hypersensitive enough that he feels that slightest pressure. Derek’s mouth falls open and he leans in, making sure he didn’t imagine it. His eyes are still glowing red, facial features held tightly, still far more wolf than human. He makes whining sound against Stiles’s belly before he remembers words.

“Wants to shift,” he says carefully, as though he’s separating the words out in his mind from indistinct wolf sounds.

“The baby?”

Derek nods. He nuzzles against the bump, then remembers how humans kiss. His lips press against Stiles’s skin reverently. “Wants to shift with its Papa,” he says lovingly.

The baby kicks again in agreement, obviously pleased with its new trick. Stiles places his hand right where Derek has just kissed, marveling at what’s going on inside of him. His baby can kick. It’s like it knows now that it’s a person, about to be born into a world with full moons and forests and a Daddy and a Papa who can’t wait to meet it.

“It’s not going to shift inside of me, is it?”

“No.” It’s a new voice speaking and Stiles turns to see that Kira has shifted back too. “Shifting is a learned skill just like anything else. First crawling, then walking, then shifting. They usually don’t do it until they’re about four years old. But if yours is already getting active at the moon, it might be an early developer.”

“Clever baby,” Derek coos to the bump.

The baby kicks again, a little weaker now, as though it’s tiring itself out. Stiles imagines it falling asleep inside of him. He wonders if it’s going to snore like Derek. “I think it’s saying goodnight,” he says a little regretfully. He knows full well that he’s going to worry about the baby every minute he doesn’t feel it kicking.
“Goodnight,” Derek tells the bump, and gives Stiles’s belly one more kiss.

“I thought goodnight kisses were against the rules,” Stiles teases.

“Not for Thumper.” Derek rolls his eyes, and they somehow change back to their normal color as he does so. The other wolves are all shifting back too, sensing that playtime is over. Stiles yawns hugely and Derek stands, reaching for his pants. Once they’re back on he pulls Stiles up into his arms.

“Time to go home,” he says, puffing out his chest a little, looking proud to be showing off how very strong he is in front of his betas.

“For God’s sake, Derek, I’m perfectly capable of walking.”

“This way you can sleep,” Derek insists, which is a fairly lame argument, but Stiles is pretty sure that the wolf is still just under Derek’s skin and wants to feel like it’s taking care of its mate. He sighs and gives up, resting his head against Derek’s warm chest. “Home, James,” he orders teasingly through another yawn.

The moon lights their path all the way back home.

#

A few days later Derek has to go on a supply run and Stiles is irrationally scared. He hasn’t asked Derek for any more details of the day Nathan died, but he imagines what might happen after Derek goes through the fence. He pictures Kate in a tree with a rifle, Kate on the side of the road with a bomb, Kate barreling into the side of the supply truck with her van of horrors.

The entire outside world seems to be filled with nothing but Kate now, and that scares him too, because he’ll never want to leave here if he keeps thinking that way.

Derek must be able to tell by his heartbeat that he’s nervous because he’s uncommonly gentle. When they wake up in their usual tangled embrace Derek doesn’t rush to pull away but hums for a minute against Stiles’s forehead, leaning in close enough that Stiles thinks there might come the brush of his lips against the top of Stiles’s head. He makes French toast for breakfast and feeds Stiles a bite of his own piece. When he finally has to leave he gives Stiles a hug, rubbing his back soothingly. “I’ll be back soon,” he promises.

“Please be careful.”

Derek says the words like a vow: “I will.”

When he’s gone every tick of the clock and thud of Stiles’s heartbeat feels like a deadening blow. Stiles wanders the house, rubbing his belly, longing for the baby to start kicking and give him a little company, but it’s lulled to sleep by Stiles’s pacing. He flicks through the television and finds nothing on. As always he marvels at the idea that an omega is supposed to be happiest just sitting around at home. Stiles can’t bear it.

There’s a patch of sun on the couch and Stiles ends up falling asleep in it. He dreams that Derek comes home on the end of a leash gripped by Kate. Kate points to Stiles, immobilized on the couch, and tells her pet to get to work. Derek growls at him, face twisting but not shifting. His eyes burn into Stiles’s and he jumps, teeth bared. He rips out Stiles’s throat but Stiles doesn’t die, just chokes on his own blood and tries to say Derek’s name with ruined vocal chords.

No, Kate scolds, coming to stand over them. We only hurt humans when we have to. You’re supposed to kill the werewolf.
Derek’s teeth bite into Stiles’s stomach, and there’s a bang, and Stiles wakes up.

Derek stands in the open doorway, smiling at him, a battered black bookbag slung over his shoulder. “Lazy,” he says, nodding at the afghan Stiles has draped over himself.

Stiles pushes himself up, hand on his back to help him, and practically throws himself into Derek’s arms. “You’re safe,” he says, words muffled by Derek’s chest.

“I’m safe. No sign of hunters whatsoever. And I got you a present.”

Stiles perks up as Derek pulls away and unzips the backpack. “Are those parenting books?” he asks as Derek pulls out a Barnes & Noble bag.

“Yeah.” Derek smiles, chasing the last whiffs of Stiles’s dream away. “But those are for me. I didn’t have Family Care classes like you did.”

“I failed Family Care on principle, so we should probably study those together.”


Stiles takes it and hugs it to his chest. “This is the best present I’ve ever gotten.” He wants to kiss Derek’s cheek but he thinks better of it and instead goes to put the CD inside the speaker. The first track starts up and Stiles turns to point at Derek, rocker-style. “There’s a bright golden haze on the meadow,” he sings.

Derek grabs his hand and tugs him into a dancer’s embrace. “There’s a bright golden haze on the meadow!”

“The corn is as high as an elephant’s eye...and it looks like it’s climbing clear up to the sky!”

“I’ve spent so much time teaching you how to fight and not nearly enough time on teaching you how to dance,” Derek says before starting to waltz with Stiles. His eyes are sparkling and his every line and feature scream relief that he’d gone outside the wall and nothing had happened.

The baby starts kicking in delight as Derek spins Stiles around. It’s like the time they’d danced together to “Dancing Cheek to Cheek”, but now they’re infinitely more comfortable in an embrace. Derek very, very carefully dips Stiles as the song comes to an end. “Not bad, Miss Rogers,” he says.

The music switches over to “People Will Say We’re in Love,” and Derek pulls Stiles back up. “That just made the baby’s day,” Stiles tells him, putting his hand to where the baby is kicking. “Told you it loves *Oklahoma!*.”

“If it comes out wearing a cowboy hat and singing about Kansas City, I’ll never forgive you.”

Stiles laughs, but he suddenly feels almost shy when he sees the way Derek is looking at him. He glances away and Derek touches his cheek. “Say something,” Derek says softly.

“What do you want me to say?”

“Something really stupid.” Derek’s touch becomes a caress. “So I get to kiss you.”

Stiles’s breath catches. He looks back at Derek, sees the soft happiness in his eyes, and almost say three words that might not be stupid, but certainly aren’t ready to be shared yet. “Maybe we shouldn’t give the baby a Disney name but one inspired by its favorite musical,” he says instead.
“Curley has a nice ring to it, don’t you think?”

Derek’s eyes sparkle with humor and triumph. “Shut up, Stiles,” he says lovingly before he tilts up Stiles’s chin and brings down his lips.

It’s so much better than the first time. There’s nothing desperate or afraid in this kiss, just sweet adoration. Derek’s hand steals down to where the baby is still fluttering, linking the three of them together. Stiles’s inner omega has sprouted wings and is up in the clouds somewhere singing the Hallelujah Chorus. He wants more. He wants to dip his hand into the waist of Derek’s jeans and watch Derek’s eyes go dark with lust. He wants Derek to carry him upstairs and tie his hands to the bed. He wants to clench around Derek and moan his name as he stripes hot against his own skin. He wants more kisses, ones that are hot and messy and in places no one has ever kissed Stiles before.

The music keeps playing: “Sweetheart, they’re suspecting things...people will say we’re in love...”

Derek pulls away, eyes reflecting every thought in Stiles’s head. He swallows; looks down silently at Stiles to ask if that was all right.

Stiles nods in response to the unspoken question.

“I take back everything I said about Exception Number Six,” Derek tells him a little roughly. “It was definitely a smart addition.”

“I think coercing me to say something stupid is still a violation, though.” Stiles jerks his head at the CD player and shakes his head with mock disapproval. “For shame. Kissing me in front of the windows in broad daylight? People will say we’re in love, Derek.”

Derek’s smile widens. “Oh, will they?” he asks softly, before he finally releases Stiles and steps away.

Stiles feels almost dizzy and he has to put a hand on the couch to steady himself. “I’m going to petition Deaton to have a supply run every day if you have that reaction each time,” he says.

Derek snorts, and things slide back to normal. “I also picked up stuff for lasagna,” he says. “How about I make an early dinner while you call your dad? You haven’t talked to him in days.”

Stiles winces. In the excitement over the full moon calling his father has completely slipped his mind. “Fuck, I’m the worst. Just yell if you need my help getting dinner ready.”

“I won’t,” Derek assures him, strutting off to the kitchen, internal alpha clearly preening over having so thoroughly swept the omega off his feet.

Stiles takes the stairs slowly, still feeling Derek’s kiss on his lips. His dad should still be at the station, and hopefully Scott will be there too. Stiles could really use a best-friend talk right now. And, okay, he definitely sneaked a few good peeks at Derek’s member when he was shifted, and he thinks he can describe it for Scott pretty well.

He flops into the bed and dials his dad’s number, all warm and happy inside.

“Sheriff Stilinski.”

“Hey, Dad.”

“Oh, Stiles. Hi, buddy.”
His dad sounds less than enthused to hear his voice and Stiles winces. “I know I haven’t called in a few days and I’m sorry, but things have been nuts here. I wanted to tell you I got permission for you to come up for Christmas—”

John interrupts him. “I have to tell you something, buddy. I have bad news.”

Three seconds later Derek crashes into the room, having heard Stiles’s suddenly galloping heart. Stiles’s meets his eyes with silent dread. “What is it, Dad?” he whispers, so terrified he doesn’t even feel Derek gripping his hand.

“It’s Scott.” The sheriff’s voice breaks. “Oh, Stiles, I’m so sorry. Something’s happened to Scott.”

Chapter End Notes

Had to cliff it here or it would have been even more ungodly long than it already is. But, in appeasement, I’ll just remind you that I didn’t tag this work Major Character Death, and Scott is VERY major to me.
Also I saw a Jane the Virgin gifset where Jane mistook her baby kicking for nervous butterflies, and it was so cute I decided to pay homage to the show that inspired this story a little bit in this chapter :)
Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

Why do I love writing evil!Kate so much??? Lord and fanfic forgive me.

Stiles stands in the middle of the main road, eyes fixed on the gate. He’s usually never able to stand still for long periods of time, but his dread is an anchor, fixing him to the cobblestones.

He’d wanted to go with the pickup crew to the airport, but Derek had flatly refused to let Stiles go past the gate. It was too dangerous, and they had to be as fast and as inconspicuous as possible. A heavily pregnant omega would only slow them down. Stiles had almost hated Derek for saying that and Derek, in mollification, had told Stiles that he would go instead.

It was meant to be a kind gesture but now Stiles has two people outside the wall to worry about. They’ll be back any minute.

Kira takes his hand. She’s been silently waiting with him all this time, letting him stew in his emotions, but Stiles knows that she can hear the increasing race of his heartbeat. “It’s okay,” she promises him.

It’s not, though.

A fucking terrible thing has happened and it’s all Stiles’s fault.

The two people up in the guard tower suddenly lean over and, after a pause, the gates start to open. Stiles holds his breath as the truck comes barreling through. Derek, in the driver’s seat, gets out first. His eyes meet Stiles’s and he gives a single short nod, either in greeting or to tell him that everything’s all right. Deaton opens the passenger door and steps onto the street, looking as unflappable as ever, and then opens the side door.

Scott climbs out. He should be cold in the Maine air but he’s wearing a t-shirt with the sleeves rolled up. He looks wan, but he smiles when he sees Stiles and raises his hand to wave.

Stiles runs as best he can with his belly in the way. He crashes into his best friend and hugs him tightly, inhaling his scent.

“Hey, man.” Scott pats his back. He’s so hot to the touch now. “Don’t freak out. I’m alive.”

Stiles nods and breaks away, wiping at his eyes. Scott’s alive, and that’s what’s important. Alive, and currently staring in fascination at Stiles’s stomach. “Holy shit,” he says. “I can hear that too?”

Stiles lets out a sort of Siamese twin laugh/sob as Scott stares around himself in fascination, taking in the compound with all his new senses.

Yes, Scott’s alive.

But he’s a werewolf now.
“I really think he’s doing okay,” Derek tells Stiles quietly as they wait outside Deaton’s clinic. Scott is getting a thorough examination, and they don’t know how long it will be, but Stiles promised to go help Scott settle into his new home. He’ll be living in Deaton’s extra room, since there aren’t any empty houses to spare right now and Deaton thinks it’s best for him to have immediate access to medical care whenever he might need it. Because he could only bring a single suitcase Stiles bought him everything else he might need, from bedsheets to toothpaste to a new phone. He’d had to use Derek’s money, which he hates, but there hadn’t been another option.

Stiles feels so guilty it churns in his belly like constant bile.

“You don’t think he’s just in denial?” he asks Derek dully. Scott’s always been happy-go-lucky, but he lets things get all bottled up inside of him and then just explodes. Like after his dad had left. He’d tried to be so strong for his mother, and then one day he’d snapped and cried for five hours.

“No. He’s nervous, of course, since we don’t know…well, you know. If his body will accept the change.”

Or if Scott’s body will suddenly just quit, unable to keep producing lycadone.

Or if the sudden new stress on his system will give him a heart attack or brain aneurism.

Or if he’s slowly being driven insane by the changes to his body and will start chasing people with an axe tomorrow.

That last one is the main reason Scott is here now. He’d been crazed when they found him in the woods, unable to distinguish friend from enemy, and had attacked two of the Beacon Hills deputies. Parrish had had no choice but to shoot him. The pain had brought him back; made him stare at his already healing shoulder and whimper, “You hurt me,” as if the deputy had just broken his heart.

He kept shifting back and forth, unable to control himself. They’d put him in a holding cell and he’d screamed for his mother in terror when the bars wouldn’t give way. He’d covered his ears with his hands and begged the Sheriff to make all the sounds stop. Eventually they’d found him digging his claws into his ears, drawing blood, as if he thought it was better to be deaf than to have to hear every heartbeat and buzzing light and sob from his mother when she saw what her boy had become. John had handcuffed him and he’d broken the chain. He’d been sedated and managed to fight the drug.

He hadn’t been Scott anymore.

Some people had wanted to lock him up in Eichen House for the Criminally Insane. Either that or just hope the change would make him keel over in a few days. The Sheriff had been in the middle of fighting that battle when Stiles had called.

Derek had fixed it. He’d grabbed the phone from Stiles when Stiles was unable to speak and barked orders to the Sheriff, arranging for Scott to be secretly flown to the Preserve, where Deaton could examine him.

Scott had been too fragile emotionally and physically to be transported for three days, and Stiles had spent every minute in agony, wondering if Scott was about to drop dead.

He can’t believe he’d wanted to be changed into a werewolf only weeks ago. There’s nothing fucking glamorous or romantic about this. Scott could die, and even if he doesn’t, he’s been thrown into a world where he’ll have to deal with anti-werewolf prejudice for the rest of his life.
And the trauma of what he went through, when he’d turned. Stiles doesn’t want to think about it.

But he does.

Every minute he does.

Because it’s his fault.

“You know, after I presented as an omega, everyone thought me and Scott would end up together,” Stiles says softly, not looking at Derek. “Even before that, honestly. Scott was always such a softy, everyone thought he’d be the omega, and I’d be the alpha. But he presented right around the same time as me and I remember his mom joking that we’d be planning our wedding before we graduated high school. It was never like that with us, though. He was just…he was like my brother. We took care of each other. It always felt like this amazing thing. That you could love someone without needing to, the way you need to love your family, and without it ever being romantic.”

“He’s your pack,” Derek says. At some point during Stiles’s speech he must have leaned into Derek for support, and now Derek puts an arm around his shoulder comfortably.

“Yeah. We’ve seen some shit together. My mom died, his dad left, he was bullied, I freaked out after I presented…but we never abandoned each other. He told me once he would take a bullet for me and I told him I took his bullshit every day and that was way more impressive.”

He can’t go on after that, but Derek gets it. He pulls Stiles in even tighter. “It wasn’t your fault,” he says.

“He took the bullet for me,” Stiles says. The guilt in his stomach has lodged in his throat now, and it’s hard to speak. “That was supposed to just be his alpha posturing. He was never supposed to actually do it.”

Scott, so fucking brave, so fucking stupid. He’d gone back out into the woods. Because he wanted Stiles and the baby to be safe. Because he wanted Stiles to come home. He’d gone out there to find Kate.

And instead Kate had found him.

“Stiles, as someone who carried guilt around for half a decade… you have to put it down now, or you’ll never get rid of it.” Derek rubs his arm as a cool breeze blows past them. “You may not be Scott’s mate, but he still reacts to you on some levels as an alpha to an omega. If you’re wallowing in guilt, it’ll only make him feel worse.”

That’s the right tack to take. Stiles straightens his spine and nods. He can pull himself together for Scott’s sake. He owes his friend that, at least.

A long time later Scott and Deaton finally step outside the clinic together. Scott looks a little better now, enough to give Stiles a slight smile. “You can stop writing my eulogy,” he says. “Dr. Deaton thinks I’m going to make it.”

Stiles exhales in relief and looks to Deaton for confirmation. The doctor nods. “It’s an adjustment for his body. His wolf is…young, and confused. He’ll need to shift, and often, until wolf and man are in accord. But I see nothing that indicates he won’t be able to survive as a werewolf.”

“And…your mind, Scotty? You don’t feel…”

“Insane?” Scott supplies, smile blooming into a reluctant grin. “Not like I did before. Then it was like
there was a scared animal clawing at the inside of my head, but the animal was me. It’s calm now. Deaton thinks after a bunch of shifts I’ll be okay.”

“Derek, you should shift with him,” Deaton says. “He turned in a place with no other werewolves, and he was subconsciously looking for a pack to protect him. We need him to feel that bond the next time he shifts.”

Derek nods. “We’ll all go out together.”

Scott looks sort of surprised by that, but Stiles squeezes Derek’s hand gratefully. Things are going to be difficult for Scott going forward, but there’s no one better to help him than Derek’s pack.

Scott looks at Stiles. “Help me unpack?”

“Yeah.” Derek helps Stiles gets to his feet. “I’ll call you to come pick me up when we’re done,” he tells Derek, and Derek nods and steps away to give them privacy.

“So how’s that going?” Scott asks in a low voice as they slowly start upstairs. Deaton lives over his clinic and the steps are kind of tricky for Stiles at his current stage of pregnancy.

“We’re not making things official until after the baby’s born.”

“But…you basically eye-fuck each other every minute of every day?”

“Yeah,” Stiles says, heaving a sigh of relief as they reach Deaton’s flat. “That’s about right.”

Scott grins and shoves open the door. He slings his suitcase in without a single grunt, even though it looks like it must weigh two hundred pounds. The flat seems like a nice enough place for a short-term stay. “I kind of want to go through Deaton’s bedstand drawers. I bet he’s into some weird sex stuff.”

Stiles laughs and sinks down gratefully on Deaton’s couch. Scott joins him immediately. “Okay,” he says gravely. “You and me need to have a serious conversation.”

Stiles sucks in a breath and nods, steeling himself.

“Who was that omega you were waiting with by the gate? The one who walked over to the clinic with us?”

That certainly hadn’t been what he was expecting. “Ah— her name is Kira. Kira Yukimura.”

Scott nods, still looking deadly serious. “I’m in love with her.”

Stiles cracks up.

“Seriously, dude. She smells amazing. I kind of want to buy her flowers. Is there a place to buy flowers here?” Scott punches him lightly on the arm. “I need you to be a bro, Stiles. Tell me what kind of stuff she’s into.”

Stiles can’t stop laughing. Of course Scott, sweet dopey brave Scott, would turn his exile from the human world into an opportunity to find love. “Kira…Kira’s amazing. She’s an omega rights activist, so just don’t pull any alpha bullshit and you’ll be fine.”

“I never pull any alpha bullshit!”

“I know, but you’re a werewolf now. Pack dynamics are more heightened.”
Just saying the words out loud sobers the both of them. “What did she do to you?” Stiles asks quietly. His father hadn’t been able to tell him much, just that Scott had gone out looking for Kate, had been missing for two days, and was then found running naked through the woods, changed.

“It’s a long story. And it’s pretty fucked up. I mean, I know you’re a delicate flower right now, so I don’t want to do any damage.” Scott keeps smiling, but it’s a little bitter now as he thinks back on the past few days.

“I want to hear it.” Stiles does. And, more importantly, he thinks Scott needs to tell it. Stiles has always been the one who keeps Scott from bottling up his emotions. He’s heard everything, from embarrassing dates to Scott’s constant fury at his father to the time Scott pissed his pants at the movies in third grade. Maybe it’s some kind of alpha and omega thing.

Or maybe it’s just a Stiles-and-Scott thing.

Scott nods, leaning back with a little sigh. “Okay. Well, it starts with me being stupid. I wanted to get to the river, since I just knew she had to be camped out up there. I wasn’t going to go alone— I talked to Deputy Haigh, and he said he’d go with me, but he never showed and I just figured— I’d go up, take a peek, and if I found her I’d come right back and tell your dad.”

Stiles tries hard not to put on his judgey face but Scott still looks sheepish. “I know it was dumb. Anyway, I was making my way there, and all of a sudden I heard a twig snap behind me. I turned around, and there she was. She looked completely insane. Covered in dirt, like she hadn’t showered in days. But she was grinning, and she said, ‘I’ve been waiting for you.’

“She had a bat, and she bonked me before I could even move. I remember her dragging me through the woods, and then I guess I blacked out, and the next time I knew anything I was in this really cold, dark place. Like a basement or something. Kate was arguing with some of the other hunters. They were trying to tell her she was making a mistake and she had to let me go. That this wasn’t… the hunter way, or something like that. One alpha was trying to make her submit. She was flashing her eyes and ordering Kate to back down.

“So Kate shot her.”

Stiles gapes at him. “Kate shot another hunter?”

“Yeah. Right between the eyes. It shut everyone else up real fast. Kate said that if any other alpha wanted to try and pull rank, she had enough bullets in her gun to take care of them all. God, she was such a fucking nut. She turned back to me and was trying to be, like, soothing. She said she was sorry I had to see that. But she was going to be my master, so it was important that I understood who was in charge here.

“I tried to… I don’t even know. Fight her off and run. But she just hit me with her bat again, and I was out. When I woke up I was on a table and they’d hooked me up to an IV. I could see all this dark stuff in there. It burned where it was going in.”

“Lycadone,” Stiles guesses quietly.

“Yeah. Kate came back and told me that she was going to turn me into a werewolf. But I shouldn’t worry. I’d be a werewolf worth living. She’d train me to hunt down my own kind. She said she was really sorry to be turning me into a monster, but I’d already allied myself with beasts, so I’d brought it on myself. And she promised that as soon as I’d fulfilled my purpose, she’d put me down.”

Scott’s eyes are a little hollow as he remembers this part. His nails dig into his knees as he hunches
forward, the indent of his claws appearing just below his skin. “She told me they’d done it before, to another werewolf, and he’d been the best tool they’d ever had. She said it wouldn’t take long. I just had to give the transfusion, and then she would kill me, and hopefully I’d wake up as a werewolf. After that it would only take a few days for me to be trained. She said it would be even easier than training a born werewolf, since my mind would be so fragile from my transformation.

“I’m not a pansy or anything but I was scared. I was thinking about my mom, and how I didn’t get to say goodbye to her. And I was thinking, you know, about you. Because she told me that her plan was to have me find you and Derek, and if I was a good boy I’d get to kill you, and then she’d turn Derek into a friend for me. She wanted a whole pack of pets, until there weren’t any more werewolves in the world, and then she’d kill us, too.”

"Jesus," Siles says, sick to his stomach. Scott nods but keeps pushing forward grimly.

“It took hours. Over a day. Someone kept drawing my blood and testing it to see if there was enough lycadone in it. Some of the hunters still didn’t like what was going on. I thought I could convince one to let me go, but they were too scared of Kate.

“Finally I was ready. They spent a long time discussing how to kill me, to improve my chances of coming back. The guy who drew blood told Kate the best option was to force an arterial embolism that would give me a heart attack, so Kate took a needle and filled it up with air. She put it— here.” Scott places a finger over his carotid artery. “She was practically shaking with excitement. She started petting my hair as she depressed the plunger, saying I’d be such a good puppy.

“For a second nothing happened. And then it was like my heart exploded. It hurt so fucking bad. I could feel myself dying. I watched the world narrow and I felt— like, my body didn’t know it was coming back. And when you die, you can feel your body kind of…say goodbye to you. There was just this split second where I knew it was all over. And then nothing.

“And then I woke up.”

The words are so heavy that Stiles knows they’re not signaling the end of the nightmare, but the beginning. “Did you know you were different?”


“And then it was like…it really did feel like there was a wolf inside of me. Like he was me, but also not. Like she’d split my soul down the middle and transformed part of it. And like Deaton said, the wolf was young and scared. I was still tied down and I wanted out, so I started struggling, and a bunch of hunters ran back into the room.

“Kate was thrilled. I think she expected me to have basically lost all of my humanity and be some, like, confused, brain-dead monster, because she was talking to me like I was a baby. She called me puppy and told me she was Master. She was treating me like a fucking dog. She even had treats for me. I tried to talk but I wasn’t human enough to remember how.

“She showed me a picture of you. You were coming out of the clinic; I guess one of her hunters must have taken it. She asked if I recognized you and pulled out one of your t-shirts.”

“She had one of my shirts?”

“Yeah. It was definitely yours. I always had a decent sense of smell before but now I could smell everything. The shirt kind of grounded me and I must have said your name because Kate was like,
‘That’s right. Stiles. Stiles is bad. You’re going to bring him to me and then we can kill him.’

“And that’s when I freaked out. I shifted without understanding what I was doing. It was like…kind of like popping a zit. Pressure, and a little bit of pain, and then the best feeling of relief ever. I guess they hadn’t expected me to be able to do that yet, because they panicked. I jumped off the table. A part of me wanted to rip Kate’s throat out, but I just couldn’t. So I ran instead.”

“They didn’t chase you?”

“Oh, no, they did. They were shooting at me but Kate was yelling at them to stop. I didn’t look back. I just bolted. And as I was running it was like I was shedding my human side. I felt really young and scared. I wanted my mom. I wanted to yell for her, but I could only howl, and I knew she wouldn’t understand me. I shifted back but I still wasn’t myself. I felt so fucking alone. So fucking scared. I wanted to die.

“When the deputies found me I didn’t realize who they were. They were shouting at me and I couldn’t understand them. I just wanted them to leave me alone. I almost killed one of them, Stiles. I was out-of-control. Just like…just like the animal Kate wanted me to be.”

“It wasn’t your fault,” Stiles says, grabbing Scott’s hand. Scott looks completely miserable as he recounts this part, and Stiles is reminded of the time in first grade when Scott had accidently tripped a girl at recess and cried with guilt for the rest of the day.

“I know. But I was fucked up for a while. I barely recognized your dad, even. I went nuts when they put me in the cell. God. My mom came to see me and I was crying and calling her mommy and begging her to take me home.” Scott blushes. “Like I said. Fucked up.”

Stiles almost has to hide a grin at that. Scott’s always been a complete Mama’s boy, but he never wants anyone to know, thinking it’ll destroy his alpha cred. “I won’t tell anyone.”

“Yeah, thanks. I wanted to tell them where Kate was, and I wanted them to let me out so I could track her. I still kind of had her scent in my nose, if that makes sense. I figured I’d be able to find my way back to her. But they were all just so scared of me. To them, in that moment, I was a bigger threat than Kate.” Scott sounds sort of stunned as he says it, and when he looks down to see that his claws have popped out he shudders and tucks his hands inside the couch cushions.

“But they finally let you out,” Stiles says, trying to distract Scott.

“Yeah. Your dad told me that I was going to go stay with you and Derek, and that kind of calmed me down. I think my wolf wanted to, like, protect you, because I knew that Kate wanted you dead. I wanted to be where you guys were. Once I proved I could carry on a whole conversation without shifting your dad let me out and a group of us went out into the woods together. I shifted so I could find my way back. And I found…well. You know.”

Stiles does. His father had reported it to him, voice caught between shock and relief. “Their camp was destroyed.”

“Yeah. They’d had a bunker underground, and it was completely blown to pieces. It all smelled like burnt meat and there was blood and bone everywhere. I can still smell it.” Scott looks askance at him. “They’re all presumed dead, you know. The coroner said there were remains from at least ten people.”

“My dad told me.”

“But you don’t believe it,” Scott guesses.
Stiles shrugs. He would like to believe that Kate’s really dead, but he just can’t be sure. He knows Derek doesn’t believe it, and for once his paranoia doesn’t seem irrational in the slightest. This uncertainty is almost worse than knowing she’s actually out there, because now Stiles will never feel completely safe outside the compound walls. “I just don’t get how it could have happened.”

“Well, it was definitely a bomb. So somebody there did it, and I think Kate’s the only one insane enough to actually try. But maybe she wanted to die. Or maybe she was planning to get out, but couldn’t do it in time.”

“I really wish that either of those things were true. But with Kate, I think assuming the worst is the smartest route.”

“Yeah, I agree. Some of the deputies thought I did it. They wanted to lock me back up until the plane took off, and that kind of sent me into a tailspin. It was rough. And, fuck, on that plane today? I almost lost my mind. I spent most of it in the bathroom trying not to wolf out on the passengers.”

“But you feel okay now?”

“Yeah. I really do. Deaton gave me these—” Scott pulls out a full orange prescription bottle and shakes it at Stiles. “They’re supposed to help stabilize my wolf, or whatever. But honestly, I felt better as soon as I saw you.” Scott grins. “And Kira.”

Stiles groans, but at the thought of Kira Scott’s eyes are suddenly much less haunted. In fact, they’re practically filled with little cartoon hearts. “I think she liked me. I mean, she walked all the way over to Deaton’s clinic with us. She didn’t say anything, did she?”

Kira actually had seemed a little interested in Scott, and Stiles figures Scott’s been through so much he deserves to have his ego boosted a little. “She said she hoped you were all right, and she thought you seemed strong. She looked impressed with you, for sure.”

“Holy shit, this is perfect. Ooh, let’s me and Kira and Derek and you have a double mating ceremony! You think Kira would go for that?”

“Scott,” Stiles says. “Don’t take this the wrong way, but Kate choosing you to be her bloodthirsty monster was the stupidest thing she’s ever done.”

Scott laughs and flops backwards, pulling his now-claw free hands back up from between the couch cushions. “I bet she’s royally pissed right now, wherever she is. For what it’s worth, I don’t think she’s dead either. You could tell the hunters were about ready to overthrow her. I think she decided to get rid of them all together and regroup.”

“Yeah, that’s pretty much exactly what Derek thinks.” Stiles sighs. He wishes his father wasn’t still back in Beacon Hills. Kate is like the toy on the spring in a Pop Goes the Weasel game. He wishes she would just strike at them already and get it over with so he can stop being so scared.

“I asked Deaton if I’d have some kind of connection to her as, like, my maker, and he said no. I think his actual words were, ‘Mr. McCall, what you’re thinking about are vampires. And you’re being ridiculous.’ But I bet she thinks we’re connected.” Scott shivers. “I bet she wants me back.”

“Well, don’t worry. You’re safe here. Derek will protect you.” Stiles grins. “And so will Kira. She’s pretty badass, dude.”

“Yeah? She’s going to come tonight, right? To our great shifting party?” Scott’s eyes widen. “Do you think my wolf-dick is big enough? Like, compared to everyone else’s? What if she doesn’t think my wolf form is hot?”
Stiles bursts out laughing again and wraps Scott in a hug. “I’m so. Fucking. Glad you’re okay,” he says into Scott’s shoulder, eyes a little wet.

“I’m glad you’re okay. You escaped from her too, man. We’re a pretty badass pair ourselves.” Scott hugs him back and the baby starts kicking, as though it’s tired of not being the center of attention. Scott springs backward. “Holy shit! It’s moving now?”

“Yeah!” Stiles rolls up his shirt in invitation and Scott touches him gingerly. “It’s always saying hi. Hey, Thumper, this is your Uncle Scott. Do you remember him? He’s going to be part of your pack once you’re born!”

“Hi, baby!” Scott says in delight as the baby thuds against his hand. His eyes are wide, mouth open in a goofy grin, and he looks like he’s always looked. A part of Stiles had been so afraid that his best friend would just be gone, shoved aside to make room for the wolf, but Scott is just Scott and Stiles couldn’t be more relieved.

“Is this going to make you baby-crazy now? Should I warn Kira?”

“Shut up, Stiles. You’re ruining my moment with my godchild.” Scott’s eyes go dreamy again. “But our kids would be ridiculously cute, right?”

#

“Hmm,” Derek says two hours later as Stiles curls up with him on the couch.

“Hmm, what?”

“I don’t know yet. I’m thinking.”

Stiles sighs. He’s just recounted Scott’s story to Derek, and Derek’s face had sunk into graver lines with each word. “About Kate?”

“Among other things.” Derek scowls thoughtfully. His hand has been absent-mindedly rubbing little circles into Stiles’s belly for the past five minutes but now he pulls it away. “I just wish I knew where she was. There’s no way she’s dead. It doesn’t make sense.”

“Hey, she created a pissed-off werewolf who wants her blood. Maybe she’s the one on the run now.”

“No,” Derek says with quiet certainty. “An Argent never runs.” He expression clouds, but he forces away whatever dark thought is in his mind and looks back at Stiles. “You think Scott’s doing all right?”

“Yeah. A little shaken up, but he’s taking it pretty well.” Scott had in fact, spent most of the afternoon trying out some of his new senses, including playing Lie Detector Test with Stiles’s heartbeat. Scott now knows, among other things, that Stiles did break Mrs. McCall’s favorite vase three years ago, he’s totally masturbated to anime porn before, and he’s irrevocably in love with Derek Hale. “He’s an alpha, you know, so he’s enjoying having superpowers.”

“Well, that might change. Once it really sinks in and he realizes most people are going to see him as a monster…”

Derek’s’ brow furrows again. Stiles frowns at him and waits until Derek’s returned to making eye contact with him before he speaks. “Well, if he ever thought that, we would remind him that he’s not a monster or an animal. He’s a person. A person who’s loved by a lot of other people. Right?”
Derek’s expression softens. He leans back into the couch a little so Stiles has more room to snuggle him. “Right.”

Stiles touches his head to Derek’s shoulder. “I honestly think Scott’s going to be just fine.” He grins, thinking of Scott’s lovesick expression. “He’s already got a huge crush on Kira.”

“Yeah?” Derek looks surprised, but then he grins too as he thinks about it. “I can see that. We’ll introduce them tonight when we all go shifting.”

“Is it going to be weird? Having two alphas in the pack again?” Stiles nudges Derek playfully. “Are you guys going to fight for domination or something?”

Derek’s lip curls mischievously, and he shoves any lingering thoughts of Kate away into the dark corner where she belongs. “Oh, yeah. A regular alpha throwdown.” He swiftly pulls Stiles’s legs up from the floor, pins him to the couch, and leans over him, fangs only inches from his neck. “And to the winner goes the spoils.”

Stiles’s heartbeat dances under Derek’s palm. They haven’t touched like this since their kiss, too consumed with worry about Scott. “The spoils, huh?”

“A werewolf pack with three omegas? Lots of spoils there to choose from.” Derek grins down at Stiles so he knows it’s a joke. “Surely someone as well-read as you is familiar with the custom of droit du seigneur?”

Stiles rolls his eyes at Derek and desperately tries to control his boner. “Don’t the omegas have any say?”

“Ah, that’s the secret. The omega has all the power.” Derek leans in even closer, flooding Stiles’s nose with his scent. “The dominant alpha will choose the prettiest omega to share his bed, but if the omega chooses the other alpha instead…well, he was never the dominant alpha at all, then, was he?”

“Fascinating,” Stiles gasps as Derek’s nose nudges right over his pulse.

“So as the prettiest omega in the pack, Stiles, give me a hint…who wins?”

“Don’t call me pretty.”

Derek tuts. “That’s not an answer.”

“I don’t know. I mean, I’ve shared a bed with Scott before…” Derek growls at that and Stiles cracks up. “When we were still having slumber parties, of course. But I’ve also been sharing a bed with you for a while, so…”

“I think you like sharing a bed with me,” Derek murmurs, and damn it, he knows exactly what he’s doing right now, especially since Stiles’s boner is practically knocking for admission against his thigh.

“It…hasn’t sucked.”

“I think you’d choose me as the dominant alpha.” Derek looks up at Stiles from under his eyelashes, innocent and dangerous at the same time. “Wouldn’t you?”

Stiles rolls his eyes and loops his arms around Derek’s neck. He matches Derek’s innocent look with one of his own and leans in close enough that Derek can snatch a kiss. “Yes, alpha. You would win. You’re the biggest and the strongest and the only one fit to lead the pack. Happy?”

Stiles squeaks in indignation and sits back up. Derek needs to give him a hand to haul his bloated mass up the whole way. “Was that just some kind of pissing contest with Scott? Who isn’t even here?”

Derek smirks. “You started it.”

“I can’t believe you!”

“Hey, now. Deep down, we alphas are very insecure, you know.”

Derek tries to give him puppy-dog eyes and Stiles can’t stay annoyed. He snorts, then flops back down and tries to look as alluring as possible in his maternity jeans. “Now…are you going to enjoy those spoils, or not?”

“Oh, I will feast on those spoils.” Derek looks pointedly down at Stiles’s belly, quite literally in their way. “In three and a half months.”

Stiles groans again, right from the depths of his erection, as Derek struts out of the room. “Tease!” he calls, and Derek’s laugh rolls through the house like a melody.

Stiles leans back and closes his eyes, feeling loved, content, and, for the moment, completely safe.

All he wants is to feel that way forever.

He hopes against hope that Kate really is dead.
It’s almost ridiculous how quickly Scott and Kira become Scott-and-Kira. Stiles introduces Scott to Kira along with everyone else when they meet in the woods that very first night, and Scott only has eyes for the beautiful omega. When they shift Scott runs around in a circle, almost as if he’s chasing his tail, but Stiles knows he’s trying to get a good look at his own junk. When he finally gets the general picture he yips excitedly and starts doggedly running after Kira, in some kind of weird instinctual courting gesture.

Stiles, propped up again against his tree, can’t stop laughing. They do make a beautiful pair— Kira is sleek and red like a maned wolf, and Scott is a stalwart, brown-furred Eastern wolf look-a-like. Kira clearly enjoys the game with the new wolf, dancing away whenever he gets close, then bounding over to nuzzle him when he finally gives up. Scott nips at her tail and she tackles him, pinning him to the dirt.

“Omega pinned the alpha,” Stiles says to Derek, who is sitting next to him in wolf form and surveying his pack. “Maybe she’s the dominant one here.”

Derek huffs at him.

“I bet I could pin you if I caught you by surprise.”

Derek tilts back his head and rumbles in an obvious, incredulous laugh.

“Dick.” Stiles turns back to the lovebirds, still rolling around on the ground. Scott gives Kira a messy lick across her face. “Ew! Did he just kiss her?”

Derek nods.

“That was the spittiest kiss I’ve ever seen.”

Derek licks Stiles right across the mouth, taking care to make it as sloppy as possible. Stiles flails against the tree, dramatically wiping his lips.

“First of all, gross, dude! And second of all…that counts as a kiss, cheater!”

Derek rumbles in satisfaction, nuzzles Stiles’s belly briefly, and lopes off to join the pack in a rousing game of “Pee All Over Everything.”

By the time the wolves have tired themselves out, Scott and Kira won’t get off of each other. Even once they shift back they spend the whole walk home with their arms around each other, exchanging soft words that Derek won’t let Stiles eavesdrop on.

By the end of the week it’s as though Scott has always been at the Preserve. He’s good-natured and always willing to volunteer for guard duty, so the general population takes to him pretty well, and the pack adores him. He’s an alpha with no desire to lead, so he’s like the cool younger brother of the king, always up for a good time and bursting with energy.

He keeps taking the pills Deaton gave him dutifully, and sometimes he just needs to go out in the middle of the night and shift until he feels like both parts of him are in harmony, but he’s thriving
here. It’s obvious.

It makes Stiles a little jealous.

He’s happy here too, of course, but he can’t do anything. He isn’t allowed on guard duty or supply runs. He can’t shift with the little kids and play wolf tag. Scott has even taken an interest in Deaton’s work and is thinking of studying medicine with him, but Stiles can’t put any of his talents to work here. The computers are old and the internet is slow. The library is small enough that even old-fashioned research is out of the question. He feels…kind of useless.

“You’re not useless, you’re pregnant,” Scott scolds him when he voices these thoughts, weeks after Scott’s arrived.

“I hate that argument. Like, oh, the most important job is gestating life! We’re in a secret compound. The most important job is keeping the people here safe.”

“Well, you’re keeping Thumper safe from this bullshit weather.” Scott shivers and wraps his winter coat around himself. It’s the early days of November, and even wolf skin isn’t enough to protect Scott from the cold. “Think of how warm that little guy is right now. If it’s smart, it’ll stay in there until June.”

Stiles taps his belly sternly. “Don’t you dare, kid.”

“Stiles.” Scott shakes his head with mock disapproval. “This is the happiest time of your life. Your purpose on earth. Give me a smile, pretty omega.”

Stiles laughs. “Don’t let Kira hear you say that shit.”

Scott’s eyes go dopey at his beloved’s name. “Listen to the text she sent me this morning.” He pulls out his phone and reads: “Had a cup of tea this morning. Made me think of you…because it was hot.” He looks at Stiles with a delighted smile. “Get it? Hot tea? I’m a hottie!”

“That’s the worst thing I’ve ever heard.”

“You’re just jealous because Derek won’t ravish you.”

“He’s going to,” Stiles defends, but damn, Derek’s self-control has been annoyingly good lately.

“Yeah, yeah. That baby’s going to pop out of you and five minutes later Derek’s going to have his dick in there trying for another one.” Scott waves his free hand, typing away to Kira with the other. “I know all about your fantasies, perv.”

Stiles flips him off, then belches. He’s been having serious gastronomical issues lately, but Deaton assured him that it’s natural. “Speaking of Derek, I need to get home. I’ve been gone for hours. I’m surprised he hasn’t put out an APB.”

“I’ll drive you.”

“Nah, I want to walk.” Deaton had said Stiles should be getting more exercise at his last check-up. He’s been sedentary enough that his blood circulation is off, and it’s raising his lycadone levels. “You go whisper sweet nothings to Kira.”

“No problem,” Scott says, turning back to his phone.

Stiles enjoys his walk back to the house, even in the cold. His pregnancy belly is a nice insulating
blubber coat, but he still likes to cuddle up with Derek at night as though he’s freezing. With Derek’s current stubbornness in kissing him he has to play a little dirty. If Derek keeps his aggravating self-control shtick up for much longer he’ll have to do something really desperate, like pretend to swoon into Derek’s arms.

He immediately has a vision of himself crashing right through Derek’s hands into the floor and discards that idea.

He lets himself into the house and sniffs. It smells strongly of paint and the familiar scent of wood. “Der?” he calls up the stairs.

Derek appears at the railing, breathless and a little disheveled. “Hey. Good timing. I have a surprise for you.”

“Ooh, a surprise? Is it big?”

“Huge. Come see.”

Stiles wrinkles his nose. “Do I have to walk up the steps?” Walking is one thing, but stairs are super fucking annoying with an at seven-month-gestation werewolf in his stomach.

“I’ll help you.” Derek bounds down the stairs and puts a hand on the small of Stiles’s back. He’s smiling, eyes bright with excitement, and he practically pushes Stiles up the stairs to see. “Okay,” he says when they reach the top. “Close your eyes.”

Stiles shuts them obediently and feels Derek gently prodding him forward. A door creaks and the paint smell grows. “Open.”

Stiles blinks and sees the spare upstairs room, transformed. The walls have been painted a pastel blue. A rocking chair is set up in the middle of the room, away from the drop cloths protecting the carpet from paint splatters, right next to a perfectly assembled crib. The crib is already filled up: a large stuffed bunny, a mobile of birds, and a beautiful blanket, soft green and pattered with wolves.

“I got this out of storage before we left,” Derek says, picking the blanket up. “It was passed down in my family for years. Each wolf is unique. See, as soon as each child gets old enough, they write their name on one of the wolves in permanent marker. Sheer luck that my aunt left it in the car and it didn’t burn.”

Stiles touches the wolf with Derek written in big, clumsy letters.

“Yeah, that was mine. I remember liking it because it had a bushy tail and it was next to Laura’s. I worshipped her.” Derek points to three wolves with the names Lucy, Evan and Tyler written in a steady, obviously adult’s hand. “And I wrote in the three little ones who died in the fire and never got a chance to write their names.”

“It’s beautiful,” Stiles says. His throat is tight looking at all those names. He can see Laura’s wolf, and Peter’s, and so many more. “Our baby will always have its pack with it now. It’s amazing, Derek.”

Derek smiles and touches the wolf named Talia. “My mom,” he says. “She would have loved you, you know. She was an alpha, and my dad was an omega, and she was the fiercest champion of his rights. She said there are a lot of things an omega can’t help but give to an alpha, but respect isn’t one of them. That has to be earned.”

“I wish I could have met her.” Stiles stares around the nursery. “I can’t believe you did this all so
fast.”

“I was motivated. I wanted to see your face.” Derek tucks an arm around Stiles and rubs the side of his belly as if he knows the baby’s been drumming up a storm. “You like it?”

“I love it.”

He *does* love it, but something about it sort of nags at him for the rest of the day. It isn’t until later, when he’s listening to Derek talk about what sort of mural he wants to paint on the wall, that it hits him. Babies sleep in their parents’ room for the first few months of their lives. This nursery…it signals long-term. A room to grow up in. A *home* without that added caveat: *temporary*.

That wasn’t the plan.

“You okay?” Derek says, breaking off his sentence to stare at Stiles in concern.

“Heartburn,” Stiles manages. His chest does kind of ache, but he doesn’t think he can blame his pregnancy for this.

What if Derek wants to change their deal? What if the Preserve isn’t temporary anymore?

Over the next few days Stiles watches Derek with growing concern. He’s put down roots here without Stiles even realizing it, and Stiles doesn’t think he’s going to move easily. Derek is thriving as the alpha of his little pack. He’s working with the top officials in the camp to improve security. He’s the leader of every supply run. He’s *happy*, and the idea of telling him to give all of that up after he’s lost so much makes Stiles kind of sick to his stomach.

“So stay here,” Scott says. They’re back in Scott’s room, curled up against the cold. “Why not?”

Stiles sighs and tosses under the blanket, trying to get comfortable. “I don’t belong here.”

“Who says?”

“Me. I’m the only human here. I can’t stay here forever. Scotty. Just like you, I have to go back eventually.”

Scott rolls over and stares up at the ceiling. “I don’t know about that,” he says.

“What does that mean?”

“I might stay.”

Stiles gapes at him. “Like, *forever*?”

“Yeah.” Scott doesn’t look at his friend. “I haven’t totally decided yet. But…well, this is where I’m safe. I’m learning how to be a good wolf, you know? And Kira’s here. I can’t just leave her.”

Stiles honestly doesn’t know what to say. He had just assumed that Scott would go back to Beacon Hills with Stiles and Derek. “What about school?”

Scott shrugs. “I’m learning with Deaton right now. College doesn’t really seem…necessary, I guess.” He rolls over to look at Stiles. “Stay,” he says. “We can all just live here together. Safe from she-who-must-not-be-named. Think how much the baby will love running through the woods with
its pack. You know soon Erica and Boyd will start having kids, and if things keep going so well with me and Kira…it’ll be a whole new generation.”

Stiles shakes his head, but it’s more of an automatic response than anything. “But…my dad. Your mom, Scotty. They’re thousands of miles away.”

“I know. And that sucks. But this is what people do. They grow up and move away and start new families. You did.” Scott looks more serious than Stiles has ever seen him. “Derek could have just been the guy who fathered your whoopsie-baby. But instead you made him your family.”

Stiles can’t think of a response to that, but he’s saved by a knock at the door and Kira’s familiar scent as she pokes her head in. “Hey, guys. Mind if I join?”

“Oh course not.” Scott pats his own lap, making Kira giggle before she joins them on the couch. Stiles waits patiently for the five-second *missed you so much those three hours were torture* kiss to end. “I was just trying to convince Stiles he should stay here forever.”

“You should!” Kira bounces excitedly. “I’ve finally managed to convince Scott he shouldn’t leave, and if you stay too, it’ll be perfect!”

“I can’t raise a baby here,” Stiles protests, feeling like he has to cling to that one fact like a life preserver. “There are like two teachers here to teach, no college, no opportunities for a real job…it’s just a military lifestyle. Prettied up, but that’s all it is. I want my baby to have more than that.”

“It’ll have everything it needs! There are plenty of little kids here, and the school is decent…I was thinking I might get my teaching certificate online and take over some of the high school classes. Besides, it’s just better here.” Kira gives him her best sad-omega face. “Your pack is here.”

“I’m human, Kira! I’m not really in the pack!” That’s really the root of it— Stiles will never, ever really belong here. He’ll only ever be allowed to stay on Derek’s grace. He’s seen as doubly weak; a human and an omega.

“Your baby isn’t human,” Scott says quietly.

“So?”

“So…there are other Kates out there, Stiles. And think of the way werewolves are treated outside the Preserve. You know they passed a law in Texas restricting werewolves from public service positions? Because they think we’re a liability risk.” Scott shakes his head in disgust. “Nobody’s advocating for werewolf rights out there because…well, most of us are in here now.”

“And in here is good,” Kira adds. “What if your baby grows up as an omega? Things are so much better for us in here than they are out there. You know, omega werewolves have totally different biologies from our human counterparts. If I hadn’t come to the Preserve, there’s so much I never would have understood about my own body.”

Stiles frowns, distracted by this. “Seriously?”

“Yes! I was on all these medications that were making me depressed and anxious and completely screwed up my ability to shift, because my hormones were all out of synch. Doctors don’t care enough to learn more about us. Deaton practically saved my life.”

“That’s ridiculous.” Stiles feels himself getting hot with anger for all the werewolf omegas out there needlessly suffering.
“Yeah. It is. So don’t go back to it.”

Stiles squeezes his eyes shut, then abruptly rolls to his feet. “I have to go.”

“No, wait.” Scott immediately looks guilty. “I didn’t mean to upset you.”

“I’m not upset. I just have to do some stuff.”

He looks at the Preserve with new eyes as he walks home. He knows most people here fled from hunters, but how many are here simply because they feel like second-class citizens outside of the Preserve’s walls? And how many omega werewolves are out there right now, completely unaware of how their own bodies are changing?

When he gets home he steals Derek’s laptop and starts researching.

#

Stiles gets so caught up in what he’s doing that he doesn’t realize how late it is when Derek gets home. Derek bustles in with bags from the burger joint on the main street, apologies, and an excited look in his eyes. Stiles can’t help but smile in response to it as he shuts down the laptop and asks, “What is it?”

Derek actually blushes. “I was talking to Kali and Duke and some of the higher-ups about reaching out to werewolves across the States and making sure they know the Preserve is an option for them. And then we started talking about how we’ll have to put in new houses and basically form a development plan, and…they put me in charge. Of the whole project. I’ll be leading a group of people in an operation to increase the population of the Preserve by two hundred at minimum within the next five years.”

Stiles’s heart sinks right down to his toes. “Five years,” he repeats.

“Right.” Derek looks a little wary, as if he knows what Stiles is about to say. “Derek, we had a deal.”

“I know. I wanted to talk to you about that.” Derek puts down the burgers and takes a deep breath. “I promised we’d leave after the baby was born But, Stiles…I want us to stay. I could be a leader here. We can make this into an even greater sanctuary for my people than it already is. And we’ll never have to see Kate or another hunter again. Leaving just doesn’t make sense. We’re happy here, right?” Derek takes Stiles’s hand and looks at him hopefully. “You’re happy here, aren’t you? With me?”

Stiles closes his eyes. For a minute he wants to just say yes. Make his alpha happy. Let himself fall into this safe, comfortable, easy life. Become the stay-at-home omega he’d always sworn he wouldn’t be.

But he just can’t sign his life away like that. Not even for Derek.

“I can’t.” he says quietly, pulling his hand away. “I have to go back to school. I have to go back to the human world, Derek. This place has been great, but it’s an escape, not a home. After the baby is born, I have to go back to Beacon Hills.”

Derek looks completely crushed. He nods and swallows hard, features fighting to look impassive. “Okay. If that’s what you want.”
The sudden change from excitement to devastation rips at Stiles, filling him with shame and a desire to fix; to please the alpha. Barely knowing what he’s saying, but aware enough to hate himself for every word, Stiles says slowly. “But…if you feel like you have to stay here…that’s what you should do.”

Derek’s head snaps up. He stares at Stiles, somehow looking stunned and betrayed and confused all at once. “You mean not revive the bond once it breaks,” he says. In contrast with his face, his voice is completely devoid of emotion.

“Yes. If that’s what we have to do to make us both happy.”

No! his mind screams. He can practically see his inner omega take a suicide plunge off a cliff. What he’s doing right now is completely contrary to his every instinct, but he has to say it. He can’t be the person who makes Derek miserable for the rest of their lives, and it’s not fair to him to have to stay in a werewolf military complex, good for nothing but childrearing, for the next fifty years.

Derek nods slowly. He seems to be turning to stone right in front of Stiles, wiping away his emotions, as if Stiles is already the stranger he may very well someday become. “We don’t have to make any decisions right now,” he says. “But it’s good to put that on the table.”

Stiles nods and curls into himself a little, trying not to panic at a situation that suddenly seems to have snowballed out of control.

“But— ” and now Derek looks a little sick. “If that is what we do…well, the baby should grow up around people like it. It will need a pack. And a werewolf baby with only humans to protect it from hunters just isn’t a good situation. So we should maybe think about…I mean, I’m just saying this as an option…but if you go back to Beacon Hills, maybe it would be best if the baby stays here. With me.”

Stiles freezes. For a minute he almost can’t make sense of the words. Derek is saying that Stiles should…leave his baby? Let it be raised a thousand miles away from him?

He shakes his head automatically, curving his hands around his belly protectively. His omega instincts so rarely make him possessive, but this one thing, this baby, this little sweet pea…his every synapse screams, mine.

Derek’s lips thin. “Like I said. We don’t have to decide anything now. I just think it could be dangerous to do anything else.”

“No,” Stiles manages to say, and Derek’s eyes flash for a fraction of a second before he composes himself.

“It’s not like it would be forever. You could stay until it isn’t breastfeeding anymore, of course. And it could spend the summers in Beacon Hills.”

It sounds like he has this all planned out; like he’d realized this might happen and already has his mind made up. He won’t let Stiles leave with the baby. And why should he? It’s just as much his as it is Stiles’s. If they went to court and battled for paternity rights, Derek would win. Even in a world where omega parents are seen as the natural caregiver, the alpha parent always wins. The courts feel that if an alpha has the biological urge to take a child away from its omega parent, the omega must be deficient. Why else would an alpha want to take on childrearing duties?

Derek keeps going, doggedly twisting the knife: “This is the only way we can both get what we want. There’s just no way you leaving with the baby is the smartest choice for us. You get that,
right? I can’t let that happen.”

Derek could take his baby away.

Derek *wants* to take his baby away.

Derek seems to suddenly actually comprehend what he just said, because he looks kind of horrified with himself. “Let’s not talk about it anymore tonight, okay? Here. I got a couple burgers…figured you’d want mayo, so here’s one with that…”

The nursery upstairs that Derek had so lovingly put together. The baby will sleep there. Just not with Stiles to tuck it in at night.”

Stiles stands up so quickly he sways on his feet. Derek pauses in his unwrapping of the burgers. “You don’t want one?”

“Not hungry,” Stiles manages. He’s honestly pretty sure that’s the first time he’s ever said that in his life. “Gotta go to the bathroom.”

The words are sort of hard to say. His breath is short and gets shorter as he slowly takes the stairs. The words echo in his head as he climbs:

*You go. The baby stays.*

He just has to escape. His instincts are shouting at him to get the baby away from the threat. To hide his young away until it’s safe to come out. His thoughts become choppy as spots dance in front of his eyes.

*You go. The baby stays.*

He steps into the baby’s room, still faintly smelling of paint, and shut the door behind him. He wedges the rocking chair under the knob and sits on the floor, back against the wall, trying to breathe.

He doesn’t need to freak out about this. It’s fine. He won’t leave his baby; not ever. If Derek is going to force his hand, he’ll just stay here in the Preserve forever. The thought doesn’t bring much comfort, though, because he knows that he’ll always resent Derek for making him choose between his independence and his family.

What other option is there, but to be a good little omega and give up his own life for his child?

*You go. The baby stays.*

If Stiles left his baby here with Derek, he could go to college without any obstacles. He could get a job. He could be mated for real someday. The thoughts come mechanically, accompanied only by a dim sense of despair. Stiles wanted the career and the baby. *This* baby.

But he can’t be selfish. What Derek had said was true. The baby *is* safest here. It has a ready-made pack. Walls to keep it safe from the hunters. The abolishment of laws that would marginalize it out in the real world. Even though it is a compound, not a real hometown, governed by strict rules about where his baby can go and what his baby can do. Maybe, in today’s world, safety has to come before independence for werewolves.

And if Derek doesn’t come back to Beacon Hills with him, the baby will have no protection out there.
The baby will have to stay. And Stiles will have to make a choice.

He imagines it. Giving the baby, nestled in Derek’s arms, a goodbye kiss, and getting on a plane. Waiting for Derek’s calls to update him on the baby’s progress; getting emails with blurry pictures and video of his baby growing up. He’ll miss the first word. The first steps. He’ll miss everything.

He imagines Derek getting mated for real to another omega, who will become his baby’s new Daddy or Mama. He imagines his baby visiting him over the summer. The awkward rides and dinners as he desperately tries to cram a year of parenting into twelve weeks. He can hear his child whining on the phone behind closed doors: "Papa, I want to come home, I don’t like it here…"

He can’t. He can’t. He curls around his stomach in a ball on the floor. He thinks he might be having a heart attack. Derek’s words replay in his head, each one an assault. The baby should have a pack. Only having a human for protection isn’t enough. You go. The baby stays.

He can’t breathe and he can’t think.

Maybe this is what Derek wants. Maybe he’s sick of being shackled to the weak human. Maybe keeping the baby and losing Stiles is his idea of a perfect family.

Stiles isn’t a werewolf. This baby is more of Derek than Stiles. Maybe the baby won’t want a human parent, either.

Stiles knows that’s crazy.

But he can’t think.

Derek wants to take his baby away.

He dimly becomes aware that someone is pounding on the door and shouting his name. His instincts scream not to open the door and let the threat in, but he couldn’t move even if he wanted to. He doesn’t think he’s taken a breath in the past five minutes.

He’s dying. He’s dying…

The door bursts open and Stiles watches the rocking chair skitter and tumble to the floor.

“Stiles!” Derek bends over him, eyes wide and frightened. What is he doing? He must have heard Stiles’s heartbeat going haywire. “Stiles, I need you to calm down, okay?”

Stiles tries. He tries, if only so Derek will leave him alone. But he can’t breathe.

“Fuck, Stiles. Fuck, I’m so sorry.” Derek sits with him and wraps him in his arms. His voice shakes. “That was such a fucking stupid thing to say. I hated myself for saying it. I’m sorry. I’m sorry. Please, Stiles just try to breathe with me.” He sucks in a breath, holds it and lets it out slowly. “Hear that? Can you do that with me?”

Stiles can’t find the air. And yet, insanely, he can hear that he’s hyperventilating. Nothing makes sense.

“It’s okay, Stiles. Shh, shh.” Derek rubs his back and rocks him. “I won’t ever, ever, ever keep you from the baby. We stay together. All three of us. Right? We’ll go back to Beacon Hills together. Everything’s all right.”

It’s not, though. Because even if they all go back to Beacon Hills, Stiles will be forcing Derek to
give up the life he wants. Why should Stiles get to have it all, and Derek be cut away from his pack? How can he ask Derek to leave this world where he is a leader, not feral murderer Derek Hale?

“We’ll figure it out,” Derek says, as if he can hear Stiles’s thoughts. “But no matter what, we’ll all be together. I promise. I promise, okay? We’re a family. Isn’t that what you said? I have a family now. You gave me my family. I won’t let anything separate us. I’m so, so sorry I made you think I would try and send you away from our baby.”

Stiles finally manages to match a breath to Derek’s. The ache in his chest lessens.

“Everything’s okay. You’re safe. Nothing’s going to keep us from our baby.” Derek’s voice drops as he nestles Stiles’s head over his chest. “You’re Daddy and I’m Papa, right? The baby needs us both. No matter what, we’ll be together.” He rubs his hand over Stiles’s belly, and Stiles becomes aware for the first time that the baby is kicking frantically. “Thumper can tell something’s wrong, Stiles. Our baby needs you to calm down. Thumper just wants Daddy to be okay, so breathe with me. That’s it. You’re safe.”

Stiles feels the sweet relief of fresh air as he breathes. His heartbeat slows and returns to its regularly scheduled rhythm. Derek keeps rocking him for several minutes, letting him calm down, until Stiles is finally ready to speak.

“I’m sorry,” he manages, voice hoarse.

“It’s not your fault.” Derek looks at him a little guiltily. “Panic attack?”

Stiles nods. He hasn’t had one in years, but they’d come on right after his mother had died and he had presented. He would get into bed at night and be convinced that there was someone standing over him with an axe. It would take him hours to calm down. The worst had been the very first one, at his mother’s burial. The service was over and the crowd was dispersing when Stiles realized he hadn’t kissed his mother’s cheek before they closed the coffin. His mom had always insisted on a goodnight kiss, even when Stiles thought he was too old for it: “Mama needs her sugar, shug.”

He panicked at the thought of her in that box, without a goodnight kiss to tell her he had loved her. He’d dropped to the ground, hyperventilating, fingers scratching into the dirt helplessly as if he wanted to dig his way down to her.

“It’s like I can’t breathe,” he tells Derek. His heart aches with the fading memory, and he puts up a hand to knead at his chest. “Like I’m drowning.”

Derek rubs his shoulder. “Well, if I remember correctly…if you’re drowning, I’m allowed to kiss you.”

Stiles stares up at him. Derek hesitates, silently asking for permission, and Stiles gives a little nod.

This kiss is the softest one yet. It feels like an apology, but more than that— it feels like a promise. Derek pulls away after a moment and sighs, pulling Stiles close to him. “I don’t know what happened down there. It was like some alpha instinct angry that you didn’t just agree with me. I’m so sorry.”

Stiles shakes his head. “No. You were right. It does make sense to stay. But I just can’t, Derek. This isn’t my world. It’ll always feel a little bit like a prison to me.”

“I understand.”

“But I don’t want to take you away from it,” Stiles whispers miserably, feeling himself getting
sucked down into despair again.

“Hey. Stiles, look at me.” Stiles does, twisting his fingers in his shirt to keep himself from crying. “There is nothing in the world more important to me than you and the baby. Not the Preserve. Not the pack. Not anything. Okay? And when I say you and the baby…I’m saying two separate things there. You. And the baby. Nothing in the world is more important to me than the two of you.”

Stiles nods.

“What I’m saying is…” Derek sighs in frustration, rubbing his hand over his face. “Look, there’s something that I really want to say to you. But I can’t right now, because I promised myself I wouldn’t until after the baby is born. I want you to know that it’s me saying it, without the influence of the bond. Not the alpha. Not the wolf. Just me, saying it to you. But…it’s three words. I think them every time I look at you. And I won’t just say them once. I’m going to say them to you for the rest of our lives.”

Stiles’s heart goes crazy again.

“Do you know what three words I’m talking about?” Derek asks softly.

“I do,” Stiles says. He takes Derek hand and squeezes.

“Then you know. I go where you go. We’ll make this decision together, as a family.” Derek rests their foreheads together.

Nothing more needs to be said for the rest of that night.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter miiiight come a day or two late. But it'll be a long one, in which:
1. The sheriff comes to visit, and instantly becomes the most popular guy in town;
2. Stiles's pregnancy heat hits, taking him and Derek completely by surprise;
3. A Very Werewolf Christmas, where Scott does something insane;
4. A near-death experience, and;
5. Something Derek and Stiles have been waiting for for a long, long time, finally happens.
If there’s one thing Derek Hale knows how to do, it’s repent. In the days following the incident, he’s solicitous to the point of groveling. He cuts back on his hours working security so he can be with Stiles, and when Erica mentions the Preserve’s development plan at the next pack meeting Derek shuts her down. “I’m not staying for that,” he says firmly, putting an arm around Stiles and drawing him close to his side.

Erica looks pissed. “It was your idea. You can’t just bail on it.”

“There are plenty of people here who can take over. I’m going back to Beacon Hills.”

“But—”

“I said no,” Derek snaps, eyes flashing at her in warning. “We’re not going to discuss it anymore. In a few months, I’ll be gone. That’s final.”

The pack meeting passes quickly after that, with a heavy blanket of resentment in the air. Stiles waits until they’re in the car about to drive home before he speaks. “Der, we should talk about this.”

“We already talked.” Derek finds his hand without even looking away from the road and squeezes. “We’re going back to Beacon Hills once the baby is born. I promise.”

Stiles chews his lip in frustration. “Is that really what you want, or are you just trying to make me happy?”

“It’s what I want.”

“I don’t know if I believe that.” Stiles looks out the window to see the trees blurring by. He doesn’t even know why he’s pushing it so much. Derek is willing to give him his home back, but they haven’t really made a decision, like Derek had promised. Derek is just giving up because he feels guilty, and that doesn’t sit right with Stiles.

“It’s what I want,” Derek repeats. “Because if we stayed, you’d feel like you were in prison for the rest of your life. You think I could ever really be happy if you felt trapped like that? I won’t be the person who keeps you from being happy.” His fingers tighten around the wheel. “I won’t be your Kate,” he says, so softly Stiles has to take a second to put the syllables together.

“My Kate?” Stiles stares at him, bewildered. “Jesus, Derek. Why the fuck would you even say that?”

“I tried to trap you,” Derek says, more forcefully. “I made you think you had to choose between the baby and your freedom. I made you afraid.” His fingers keep flexing almost convulsively. “The look on your face when I said what I said? Those words devastated you. And then your heartbeat just…” His breath catches. “For a moment, you thought I could control the rest of your life. You were afraid
of me, the same way I’m afraid of Kate.”

“Not like that. Not like that at all.” Stiles is shaken to the core at even the thought of the comparison. “We were both stupid. We never talked about what was going to happen after the baby came, and it just snowballed. That’s why I want to talk now, Der. We have to make decisions. What are you going to do in Beacon Hills?”

“Take care of the baby while you go to school,” Derek answers automatically.

Stiles blinks, surprised he had an answer ready-made. “That’s what you want?” It would kind of be perfect—BHU has a great daycare program, to assist omega parents, but if Derek watched the baby every day it would take a lot of stress away. Still— “I don’t think I’ve ever met an alpha stay-at-home parent in my life.”

Derek shrugs. “So? It’s not like we need money. With your settlement from the clinic and my inheritance, we’ll be fine while you’re in school.”

“But you don’t…I mean, do you want to go back to school? Or get a real job? More than, like, being a barista?”

“No,” Derek says, but it’s the most unconvincing word Stiles has ever heard and he glares at Derek until the tips of the werewolf’s ears turn red.

“What do you want to do, Derek? You have to talk to me if this is going to work. If we can’t communicate, what do we have beyond the bond?”

Derek looks startled, and a little horrified, by that thinly veiled threat. “Stiles, I can’t do much of anything in Beacon Hills,” he admits, staring out the windshield so intently they might have been driving through a minefield. “I’m on probation, remember? My record has to be submitted to any college I would apply to, and you know the Supreme Court held that werewolves aren’t a protected class, so colleges are allowed to deny me based on aggression risk.” He sucks in a breath. “I can’t…I can’t even shift. Not even to go out in the woods with our baby once it’s old enough. Even if our baby is able to understand why, its wolf will always feel like I abandoned it. I want to be with it as much as I can every day, to try and temper that.”

Stiles feels queasy. “You can shift. You have to. My dad will let you—”

“He’s going to have to excuse my heightened levels when we first go back to Beacon Hills, but we can’t ask him to do that forever. Not only is it breaking the law, but any other police officer could demand a sample from me at any time. You know what they could do to me if they found out I broke probation?” Derek’s jaw clenches. “If a police officer comes across me in my wolf form, he’s allowed to shoot me. No questions asked.”

Stiles clamps a hand over his mouth, thinking he’s going to be sick. “No way.”

“Those were the terms. I either had to agree, or they would have put me down right there. And I don’t want to be out in the woods with my child and have a cop blow me away in front of it.” Derek’s voice is a little ragged. “So you go to school. I’ll stay with the baby, keep my head down, and protect all three of us. That’s a good plan. It’s what I want.” He pulls to a stop in front of the house and turns to look at Stiles pleasingly. “Okay?”

Stiles nods, but he still feels sick as they walk inside together.
On December 21st, Stiles stands on the main street of the Preserve waiting for a car for the second time. This time, though, he’s not filled with dread, but with a giddy excitement.

“What’s taking them so long?” Scott whines next to him, jittering his leg in the cold.

“Shh. I think the guards see something.”

The gates swing open and Derek’s jeep comes through. Stiles can see his dad in the front seat and he whoops with excitement, waving a hand over his head. John grins and waves back, already unstrapping his seat belt so he can run to Stiles as soon as the door opens.

“You’re huge!” John shouts, smile practically splitting his face as he slams the car door.

“Mom!” Scott shrieks as the back door opens and Melissa McCall steps out, eyes wide with interest as she takes in the Preserve.

Two sets of parents and children crash into each other. Stiles is unashamedly crying a little as he embraces his father. “God, I missed you,” he says, inhaling his dad’s scent.

“I missed you too, buddy.” His father squeezes his shoulder, then steps back. “Let me get a look at my grandchild.”

Stiles laughs, wiping his hand across his face as he father puts a hand on his belly. “It was just kicking a minute ago.”

“Jesus Christ. Two more?”

The voice comes from behind them, and Stiles tenses. He knows without even turning that the speaker is Adrian Harris, a werewolf who has been very vocal in his displeasure about Stiles’s presence in the Preserve. “Ignore it,” he mutters to his father, but Scott is already growling at Harris and standing in front of his mother protectively.

“Move along, Adrian,” Derek says, stepping in front of Stiles, not to be outdone by Scott.

“You brought them here, Hale?”

“We have permission. They’re here to spend the holidays with their kids. Take it up with Deaton if you have a problem.”

“You’re damn straight I have a problem.” Harris spits on the ground at John’s feet. “These kind killed my wife and babies and then tried to lock me up for it. If you’re smart you’ll get them out of here while they can still walk.” He puts a hand down to his holstered pistol, and Stiles bites back a groan. There’s no way Derek and Scott are going to let a threat that explicit go.

Sure enough Derek snarls and tenses forward, ready to spring. Just before it gets bad, John asks casually, “What’s that you’ve got there? M9?”

Derek freezes and gives Stiles and his father an incredulous look. Harris looks just as nonplussed as he grips his pistol almost protectively. “Yeah.” He pauses, then adds defensively, “Military grade.”

John nods thoughtfully. “Is that the best you’ve got here? Because those M9s are outdated as all get-out. Half the firing power of newer models, and the safety lock is all the way on the opposite side of the barrel— you know what I’m talking about? I bet you’ve accidently fired it while you’re reloading: everyone with that piece of junk does. Now, I refitted everyone in my department with the G23, and it’s ten times better. Derek made me surrender my weapon on the way over here, but I’ll
have him show you— son, get my pistol out of the jeep, will you?”

Derek, looking equally stunned by John’s decision to hand his Glock over to Harris and his use of the word, “son,” silently complies.

“See that? Real smooth. Nothing against our boys overseas, but they’re working with outdated weaponry and they have been for years. I’ve got a catalog in my bag with the latest revolver issues. Are you in charge of the weapons here?”

Harris shakes his head, admiring the Glock reverently. “That’d be Kali.”

“Well, you take me to her, and we’ll see if we can’t get you all some better firepower.”

Harris stares at John doubtfully. “You’d help outfit a compound full of werewolves?”

“If it’s where my son is staying, you’re damn straight.” John sticks out his hand. “John Stilinski. I’m very sorry to hear about your family. I hope you put away the sons of bitches who did it.”

Harris hesitates, then gives John’s hand a firm shake. “They got theirs,” he says with a low finality that sends a chill up Stiles’s spine. “You mind if I keep this for a while, to show Kali?”

“Not at all.”

“Jesus, Dad,” Stiles mutters as Harris walks away. “If he shoots us in our sleep tonight, I’m blaming you.”

“He won’t.” John claps Stiles on the back, looking pleased with himself. “Now, I believe we have a lot to talk about, son.”

#

News of the human sheriff with better combat advice than the military spreads quickly through the compound, and Stiles practically has to take a number to get to see his own father. John is staying in one of the apartments on the main street, which have been quickly renovated just within in the past month to accommodate the new families in the Preserve, and for the next three days he’s bombarded with questions about body armor and assault rifles and whether or not he thinks drug sniffing dogs could be used to recognize wolfsbane. Stiles finally makes an escape with him on Christmas Eve, bringing him back to his and Derek’s place, where he hopes nobody will follow.

“This is downright grim, Stiles,” John scolds as he wanders the house and sees not a single decoration.

“Wolves are all about nature. You suggest they cut down a tree and they practically swoon. Besides, the stores here are limited, so I can’t just run to the mall and pick up a nativity.” Stiles picks up a My Little Pony doll he’s drawn a red nose and stuck paper antlers on. “We improvised.”

“Where am I supposed to put your presents?”

“We’re just putting them on the couch. The whole pack is coming over to do Christmas tomorrow, and from what Derek told me, werewolves and gifts basically becomes a free-for-all.”

John looks at him curiously. “You sound…fond of it. Like you’re talking about family.”

“Well, they are, in a way.” Stiles rubs a twinge in his back and sighs. “But we are coming back to Beacon Hills, Dad. I swear.”
“I know you are. But is that what you really want?”

“Yeah.” Stiles sighs again. Every time he thinks about that question he feels queasy. “I think so. I’m still figuring some stuff out, but I think I have a way to make us all happy.”

“If anyone can do it, it’s you.”

Stiles flushes, not too old to keep from preening under his father’s approval, and then grins as the baby starts to kick. “Oh, hey. Feel.” He presses his dad’s hand to the spot and watches as John’s eyes light up.

“You better come back to Beacon Hills,” John says as the baby delights in its daily target practice with Stiles’s kidneys. “I’ll kidnap that kid and run if you don’t.”

Werewolf Christmas is just as hectic and wonderful as Derek had promised. It’s a mad rush of present opening and excited squeals and a few play fights, and Stiles’s sides ache from laughter by the time the last bow has been torn off.

He and Derek are exchanging gifts later, once they’re alone, but they’ve both made out with a decent haul of baby supplies. John had given Stiles plenty of practical gifts, and one sentimental one: the pregnancy journal his mother had kept before Stiles was born. Stiles flips through it while the wolves play around him, throat tight as he reads his mother’s beautifully expressive handwriting: Little one will not stop kicking. My little Energizer bunny— can’t wait to meet him and see if he’s this way once he’s out in this world he’s so eager to explore.

He’s so caught up in his mother’s words he doesn’t realize that a hush has fallen over the room for several seconds. When he finally glances up he sees Scott, a deadly serious expression on his face, kneeling in front of Kira with a box in his hand.

“No fucking way,” Erica breathes in delight.

Stiles immediately looks at Melissa to see if she’s putting a stop to this, but her eyes are wet and proud and completely unsurprised, so clearly Scott ran this by her already. The same goes with the Yukimuras, clasping hands while sitting together on the floor. The only person who looks as incredulous as Stiles feels is Derek.

“Kira,” Scott begins, voice shaking. “Two months ago my world was turned upside-down. And then I met you, and you became my world. I knew the moment I saw you that I wanted to mate you someday. So I ask that you accept this necklace— ” he pops open the box to reveal a traditional mating necklace, two leather bands braided three-quarters across, then gaping in a wide circle to show off the mating bite. “And accept me with it. Because without you, my world wouldn’t just be upside-down. I wouldn’t have a world. I’d be lost in space. Where I would die, and not even care. Because nothing would matter without you.”

Stiles rolls his eyes up to the ceiling in despair. After twelve years of getting Stiles to write his every essay and presentation, Scott just had to compose his engagement speech without Stiles's editing hand.

Kira doesn’t seem to mind the mushiness. “Oh, Scotty!” she breathes, plucking the necklace out of the box reverently. “Of course I will!”

Scott grabs her up and spins her around the room while everyone applauds. John, voice fondly amused, leans down to mutter in Stiles’s ear, “How long before he gets her pregnant, you think? A
week?"

"Dad!"

"Okay, two weeks. Final wager."

Stiles snorts so loudly he’s afraid he might send himself into premature labor.

"God, I wanna claim you right now," Scott says to Kira, eyes all dopey and adoring. He kisses her neck and sniffs at her, eyes starting to go feral with lust.

"Reign it in, Scott," Derek says firmly. He’d regaled Stiles last night with tales of Christmases past ruined by an untimely shifting, and Stiles knows he’s not going to let it happen this year.

"What? Oh." Scott pulls away from Kira, embarrassed. "Sorry." He pulls out his pills and pops one back before returning to nuzzle at his beloved. Stiles grimaces— Scott is still trying to control his wolf; is he really ready to be mated?

But as he watches his best friend with Kira, Stiles’s misgivings can’t keep hold for long. Scott and Kira are so obviously in love, even after such a short time period. It’s simple for them. Not all love has to be as complicated as it is for Stiles and Derek, after all.

After the proposal the party disperses fairly quickly. John sticks around for some cookies and conversation, but he can tell that Stiles and Derek want privacy, so he excuses himself soon enough.

Stiles feels oddly nervous about his gift for Derek, and he sees that Derek looks just as sickly anxious. "You want to go first?" he asks the werewolf, wiping his clammy hands on his jeans.

Derek nods and disappears into the back room. He comes out with a tiny wrapped box, possibly a jewelry box, and Stiles’s stomach disappears down to his toes.

"It’s not a mating necklace," Derek says quickly.

Stiles can’t tell if he’s relieved or disappointed, so he just fakes a smile. "Thank God. Scott would kill me if we stole his thunder."

"It’s— well, you’ll see. Open it."

Stiles does. Inside the box is a single jagged piece of wood. Stiles holds it up and looks at Derek questioningly.

"Your dad brought it. I’ve been working with him to make your present." Derek clears his throat nervously. "It’s from my house. Or what used to be my house. I had it torn down. That’s a piece of it."

"Oh," Stiles says stupidly. He’d been expecting, like, a baby book or something. Tearing down the house where Stiles was tortured is a nice gesture, though. "Um…thank you?"

"I had it torn down because a new house is being built in its place. And I’d like to live there with you."

Stiles chokes, losing his breath for so long the baby kicks in alarm. "You— me? A house?"

"I sent the plans to your dad, and he hired the crew. They’re going to start building right after the New Year. It won’t be ready for a while, but I’m paying them to work overtime." There’s a bead of nervous sweat on Derek’s brow. "I hope that’s all right. I know something terrible almost happened
to you there—and something terrible did happen to me there—but I don’t want that place standing anymore as a monument to pain. That’s not what my family would have wanted. I want it to be our place, so you know, when I’m with you—I’m home.”

Stiles almost wants to cry. “The woods will be our backyard,” he says, all choked up. “You and the baby can go out and shift whenever you want.”

Derek smiles a little bashfully. “Well, the baby can, anyway.”

Stiles shakes his head. “No. You and the baby. That’s...well, that’s my present.” Stiles pulls over Derek’s laptop, waiting on the counter, and boots it up.

Derek’s brow knits. “My present is my own laptop?”

“Just wait.” Stiles clicks until the email is open. “I found her online. Her name is Braeden Sawyer. She’s a lawyer with the ACLU, specializing in werewolf cases. I emailed her office about your case, and I heard back from her two days ago.” He spins the screen so Derek can read:

Dear Mr. Stilinski,

My paralegal briefed me on Mr. Hale’s case, and I’ve studied his file. I’d like to thank you for bringing it to my attention. You were right in thinking his treatment at the hands of the Spokane police was unconstitutional. Mr. Hale was denied his due process rights when he was forced into a restrictive plea deal without being offered the opportunity for counsel. It is very clear that Mr. Hale acted under extreme duress when he killed the hunters who had taken him, and any human under similar circumstances would have been absolved immediately. His “probation”—a word I hesitate to use, as refusing a werewolf the ability to shift is far more like regulated torture—betrays a lack of understanding of both werewolf neurology and basic human decency.

Unfortunately, what happened to Mr. Hale isn’t unique. I’ve defended many werewolf clients whose lives have been ruined by entrenched prejudice in the judicial system. The good news is that the convictions rarely hold up when challenged. I’m extremely confident that if I enter an appeal for Mr. Hale with the appellate court, his probation will be lifted.

My retainer is attached. I also take on these cases pro bono, and would be happy to have you discuss that with my secretary.

I understand from your communications with my paralegal that you and Mr. Hale are currently in a sort of “werewolf sanctuary.” With a little luck, Mr. Hale won’t need to appear in court. It depends on if the Spokane DA chooses to oppose my Motion to Set Aside Judgement. DAs rarely do, as they’re well aware the terms of the plea deal were blatantly unconstitutional. If the Motion is challenged and denied, we will enter an appeal and Mr. Hale will need to appear. I’m doubtful that will happen, but I’ll keep you updated as the process moves along.

Please feel free to share my information with other werewolves in your current location. I imagine a good many of them are in hiding from outstanding warrants of questionable legitimacy. I’m happy to help in any way I can. There are so few voices speaking for werewolves in the legal system, but even one voice, if loud enough, can make a difference.

Thank you, and I look forward to hearing from you further,

Braeden Sawyer, Esquire

“I don’t understand.” Derek says slowly, eyes scanning the email.
“She’s the best of the best. I’ve looked at her history— she’s challenged, like, a hundred convictions, and had them all set aside. There was one werewolf who had just been put on death row, and she sailed into town, filed an appeal, and got him off completely.”

“She really thinks she can get my probation lifted?”

“More than thinks, she knows she can. I hope you don’t mind, but I already emailed her back and hired her. She’s going to be filing on the twenty-ninth of January. She said the appellate panel might take anywhere from a day to two months before they reach her motion and make a ruling, depending on how many other motions are filed.”

Derek’s mouth falls open. “That fast?”

“Yeah. With any luck you’ll be a cleared man by the time we return to Beacon Hills.” Stiles grins at the expression on Derek’s face. “Merry Christmas.”

Derek grabs him and holds him close, looking struck half-dumb with awe. “You’re fucking amazing,” he says into Stiles’s hair. “You just gave me my freedom.”

“Yeah, well, you gave me a house.” Stiles snuggles against Derek’s chest, enjoying his warmth. “Not a bad haul for our first Christmas together.”

#

After the excitement of the holidays Stiles, Derek, and John all go in for a doctor’s appointment. Stiles goes early to help Scott pack everything up. He’s going to be leaving Deaton’s to move into an apartment with Kira while they plan their mating ceremony. Scott is a little sad to be leaving Deaton’s place— he’s become close to the doctor, and Deaton has camera feed of the entire Preserve in his living room, which Scott had greatly enjoyed watching like a total creep— but he’s still glowing with love for Kira. “Soon I’ll have a little guy just like you,” he sings to Stiles’s belly.

“Kate Argent’s going to love that. She created you to get rid of werewolves, and instead you’re going to go off and make, like, five more.”

“Ten, at least. Remind me to thank her.” Scott grins as he returns to throwing shirts pell-mell into his suitcase. “Her killing me was the best thing that ever happened to me.”

Stiles laughs, and then checks his watch. His appointment is in twenty minutes, but it’ll take him fifteen to get down the stairs. “I’m happy for you, buddy,” he says, because he is.

“And I’m happy for you.” Scott takes a deep, satisfied breath. “It’s a good life.”

Stiles makes his way downstairs and meets Derek and his dad. Deaton boots up the ultrasound machine and they all coo at the perfectly formed little human on the screen. John sniffs and wipes his eyes.

“Dad, are you crying?”

“If a man can’t cry looking at his grandchild, when can he?” John asks gruffly, taking a handkerchief when Deaton proffers it and blowing his nose.

“Everything looks just fine. You should be developing the birth canal any day now, and seeing your chest start to swell. Lycadone can slow that process, though, so I’m going to give you a five-day prescription of this.” Deaton hands Stiles a small white bottle. “Two a day starting tonight.”
Stiles wrinkles his nose at the thought of his necessary bodily modifications. Omegas of both genders can breast-feed, but he hasn’t been looking forward to suddenly getting a C-cup. “Will it hurt?”

“You’ll be a little sore, especially where you tear to form the birth canal, but nothing terrible.”

Deaton prints out a picture of the ultrasound and hands it to Stiles in appeasement, like offering a little kid candy after a shot. “But you’re in very good shape. You’ll be seeing the baby in the flesh sooner rather than later.”

#

The next morning, when Stiles wakes up, he feels…strange. Hot all over, with a sort of zingy feeling in his lower belly. He sniffs sleepily at Derek’s pillow, humming as the smell makes him even warmer.

There’s a slippery feeling between his legs, all warm and soupy and pleasant, and he reaches out for Derek only to find that he isn’t there.

His eyes fly open and he sits up. He’s alone in the room, but he can smell bacon cooking in the kitchen. Derek must be downstairs.

Stiles feels a desperate pull towards the alpha, and he reaches down shakily to find that he must have been producing slick while he was asleep. His sweatpants are kicked off and his boxers are damp. Just the feeling of his fingers on his sensitive skin makes him groan and he shuts his eyes, breath short.

He’s in heat.

He knows that many male omegas go into a pregnancy heat shortly before they deliver. It’s a by-product of the hormone changes necessary to prepare his body for labor. He hadn’t even thought about it happening to him— he’s a virgin, for God’s sake. He hasn’t had a heat since he was twelve years old.

All he knows is that he needs Derek. He’s buzzing all over and his heart is clanging in his chest, and Derek is the only one who can make it go away. He’s scared. He’s never been with an alpha for a heat before, but he’s tortured himself for years looking at blogs online, where alphas brag about the things they made their omegas in heat do. There are pictures everywhere of omegas kneeling, bruised, crying; submitting to anything and everything just so they can please their alpha and get their fix.

He trusts Derek, but he knows Derek is a slave to his biology, just like Stiles. Derek has difficulty controlling himself when the alpha takes over. He’d proven that the very first time they’d met in the clinic’s waiting room. He’d proven it again when he’d thought Stiles was going to leave the Preserve with his baby.

Stiles’s smell is going to knock him over, and Stiles won’t be in any position to say no to whatever Derek wants.

But despite his misgivings, Stiles has to go downstairs. He has to go to his alpha.

Derek is at the stove, blotting the grease from the bacon. He smells Stiles immediately and freezes. “Oh,” he says, eyes wide and nostrils flaring.

Stiles nods and curls around himself. The kitchen is warm from the stove and smells like meat and Derek, everything carnal and thick and strong. “Heat,” he manages to say.
Derek nods and lifts a hand to his nose to block the scent. “Maybe I should… go stay somewhere else for a few days—”

“No!”

It bursts out of Stiles in a high, reedy whine, taking them both by surprise. Derek’s eyes widen fractionally and he nods. “Okay,” he says, voice gentle, like Stiles is a wounded animal. “I’ll stay. Tell me what I can do for you.”

There are so many things Stiles could say, but what slips out is a tremulous, “Take care of me.”

The last bits of predatory lust disappears from Derek’s eyes. “Of course,” he says tenderly. He lifts up the plate with bacon. “I made breakfast. Are you hungry?”

Stiles nods and follows him to the table. He can’t bring himself to sit on a chair, not with his lower body on fire, so he waits for Derek to sit down and then slips onto his lap.

His last coherent thought is that he just made a serious mistake. All he can smell is Derek. Derek’s warmth hugs him, the sheer presence of alpha piercing him through. Stiles is nothing but need now, and he’s not even rational enough to be scared about it. Derek holds up a piece of bacon, his eyes glazed over at Stiles’s proximity, and Stiles eats it eagerly. It’s turkey bacon, not his favorite, but it tastes like the best thing in the world because it’s from his alpha’s hand.

“Good boy,” Derek says. The words sent a jolt of pleasure right through Stiles’s cock and Derek groans softly as Stiles’s scent spikes with arousal. Stiles opens his mouth for another piece. This time he laps at the tips of Derek’s fingers with his tongue before he swallows. Derek’s erection hardens beneath him, making Stiles smile with pride. He’s pleasing his alpha. “More,” he demands, and Derek gives him another piece. Stiles swallows the bacon and then eagerly sucks Derek’s fingers clean, enjoying the taste and feel of alpha in his mouth.

“Oh, fuck, Stiles.” Derek’s voice is rocky with lust. “If you keep doing that it’s going to be really hard to stop.”

“Don’t stop,” Stiles says simply around Derek’s thumb. He takes Derek’s free hand and brings it to his boxers, so Derek can feel his slick. “Need you.”

“Oh, God.”

“Make me come,” Stiles begs. He stubbornly keeps Derek’s hand there, even when Derek tries to pull it away. He can feel how hard Derek is and he wriggles purposefully, hoping to send him over the edge. “Knot me.”

“We said…we were going to wait…”

Stiles growls in frustration, and it comes out like an impatient puppy. “I don’t want to wait anymore. I’m yours. Claim me. Please?” He pushes Derek’s fingers into the cloth of his boxers, until they’re practically inside of him. “I belong to you,” he tries, hoping to trigger Derek’s possessiveness. “You can mark me. Don’t you want to?”

Derek stares down at him, horror warring with lust in his eyes. “This isn’t you,” he says.

So what? Stiles wriggles again, sick of waiting. Maybe Derek wants him to beg. It must be a game, and if Derek wants Stiles to play, he will. “I’ll be your good boy. I’ll do anything, Alpha.”

Derek shuts his eyes and breathes in steadily through his mouth. “Let’s go into the living room,” he
says finally.

The living room. The couch. Stiles grins at the progress. “Carry me.”

“I can’t. You’re too heavy.”

Stiles starts to pout, but then he remembers the reason he’s so heavy. He’s already pregnant; already bred up so good for Derek. He’s a walking symbol of his own fertility. “Let’s go,” he says, tugging Derek’s hand as he climbs off his lap.

“Wait for me. I just have to do something first.”

Wait for me. Stiles practically trips over himself as he stumbles to the couch. He knows what Derek wants. It’s a little tricky to get into position with his belly in the way, but whatever is holding Derek up takes a while, so Stiles is able to tug down his boxers and point his back towards the door, ass up in presentation, when Derek finally follows him in.

The smell of arousal nearly blows Stiles over and he grins. He’s beaten Derek at his own game. No way can Derek make him wait any longer.

“Oh, fuck,” Derek says. Stiles feels a warm hand on the small of his back. “Stiles…”

Stiles purrs and bucks into the touch. “Yours,” he says, the single word a promise and a demand.

“Stiles, please…please sit up.”

Rejection crashes over Stiles and he looks up at Derek in shock. “You don’t want me?” he asks, lip trembling. Is it because he’s pregnant? Does Derek not want him if he can’t be bred?

“God, Stiles, of course I do. Can’t you smell how much I do?” Derek sits on the couch, pulls Stiles up and cuddles Stiles to his chest. “Can we just…do this slowly? Please? Can we just sit here together for a few minutes?”

Stiles doesn’t want slow. He wants fast and hard and pleasure-pain ripping him apart. He just wants relief. But Derek is his alpha, and this is what the alpha wants, so he turns his face into Derek’s neck and waits for Derek to be ready. The skin there is so warm, flowing with blood and life. Stiles will put a mating bite here. He wonders if Derek’s werewolf skin will heal it, leaving the world no way to know he’s claimed.

That doesn’t matter. Derek’s mark on Stiles’s throat will scar beautifully and show Derek’s ownership to the world. That will make Derek so happy, and Stiles will be rewarded for it. Stiles smiles into Derek’s skin and nuzzles even closer. Derek is still hard under Stiles’s slick ass. It’s going to feel like the best thing in the world when Derek is inside of him.

After a few torturous minutes there’s a knock on the door and a sudden new scent, practically a violation against Stiles’s system, in the air. Stiles burrows his nose deeper into Derek’s neck to escape it, but the owner of the smell is just getting closer and closer. “Oh, dear,” Deaton’s voice says.

Stiles bares his teeth and waits for Derek to get rid of this intruder.

“What the hell happened?” Derek snaps.

“Those pills I started him on. A very uncommon side effect, but…it’s his first heat since he presented, and that combined with the hormone pills is making it twenty times stronger than normal.” Deaton’s hand rests of Stiles’s shoulder and Stiles growls at it. “Stiles, look at me.”
Stiles shakes his head.

“Stiles, please look at him,” Derek says, hand rubbing a comforting circle on his back.

Stiles reluctantly turns his head to look at Deaton. Deaton gives him a smile that must be meant to look reassuring. “Here you are. This will help.” He holds out a single huge pill, practically the circumference of Stiles’s thumb, and a water bottle to help him choke it down.

Stiles’s eyes widen and he dives back into Derek’s chest.

“Stiles.” Deaton’s voice is a little sharp with impatience. “You need to take this.”

Stiles shakes his eyes, eyes watering. He hurts all over with need and there’s a strange alpha in his den, trying to make him swallow something he doesn’t want, and Derek isn’t stopping it.

“Hey.” Derek jiggles his leg, trying to make him look up. “Can you do it for me, baby? Please?”

It’s the endearment that does it. Stiles sniffs, sits up, and opens his mouth. Derek carefully places the pill on his tongue and holds out the water bottle. Stiles swallows, eyes screwed tight with displeasure, and then opens his mouth to show that it’s gone.

“Good boy,” Derek praises, pulling him close. “That was so good, baby.” He strokes Stiles’s hair and the combination of the touch and the praise is almost as good as a knot.

“Now make him leave,” Stiles whines, not even caring if Deaton can hear him.

There’s a pause, and then Deaton says, “He’ll be all right soon. Take it easy with him for the rest of the day and call me if there are any problems.” His footsteps recede, the door opens and closes, and the scent is finally gone.

Stiles snuggles against Derek and closes his eyes. He hopes Derek doesn’t make him wait much longer, but for right now the smell of his alpha is enough. He breathes in and out, in and out, and slowly the ache in his lower belly begins to go away. His foggy mind clears enough for rational thought to return.

And then the shame hits.

Derek must smell it, because he hums soothingly and keep stroking Stiles’s hair. “It’s okay,” he says gently.

“Oh, my God.” Stiles pushes away from him, burying his face in his hands. “Oh, God.”

“It’s okay. You’re okay.”

Stiles replays each moment, every needy sound and movement. He can’t breathe for his shame. He’d been everything he’d always hated; always feared. “Oh, God,” he whispers again, feeling lower than anything that’s ever lived.

“It wasn’t your fault. It was Deaton’s, for giving you those pills yesterday.”

“That’s…that’s what it’s like, to be in heat?” Stiles wants to throw up. He’s always looked down a little on the omegas who allow themselves to be so degraded just to get a knot, reinforcing every stereotype used to oppress omegas all over the world, but now he understands. He hadn’t been in control, and it was terrifying.

“No. It was the pills. Usually it’s not nearly that strong, for either of us.” Derek reaches for him
again. “Please don’t be upset. You’re still in heat and I can smell that you’re hurting and it’s killing me. Come here.”

Stiles lets himself lean against Derek. The alpha still smells like home and happiness and safety, but the desire to be fucked and used is muted now. Stiles tries to calm down. “You called Deaton?”

“Yes. After I sent you into the living room.”

Stiles frowns. He’s glad— very glad— that Derek did, but why had he? If he’d been feeling even a tenth of what Stiles had been, it must have been torture. “Why? Why didn’t you just…take me? The way I begged you to?” His voice is still bitter with self-disgust.

Derek’s hand stills. “You asked me to take care of you.”

Stiles remembers. It had been one of the last things he’d said before the omega took over.

“I’ll always take care of you. Always. But I’ll never, ever take advantage of you.” Derek kisses the top of his head. “It wasn’t really you, and when the heat was over you would have regretted it. I knew that. Did I want to knot you right there? God, yes. But you are what matters to me, not your omega biology. So I took care of you.”

Stiles is overwhelmed with gratitude. If it had been any other alpha he’d been tied to, he knows he’d be on his knees getting pounded right now. “Thank you,” he whispers. “I’m sorry you had to do that. It must have been awful.”

Derek hushes him and kisses his hair again. It sends a sweet, soothed feeling through Stiles’s body, just enough to satisfy the lingering traces of his heat. “I did it for us both. I’ve only ever been with one person before. Kate. And that wasn’t real. When I’m with you… I need it to be real. I need to know that it’s all you, and you’re with me because you love me.” The words come out in a rush and Derek clutches Stiles a little closer, as if he’s afraid the confession will make Stiles run.

Stiles feels secure enough to press his lips to Derek’s jaw. “Trust me,” he says when he pulls away. “If it’s even a little part of me, you don’t have to worry that I don’t love you.”

Derek smiles at the words before he kisses the top of Stiles’s head one more time. “Deaton said you should take it easy for the rest of the day,” he murmurs. “How about we just stay here and watch some movies?”

Stiles sighs contentedly and snuggles against Derek. The wolf is still hard and a part of Stiles longs to suck him to completion or take him in hand until he’s coming hot over Stiles’s skin, but instead he just settles his head against Derek’s chest and relaxes. “That sounds like the best plan ever.”

#

Stiles stares at his naked body in the mirror and runs a hand down the curved plane of his belly. The body modifications had begun shortly after his heat, and now he’s a picture-perfect full term expectant omega father. His breasts are round and full and taper into dark nipples, ridged with the glands that will produce his milk. Between his still-aching legs is a perfectly formed birthing canal, purely functional and incredibly uncomfortable. Even though there isn’t a single nerve ending there to bring him pleasure he can’t resist rubbing his fingers inside of it, stretching himself out, wondering how a baby’s head will fit through.

He’s less than three weeks away from his due date. His body is ready. The house is ready— Derek put up the bassinet in their room days ago, the mobile of birds hanging down for their baby to see. He and Derek, in many ways, are ready. They’ve read all the books; competed to see who could
change a diaper on a bag of flour the fastest; even took a quiz about baby safety administered by the Sheriff.

And yet Stiles still doesn’t quite feel like he’s truly accepted what’s about to happen. He’s stared at his baby’s ultrasound a thousand times, but he can still only imagine it as a blurry shape in his arms. The reality of how his life is about to change just seems too far away to grasp. This baby is going to be his, *forever*. He officially won’t be a teenager anymore. He’ll be someone’s dad.

If only his brain would stop screaming DOES NOT COMPUTE at the thought.

He sighs and bends down to tug up his pants. Maybe tomorrow he’ll feel like a parent.

His cell phone rings and he fumbles for it, cursing the way he moves as if through molasses now. “Hello?” he shouts just as the ringer finishes, employing that useless maybe-if-I-yell-loud-enough-they-won’t-have-already-hung-up trick.

“Stiles.” Scott’s voice is short and ragged. “I’m coming to pick you up. Come outside and wait for me.”

“What? Why?”

“It’s Derek. He was at the guard tower. He fell.”

Stiles goes completely numb.

Scott doesn’t know what happened. Derek had been up there with Adrian Harris, and suddenly he’d just pitched forward, falling thirty feet to the ground. Derek had been conscious when they’d carried him off to Deaton’s. He’d said Stiles’s name, so Scott had come to get him. That’s all Scott can tell him.

Stiles can’t breathe as Scott drives them frantically to the main street. It’s a jarring ride, sending spikes of pain up his lower back at every pothole, but at least it gets them there quickly. Once they arrive, Scott has to help him out. As they approach the door panic immobilizes him. If Derek is dead…

The thought makes pain erupt through him and he groans, squeezing Scott’s arm so tightly his best friend makes a small sound of distress.

Then the door opens and he can smell Derek, warm and alive and *his*.

And then he can hear him.

“Fuck, Alan, I said I’m fine. This is completely unnecessary.”

Stiles goes boneless with relief and pushes into the room. Derek is sitting on Deaton’s examination table, shirt off, looking phenomenally pissed as he glares at the doctor. His gaze catches on Stiles and he groans. “Stiles, what are you doing here?”

“You fell,” Stiles gasps, searching Derek’s body for injuries.

“I did, but I already healed. How did you even find out?” Derek’s gaze slides to Scott and his murderous expression deepens. “You?”

“You called out his name!” Scott says defensively.
“Yeah,” Derek says between gritted teeth. “I was saying, nobody tell Stiles about this.”

Scott deflates. “Oh. I thought it was, like, a bring my beloved to me for a final kiss type thing.”

“Idiot,” Derek mutters. He sighs and reaches for Stiles’s hand. “Look. I’m completely fine. I just leaned against the side a little too long, and it broke. Deaton already set my bones to make sure they healed properly. I’m good as new.”

“Really?” Stiles says doubtfully. Feeling is returning to his body now that he’s seen Derek is alive. He lets himself relax in relief, even as another twinge of pain seizes his lower back.

“Really. All I want is to go home.” Derek looks over his shoulder to Deaton. “Can we please go home now, Alan?”

“Actually, I think we might have to stay a while.” Stiles massages his back with his fingers, teeth gritted.

“What? Why?”

“Because my water just broke.”

A tiny trickle of water snakes out his pant leg as he says it, and Derek stares in shock at the dark wet patch on the thighs of Stiles’s sweatpants.

“Holy fucking shit,” Scott says.

“No,” Derek says, voice edged with panic. “No, Thumper isn’t ready yet. We still have three weeks. I think you just peed or something. Deaton?” His voice rises in something like a shriek. “Can you… can you please check to make sure he just…you know, urinated?”

Stiles gaps in pain and digs his nails in Derek’s hand. “No, Derek, this is labor.”

“It can’t be,” Derek begs.

“It is,” Stiles, Scott, and Deaton all say together.

“Looks like we’re switching out patients,” Deaton says, shooing Derek off the cot. His eyes are bright with excitement. “Congratulations, boys.”

Derek still looks dazed as he helps Stiles up. “Oh, my God,” he says. “Stiles…are we ready for this?”

In answer Stiles reaches for his hand again and grips it tight. Another contraction seizes him and he leans back, a tiny cry escaping him as he lets the pain take over.

He can almost hear his baby’s excited little voice as it prepares to enter the world:

Ready or not… here I come.

Chapter End Notes

This ended up being a crazy long chapter, and probably should have been split into two, but 1. the heat scene is my way of redeeming Derek for his shithead behavior last
chapter, so I didn't want to wait too long on that, and 2. I think it's high time for Baby Sterek to make its grand debut. Birth coming this Thursday!
It hurts. Stiles can’t believe how much that simple fact shocks him. He knew, abstractly, how much agony he would be in, but actually experiencing it is indescribable. He’d assumed there’d be an ebb and flow of pain as he went through contractions, but that isn’t it at all—it’s just that the contractions are about a ten on the pain scale, and every other moment hovers around a seven.

He remembers reading somewhere that childbirth is especially bad for male omegas, since they don’t have menses cycles to get their bodies used to the pain, and he chalks that up as Reasons Why Being an Omega Sucks No. 1,000,000,000.

“You’re such a fucking champ,” Derek croons to him, wiping his forehead with a wet cloth, and that would be so much more reassuring if Stiles couldn’t smell the panic coming off of Derek in waves.

“Contractions are seven minutes apart, dilation at five centimeters.” Deaton crouches down so Stiles can see him. “We start pushing at ten.”

“How long will that take?”

Deaton chuckles, maddeningly calm. “I’m afraid I’m not driving this bus, Mr. Stilinski.”

“If I can’t push, what the fuck do I do?” Stiles wails as another contraction strikes. Deaton waits for it to end before he responds:

“I can give you an epidural, if you’d like. That will give you a chance to rest so you have energy to push when the time comes.”

Stiles winces. It’s stupid, but he’d wanted to do this without medication. Make some grand statement about how omegas can withstand more pain than alphas, which is so idiotic because it’s not like anyone here even cares about that.

“Do it,” Derek says softly, still wiping his forehead.

Stiles can’t decide. “I read online that they don’t always work on omegas, since we don’t have nerve endings in our birthing canals.”

Deaton shakes his head. “If nerve endings were the problem, you wouldn’t be feeling pain. An epidural will numb your entire lower body.”

Stiles sighs, then grits out, “I don’t want it.”

This all seems so unreal, still. He doesn’t want to be numb for it. He wants to feel each contraction as it brings his baby closer and closer to real life, so he’s ready when it finally arrives.

Deaton nods. “You have up until the baby starts crowning to change your mind.”

“You’re a masochist,” Derek mutters, wiping Stiles’s forehead again.

“Pot, meet kettle.” Stiles squirms away from him. “And cool it with the cloth, you’re getting water in my ears.”
“I have to do something.”

“Talk to the baby. It’s probably scared.”

Derek gives Stiles an exasperated look, obviously recognizing this for the distraction ploy it is. “Stiles…”

“It’s scared,” Stiles insists. Fuck, it probably is scared. It’s being bumped along out of its cozy little planet, about to be forced through a tiny tube into the light. It has no idea what to expect. His baby needs him to be strong. The thought calms him a little.

Derek sighs but leans to put his lips just over Stiles’s heaving belly. “Hey, Thumper,” he says. “Don’t be afraid. Just as soon as you’re ready you’ll be out here with us. Daddy’s doing a really good job helping you, but you’re in charge here, okay? Don’t make us wait too long.”

Stiles is used to a frantic kick whenever Derek talks to his belly, but the baby is obviously otherwise occupied right now, and the realization that he’ll never feel his Thumper thump again brings a sentimental lump to his throat.

Even after everything that’s happened, he’s going to miss being pregnant.

There’s a knock on the door and Scott pokes his head in. “Rounded up all the troops. We’re out in the waiting room. Just yell if you need any of us, okay?”

“That’ll be the day,” Derek mutters, still rankled at Scott for bringing Stiles to the clinic in the first place. Stiles isn’t sure if the shock of Derek’s accident had forced his labor, or if it had just been a coincidence, but he isn’t going to blame Scott for it. “Thanks, buddy,” he wheezes, and Scott grimaces in sympathy before he shuts the door again.

Stiles whines through his teeth until his next contraction passes, then looks up at Deaton. “What’s… the longest labor…you’ve ever seen?” he pants.

Deaton looks like he doesn’t want to answer, but he eventually says reluctantly, “Thirty-four hours.”

Stiles wheezes out a laugh and leans back. “Okay. So at the very worst, just thirty-three and a half hours to go.”

#

“Fantasia.”

“Aristocats.”

“Sorcerer’s Apprentice.”

“Fuck. Ah, Emperor’s New Groove.”

“Enchanted.”

“Good one. Dumbo.”

“Oliver and Company. I win. There’s no Disney movie starting with ‘y.’”

“Never play against an expert.” Derek’s hands rub into his shoulders. At five hours in he’d climbed up onto the cot with Stiles and started giving the back massage Stiles had been begging for.
“I never thought I’d say I’d be bored during labor,” Stiles mutters. He hadn’t given in on the epidural, but he’d allowed Deaton to give him a more mild pain reliever that made his non-contracting moments downright pleasant, since they weren’t a complete black hole of pain.

“Want to play ‘First Letter, Last Letter’ for musicals?” Derek rubs a particularly sore spot, making Stiles groan with relief. “I’ll let you start.”

Stiles feels good enough to smile. “That wouldn’t be fair. The only one you know is Oklahoma!”

“I hate Oklahoma!”

“You love Oklahoma! more than life. Don’t lie to me.”

“It’s grown on me.” Derek nuzzles him and sings softly: “Oh, what a beautiful morning, oh, what a beautiful day...I got a beautiful feeling everything’s going my way...”

The song cuts off as Stiles tilts back his head and wails at the next contraction, far and away the worst one yet.

“Eight centimeters,” Deaton says from the foot of the bed. “We’re nearly getting to the hard part, Stiles.”

Stiles really hates him for phrasing it that way.

“Deaton,” Derek says, suddenly terrified. He clamors off the cot and leans down to put his ear above Stiles’s belly. “The baby’s heartbeat—”

Stiles freaks out. “What? What about the baby’s heart? Derek?!”

“It’s all right,” Deaton says, placing a soothing hand on Stiles’s arm. “The baby was just squeezed very tightly during that last contraction, which interrupted its placental blood flow, and its heart rate sped up a little. It’s okay now. This is absolutely normal.”

“Are you sure?”

“If the heart rate shows the baby is in distress, I promise you I’ll prep for a C-section. But you’re both doing fine.” Deaton looks at Derek and speaks sternly. “Derek, I need you to stay calm.”

Stiles looks up and sees that Derek is fighting a shift, eyes glowing a murderous red and sharp teeth crowding his mouth. He snarls at Deaton.

“Mr. Hale!” Deaton takes his hand away from Stiles, purposefully rising it in a don’t-shoot motion. “I know how you’re feeling right now. Your mate and baby are in a precarious place. But the absolute worst thing you can do for them right now is lose control. If you shift out of panic, you won’t let me touch him, and I need to in order to do my job. Do you understand?”

“Derek,” Stiles whispers, tugging at his hand. “We need you with us. Come on.”

Derek glares at Deaton for a moment more, and then blinks and shudders and returns to normal. “Fuck,” he says, voice rough. “Fuck!”

“Hey, drama queen. I’m the one in labor.” Stiles squeezes his hand, a little shaky at the close call. “What was that?”

“Can’t lose you,” Derek mutters. “Either of you.” He presses Stiles’s hand to his lips and shakes for a minute, still battling for control. “I can’t just sit here and do nothing.”
Deaton clears his throat. “I think Stiles would appreciate some ice right now. Why don’t you run up to my apartment—”

Before he even finishes the sentence Derek has jumped for the door. He swings it open and explodes into his wolf form, a controlled shift, as he streaks upstairs.

“Unnecessary,” Deaton mutters. He beds down over Stiles. “While he’s gone, tell me how you’re feeling. Be honest. No trying to sound brave for your alpha.”

“It hurts. But I’m okay.” Stiles tilts back his head, terrified for the next contraction. “What if the baby keeps getting squeezed? Are the rest of the contractions all going to be like that?”

“I’m going to keep an eye and ear on the situation, but your baby is nice and strong. I have every confidence that we can do this naturally.”

“And it’s not too early?”

“Werewolves are very commonly born premature. It might be a little tiny, but our last ultrasound indicated that everything is perfectly developed. Don’t be afraid.”

Derek runs back into the room, holding a cup the size of a trophy filled with ice. “Here you go,” he says, slipping a shard into Stiles’s mouth.

It actually feels great and Stiles sucks it eagerly until it’s melted. Derek gives him another, looking relieved to be occupied with something even this small. “Am I at nine centimeters yet?”

“Not yet.”

Stiles groans in despair and tenses as the next contraction grips him.

#

“What were you thinking about when you gave your sample?” Stiles asks Derek three hours later. He’s stalled at nine centimeters, with the contractions evidently doing absolutely nothing to move things along. He feels sort of calm now. Resigned. Like his body has just sort of given up. The pain is almost boring, it’s so unending. He feels a little crazy, and he wonders if Deaton somehow slipped him something to keep him calm.

“What?”

“Did they give you porn or something? How did you, you know, get it up?”

Derek looks at him like he’s absolutely insane. Which is fair, honestly. “Stiles, there’s no way I’m answering that question.”

“But it’s where our baby came from. I want to know.”

Derek rolls his eyes so hugely Stiles has to smile. “No, they didn’t give me porn. They just gave me the cup and left.”

“So, how did you do it?”

Derek glares at him, and then his face relaxes into a mischievous smile. “Honestly? I was thinking about the perfect omega I’d just met down at the Coffee Karma. This young man who smelled all spicy and warm and good, even when his pretty mouth was twisted up glaring at his asshole friend. I imagined all the things I’d like to do to him. How I wanted to knot him and hold him and see him
A wide grim blooms on Stiles’s face. “You’re totally lying.”

“Maybe I am, maybe I’m not. You’re not a werewolf, so how will you ever know for sure?” Derek leans over and kisses the tip of Stiles’s nose, just in time to distract him from the next contraction.

“There we are,” Deaton says once it passes. “Ten centimeters. Time to push.”

Stiles feels like he’s been waiting forever, but he still squeaks in terror. “Already? It’s coming now?”

“Well, pushing can take up to two hours, but we’re definitely getting there.” Deaton smiles encouragingly at him. “You’re doing very well, Stiles. Let’s bring your little one home.”

The contraction strikes and Stiles bears down on the cot, pushing with all the strength in his body. He pulverizes Derek’s hand and clenches until his vision blacks out.

He feels no different.

“And again,” Deaton says.

Stiles hesitates, needing a moment to recuperate. “Is its heartbeat still okay after that?”

“Very strong. You’re both in perfect shape. You can do it. Push.”

Stiles pushes again.

And again.

And again.

#

Stiles has lived a thousand years on this cot. He is nothing but pressure and sharp pain. His will has abandoned him and he will never, ever leave this room.

“You’re so good, you’re perfect, you’re the best in the world,” Derek chants, or maybe it’s Scott. Various pack members have rotated through over the past hour and a half. They’ve been very supportive, but Stiles would like them all to go home now so he can sleep.

“I can’t,” he says simply. He resolves not to even push during the next contraction— what’s the point?— but his body goes ahead and does it anyway.

“You can. You are. We’re almost there, Stiles. Don’t you want to meet Thumper?” Derek’s hand slips another piece of ice into his mouth.

“Thumper’s not coming.” They’ve been here for nine hours. His baby is clearly planning to stay right where it is. That’s fine. It can live in there forever.

“I beg to differ,” Deaton says. He grabs Stiles’s hand and guides it between his legs. “Can you feel that, Mr. Stilinski?”

It’s firm and slippery and foreign and it wakes Stiles up immediately. “Is that the head?”

“It is.”
“Oh, shit shit shit.” Derek dashes to the end of the bed and kneels beside Deaton. “I can see it, Stiles. We’re so close.” He looks up at Stiles, a dazzled grin on his face. “This is it. You can do this. I’m right here.”

“On the next contraction, I want you to push with everything in you,” Deaton tells him, maintaining eye contact firmly. “Now, once the baby’s out, your instincts will be sending you a lot of signals. You won’t like that I’m holding your baby. But I have to get it cleaned up and look it over to make sure it’s healthy before I can let you hold it. Do you understand that everything I do I’m doing to keep your baby safe?”

Stiles nods and feels the contraction start to build.

“Good. This is it. Push.”

Stiles pushes and feels it happen: feels the head slide out into the world; feels the small body follow and the pressure abate. A shrill screech fills the room and Stiles watches in amazement as Deaton carefully lifts the tiny creature away from him.

“Congratulations, boys. You have a perfect daughter.”

Stiles’s mouth hangs open as he watches Deaton cut the cord and smile down at the baby. *His* baby.

A daughter.

Thumper is a girl.

As Deaton steps away with her Stiles’s instincts roar out to stop him. That’s his cub, in a strange alpha’s arms, and she’s crying like something is killing her. He forces the feeling down. It’s just Deaton. He’d said he needed to take the baby, just for a minute, to make sure she’s all right.

But the screams are clawing through him and he gasps out, “Is she okay? Why is she crying like that?”

“She’s fine.” Deaton bends over her and then, after a moment, lifts her up, now clean and carefully wrapped in a blanket. “She just came from a very safe, nice place, and she’s not sure if she likes it here yet. But I have something that’s going to make her feel *much* better.” He walks back over to Stiles and carefully lowers the warm bundle into his arms. “Oh, that’s it,” he murmurs to the baby. “You know who this is, don’t you, little one?”

Stiles stares down into the tiny, scrunched face of his child. She’s still crying, but she recognizes his scent and the sobs taper into little hiccups. The realization of what’s happening grips him, and he swears he feels his heart melt, releasing more love than he’s ever felt before, flowing into his child.

She knows him. She recognizes the man holding her as the same man who carried her those nine months. She knows that Stiles is her daddy, and she’s safe in his arms.

Her squinted eyes blink and then widen, and just like that she’s a real person. He can see Derek in her eyes and in the fine black fuzz of hair on her head. He can see himself in the little moles dotting her throat. She smells like nothing he can even describe; she smells like *family*.

It all flashes before him. The shot in the clinic. The weeks of illness. Crying at the clinic conference table. Fearing for his baby’s life in Kate’s clutches. The days on the road. Putting Derek’s hand over that tiny kicking foot. Laying back and feeling her move, reveling in the miracle of her being.

And now she’s here.
His daughter.

“Hi,” he says to her. He’s crying all over her. “Oh, hi, my perfect girl. Look at you. I love you. I love you. You’re the best thing that’s ever happened in this world.”

Deaton chuckles fondly and steps back. “Well, we won’t have to worry about her self-esteem. I’ll go tell the pack their watch is ended.” He slips outside, and moments later a huge cheer rings out from the waiting room. Stiles just keeps staring at her. He lifts her hand, uncurls her little fist, and studies the perfectly formed miniature whorls on her fingers. He unwraps her and looks at all those freckles and moles; her chubby feet.

“She’s perfect,” a voice says, and Stiles twitches. He’s forgotten that Derek is in the room, and his first instinct is to curl away and protect his daughter. The man bending down next to him is a threat; an alpha.

Not his alpha.

The bond is broken.

For a second Stiles feels a terrible, yawning emptiness at the loss. But once his mind clears, it’s all right. Derek still smells good to him, sort of spicy and sharp and new; something he wants instead of something he needs. Besides, nothing could ever be bad in a world with his baby. “She is,” he says, unable to take his eyes off of his daughter.

“Can I…can I hold her?”

He doesn’t want to let go of his baby for as long as he lives, but he can hear the naked need in Derek’s voice, so he wordlessly turns and lets Derek lift her out of his arms. She whimpers, then relaxes as she instinctually recognizes Derek as family.

Derek’s face is a slack mask of awe and love as he takes her in. His hand cradles her head so, so gently, and he leans down to carefully press his lips to her forehead. “My cub,” he whispers. “Oh, I love you.”

He takes a moment with his daughter, then leans back down to return her to Stiles’s arms. He bends so he can study her over Stiles’s shoulder. She blinks at them, opens and closes her mouth for a second, and then shuts her eyes.

Stiles is a father now.

It’s the best hour of his life.

#

Deaton wants to keep Stiles at least overnight so he can monitor his lycadone levels. After taking about a half hour to enjoy their daughter together, Stiles and Derek let the visitors in to see.

The Sheriff cries big alligator tears as he holds his granddaughter. She puts up with it patiently for about two minutes, then joins him in crying, wriggling in his grasp until he reluctantly gives her back.

“She’s so beautiful,” he sniffs, taking the handkerchief Deaton has at the ready.

“Look what she can do.” Stiles moves this thumb over his daughter’s hand and grins when she grips it hard in her little fist. “Daddy’s strong girl!” he coos, pulling up his thumb so he can kiss her hand.
“Your mother is so proud of you right now.” John squeezes Stiles’s shoulder and raises his camera to snap a picture of the baby’s wrinkled, tear-stained, perfect face.


Derek, exhausted enough that the joke rankles, growls slightly.

“We might be going with a different name.” Stiles tilts her so they can see, not quite ready to give her over to someone who doesn’t smell like family.

“Oh, man.” Scott drops to his knees, eyes shining. “Stiles, she’s amazing. She’s a real baby!” He looks up at Kira, face bright with emotion. “Let’s have one.”

“Don’t tempt me.” Kira sighs happily and strokes the baby’s forehead with her thumb. “Congratulations. She’s absolutely perfect.”

The baby startles at the touch. Her hand starfishes in the air before it curls back into a fist. She lolls her head and shuts her eyes, resting against Stiles to sleep.

“We do actually need to pick a name,” Derek says softly once Scott and Kira are gone.

“I know. I think I have one.”

“Yeah?” Derek chuckles and snuggles in next to Stiles on the cot so he can watch the baby sleep. “What Disney princess did you settle on? Elsa or Belle?”

“I actually thought we could go non-Disney for her first name.” Stiles takes a breath, suddenly nervous. He feels like he’s known his daughter’s name since the moment she was born, and he hopes Derek agrees. “Mia. It means, ‘mine.’ And I don’t know about you, but that’s the first thing I think when I look at her.”

“Mia,” Derek repeats, smiling. He nods in satisfaction.

“But I have a Disney middle name. Ohana. Like from Lilo and Stitch. I know it’s unusual, but it means ‘family.’”

Derek is quiet for a moment. “So her name would basically be, ‘my family.’”

“Yeah.” Stiles chews his lip nervously. “What do you think?”

“I think it’s her name. I love it. Mia Ohana Stilinski.”

Stiles shakes his head. “Mia Ohana Hale.”

“Stiles, you did all the work. I want her to take your name.”

“And I want her to be a Hale.” Stiles puts a finger up to Derek’s lips to shush him. “Kate tried to end the Hale line. She failed. I want Mia to carry on that name, to honor all the Hales she never got a chance to meet.”

Derek considers this. “Stilinski-Hale,” he bargains eventually.

Stiles smiles. He meant everything he’d said to Derek, but he also likes the thought of his child having the name of her omega father. “Deal.”

“Mia Ohana Stilinski-Hale.” Derek rests his forehead against Stiles’s. “It’s perfect.”
Stiles breathes in the scent of Derek and the baby; his family. “So… do we want to just do the mating bite thing right now? It’s weird, not being bonded to you. I want it back.”

Derek shakes his head. “Oh, no, Stiles. We’re not just going to jump right back into the bond. We’re going to do this right. Starting now, I’m courting you.”

Stiles grins “Courting me?”

“Yeah.” Derek’s eyes light up as the baby stirs in Stiles’s arms. He reaches out to give her his finger to grasp, making his voice soft and sing-song. “I’m going to take you on dates and kiss you on the front porch and propose when you least expect it. Oh, yeah. I’m going to court your daddy, Mia. You think he’ll say yes?”

Mia yawns and makes a sucking sound with her mouth.

“Oh. Oh!” Stiles struggles to sit up, reaching for the ties on his hospital gown. “I think she’s hungry.” He flashes Derek a naughty grin as the gown falls forward. “If we’re courting, should I be showing you my tits this early?”

“No need to start playing by the rules now.”

Stiles lifts Mia up to his breast and after a few frustrating minutes she latches on and starts to suck. It’s an odd feeling, but like everything else today, it feels Stiles with a warm buzz of love. When she finishes he gives her to Derek to burp, and Derek pats her back, face alight with happiness. “Who’s Papa’s best girl?” he coos to his daughter.

“Maybe we should stay,” Stiles says. The words sort of fall out of him, completely unplanned.

Derek looks down at him. “Hm?”

“Maybe we shouldn’t go back to Beacon Hills.”

Mia whimpers and Derek tucks her a little tighter into his chest. “Why are you thinking that?”

“Kate’s still out there somewhere. And…I don’t even want to leave this room with her, let alone take her out into the big world. She’s safe here.”

Derek sighs and sits back down on the cot. “A part of me completely agrees with you. But…I honestly feel like leaving is the best thing we can do. Look at her. I want to give her everything. I don’t want her to feel like she’s something that has to be hidden away. I used to think that safety was more important than freedom, so I ran and I hid and that was all I had. But I know now that it means nothing without a home.”

“This could be a home,” Stiles admits softly. The decision is different now that he’s looking at it as a father. Safety or freedom. Surely there must be a way to give her both.

“It could be. But it doesn’t have to be. She needs more. Kate doesn’t have an army any more. She’s one person, against you and me and your father and the entire Beacon Hills police force. I don’t feel like I’m alone, waiting for the inevitable any more. If she comes back, she’ll get caught. Because I’m never, ever going to let her get close enough to hurt either of you.” Derek smiles down at Mia when she makes a sound. “That’s right, Mia,” he croons. “Papa will never let anything bad happen to his best girl.”

“Are you sure?”
“I’m sure. We’ll stay until she’s big enough to travel and we have everything in California settled. And then we’ll take our daughter home.”

Mia coos in happy agreement, and Stiles loses his heart all over again.

#

“And then we tuck right here, and there we go!” Stiles finishes putting on his daughter’s diaper and beams down at her. “We’re all clean and dry and happy!”

Mia kicks upwards and punches herself in the mouth with her fist.

“That’s not where your hand goes, silly!” Stiles pulls her hands away from her face and fits on a pair of mittens. “Here we are. Just until Daddy can cut your nails. We don’t want to scratch that pretty face, do we?”

Mia wrinkles her nose at him and whines at the feeling of the mittens.

“I swore I wasn’t going to baby-talk to her, but I can’t stop,” Stiles says to Deaton as he lifts Mia back into his arms.

“That’s completely natural. Babies like it when their parents talk in a high register. It’s instinctual—it links back to when female mothers were the only natural caregivers, so a high voice makes a baby feel safe.”

“Really?” Stiles sits back down with Mia and rocks her gently. “You like when Daddy talks like this, Mia-girl? Is this making you smile?”

Derek, who had left the room to drive the jeep over to the clinic, re-enters and shakes his head fondly at Stiles. “You sound absolutely ridiculous.”

“Come on, Derek, try it. Mia wants to hear Papa’s silly voice!”

Derek starts to roll his eyes, but Mia lets out the most adorable yawn and his expression changes mid-roll from lovingly exasperated to completely besotted. “Mia wants to hear Papa’s silly voice?” he coos, reaching out to tickle his daughter’s foot.

Stiles dies a thousand deaths at how adorable it is.

“Let’s get you home,” Derek sings to her, and helps Stiles stand.

They’ve been parents for approximately eighteen hours and a lifetime. They’ve already faced meconium, a refusal to latch, and a completely inexplicable and seemingly unending crying jag.

Stiles has only slept a few hours, but he feels wholly awake. Becoming a parent is like getting superpowers, a side effect of the endless depths of love flooding his system. Mia is such an attentive baby, looking around at the world with bright, interested eyes, needing her parents to help her navigate through. Derek and Stiles are both filled with a desire to show her everything, and “Mia, look!” is practically the new prefix of their every sentence.

“Mia, look!” Stiles says now as they walk her outside. “See the car? The car takes us home!”

Mia whimpers at the cold as they climb inside, then wails when Derek turns the key and the ignition roars to life.

“It’s okay! It’s a nice car. It just says hi to us in a loud voice.” Stiles hushes her, pressing her ear up
against his heartbeat to calm her down. “Look outside! See all the shops going by? Just wait until you get home! It’s your own little den. It smells just like Daddy and Papa. Papa has your bed all ready, and there’s lots of toys and blankies and a bird mobile just for you.”

“And your pack already stopped by to dust, so no sneezing for our girl,” Derek adds, reaching over to stroke her back. She’s wrapped in the Hale blanket, fetched by Erica and Boyd last night.

“Mia, look! We’re home!” Stiles holds his daughter up to see the house as Derek pulls to a stop. Mia stares, wide-eyed, and Stiles coos to her as he waits for Derek to come open the door. It’s bitingly cold outside and he clutches his daughter into his chest to protect her from the wind. The pack has the heat turned on and he sighs in relief when Derek shuts the front door behind them.

“Wellcome home, Mia,” Derek says, flicking on the light.

Stiles takes the stairs carefully. He walks into the nursery first, even though Mia won’t be sleeping here for a while. “This is your room, sweet pea. Look at the window!” He waltzes the baby over to that one tiny porthole window without protective bars. “We can look outside and wave to all our friends! See the birds?” He lifts her hand and waves it out the window. “Say, hi, birds!”

Mia stares out the window in slack-jawed fascination.

“But for now you sleep with Daddy and Papa.” He walks her into the bedroom, where Derek is already waiting. “Here we go. Sleepytime.”

He places her in the bassinet carefully, cooing reassuringly when her face screws up. “Don’t cry, sweetheart. Daddy and Papa are right here.”

Derek flicks the mobile so the birds bob. “Mia, look. Birds!”

Her eyes track their movements.

“Birds!” Derek repeats, giving it another spin.

Mia’s eyes shut and Stiles watches her relax into sleep.

“You must be exhausted too,” Derek murmurs, rubbing Stiles’s shoulder as they stand over their daughter.

“I could sleep.” Stiles frowns, seized by an unpleasant thought. “We’re still sharing the bed, right? That’s okay while we’re… courting?”

Derek nods seriously. “We’ll have to be right on call if Mia needs us, so I think it’s the smartest move.”

“Good. I’m not ready to give that much of you up.” Stiles returns his gaze to his sleeping child, but he feels Derek’s eyes on him and after a moment he looks up. “What is it?”

Derek shakes his head, a small smile on his face. “I just…I’m really glad it was you in Room 300.”

Stiles finds a little bit of love in his heart not claimed by Mia and steps into Derek’s embrace, for once just because he wants to and not because the bond draws him there. “Yeah.” He takes a breath, smelling his daughter’s father and his favorite spice and home. “Me, too.”

Chapter End Notes
You guys didn't REALLY think I was going to let Kate ruin baby Mia's birthday, did you? ; )
Next update coming Saturday, in which the boys learn how to be parents and enjoy courting each other, and a moment from the past happens all over again.
Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

Apologies for this going up a day late! It ended up longer than expected, and my weekend travel plans got wonky, and today is American father’s day, which seemed appropriate for this chapter :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Stiles never thought he’d criticize the endless omega classes he’d taken for not giving him enough information about babies, but in the first few weeks of Mia’s life he realizes they’d left out covering an entire species. Mia is a werewolf, and he has to learn on the job how that makes her different from her human peers. Deaton can supply some of the information for him—because of her enhanced senses, she’ll hit many developmental milestones early, though that also means she’ll be extra sensitive to irritants— but most of it he experiences first-hand.

Her instincts are fantastic. She learns within days to burrow into a warm chest when she wants milk, and she can root out Stiles’s nipple quickly, even through his shirt. When Derek is holding her and she gets hungry she sniffs into him, remembers that this smell isn’t a feeder, and loudly demands to be handed over to her daddy.

She’s very responsive to sound, and Derek and Stiles get into the habit of keeping up a constant patter of conversation to her. In response she develops a little vocabulary—snuffles, whines, coos, and a gurgling growl when she’s frustrated with lack of milk or a too-long changing. Derek thinks she’s already very well attuned to nature, given the way she loves when Stiles takes her over to the window in her nursery to wave hello to the birds. He can’t wait until winter is over and all the rest of the birds come home, filling up the woods for his daughter to see.

She also hates bath time, which Derek insists isn’t a werewolf trait, but Stiles has seen enough wet dogs in his life to recognize the similarities. She wails all the way through, but is the happiest girl in the world when Stiles dries her off in a fluffy towel and wraps her in her hooded terrycloth robe. Stiles gets his first reflex smile after a bath. She’s snuggled up in her robe, fist against her head, eyes closed and lips tugged upwards. He’s so in love with it that he can’t put her down for almost an hour.

It gets a little annoying, honestly, because they’re working on about four cumulative hours of sleep a day, and how can Derek be this cheerful?

“Are you on drugs?” Stiles asks, exhausted, after a five hour crying jag that hadn’t ended with the
sunrise. “Give me some.”

Derek shakes his head and bounces Mia gently. “No drugs. Just happy.”

“Too happy,” Stiles mutters, massaging his sore breasts and wondering if he has mastitis. Deaton’s already checked him twice and said no, but God, his tits hurt.

“No such thing.” Derek kisses Mia’s head when her sobs start to quiet, then waves Stiles over he can put his free hand on his breasts and take the pain. It’s an incredibly intimate gesture, but they do it so often it’s practically become rote. “After Kate, I never thought this was in the cards for me. She’s a miracle.” He beams down at his daughter, who’s snuggling against his chest, ready for sleep. “And look how much she loves us,” he says softly, as if he’s amazed that someone in the world trusts him so completely to sleep sound against his heartbeat. Stiles smiles, even with his head pounding, and follows Derek’s kiss with his own. “We love you too, Mia-oh-mya,” he says, and watches his baby’s face relax into blissful sleep. He can’t believe how big she’s getting; how quickly time flies. He can’t believe how happy he is, even when he’s miserable.

Mia’s pack is just as enamored with her as her parents, and they find all kinds of reasons to stop by and see her. John even extends his vacation time after the boys decide to stay in the Preserve at least until Mia’s finished teething—her fangs will break through her gums at the same time as her regular teeth, and they want an entire team of werewolves on standby to help take the pain. The rest of the pack are aware that their time with her is limited and they shower her and her parents with gifts and affection to make up for the years they’ll be apart.

One of the best gifts comes from Scott when Mia is five weeks old. He and Kira create an entire fake newspaper for the Preserve with Mia’s birth announcement, figuring it should be officially printed somewhere. They use one of the pictures taken by the Sheriff when Mia was first born and include a description that makes Mia out to be the eighth wonder of the world.

“We actually printed up a bunch and gave them to people around the Preserve,” Scott tells him. “Everyone’s super excited about there being a new baby here. Well, Adrian Harris was going on about how werewolves shouldn’t be mixing their blood with humans, but he’s a…what’s a baby-friendly word for douchebag?”

“Poopyhead,” Stiles supplies, reaching out to give Mia a little push in her baby rocker.

“He’s a poopyhead,” Scott tells the baby gravely. Mia, unconcerned with the poopyheads of the world, beams up at Scott with her brand-new smile. Scott groans and clutches his chest. “Your baby is killing me, man. Too cute for words. Every time I visit I have to pop two suppressants and go wolf out in the woods for a half hour so I don’t go home and beg Kira to let me knot her.”

“Your wolf is still that bad? Maybe Deaton should up your dosage.”

“Nah, I’m just naturally a feral beast.” Scott snaps his teeth at Mia, who looks frightened and tilts her head towards Stiles to see if she should be crying or not. “Oh, I almost forgot. I’m also supposed to give you this.” Scott pulls out a folded piece of paper and gives it to Stiles. “I’m not allowed to tell you who it’s from.”

Stiles opens it and reads: Do you like me? Check yes, no, or maybe. Love, your secret admirer.

He cracks up.

“Don’t ask me who sent it. I’m sworn to secrecy.”

“Hey, Derek!” Stiles calls into the kitchen. Derek appears at the doorway, smirking. “I just got a note
from a secret admirer. Can you believe it?”

“Just trying to give you the full courting experience.” Derek drops down on the floor with them and gives Mia a push. “So, yes, no, or maybe?”

“Told you you should have added chocolates,” Scott scolds. “Chocolates would have secured the yes.”

“I was going to say maybe, just to play it cool, but you did deal with the Mia-diarrhea thing last night, so a yes only seems fair.”

Derek holds up Mia’s hand so he can high-five himself with it. Jesus, Stiles has been rubbing off on him. “Excellent. Phase one of courtship complete.”

#

When Mia is around seven weeks old Derek takes her out on a Papa-Daughter walk around the woods, giving Stiles enough time for such luxuries as a real shower, a shave, and using the internet for something other than Google searching what does normal baby vomit look like. When he checks his email, he sees a week-old message from Braeden Sawyer: Call me, followed by her number.

His heart rises into his throat. He’s forgotten all about Derek’s appeal in the excitement surrounding Mia’s birth. She’d filed on January twenty-ninth, and Stiles realizes with surprise that that was Mia’s birthday.

He checks the time, converts to PST to make sure her office is open, and dials. A paralegal puts him on hold for a minute, and then a crisply professional voice picks up:

“Braeden Sawyer.”

“Hi, Ms. Sawyer. Stiles Stilinski, responding to your email?”

“Mr. Stilinski!” She sounds pleased to hear from him. “I was beginning to worry you didn’t get my message.”

“I’m sorry about that. I’ve been…” Stiles looks at his daughter’s bassinet and smiles. “Occupied. What can I do for you?”

“Well, I don’t like to send news like this over email, so I wanted to speak to you in person. The appellate court ruled on my motion to set aside Mr. Hale’s plea deal. They had me appear in court and make oral arguments. The state declined to present an opposition. It took a little longer than I expected because the court ended up addressing de novo whether or not prohibiting shifting was an unconstitutional cruel and usual punishment. They held that it was. Not only is Mr. Hale’s record clear, but the Eastern District of Washington will no longer prohibit a werewolf from shifting as part of a legal punishment.”

Stiles’s mouth hangs open. “He…he’s clear? It’s over?”

“It’s over.”

The door downstairs opens and closes and Stiles’s head shoots up. “He just walked in. If I put him on the phone, could you tell him that yourself?”

Braeden chuckles. “Of course.”
Stiles rushes the phone downstairs. Derek is in the kitchen, Mia strapped to his chest in the Babybjörn. He smiles at Stiles. “We have to tell Daddy about everything we saw,” he says to their daughter, gently taking off her knit hat and wiping a strand of drool off her chin. “Tell Daddy about the squirrels!”

“Derek. Phone.”

Derek frowns questioningly and takes it. “Hello?”

Mia kicks her legs, wanting out. She gurgles at Stiles and he maneuvers around Derek to pull her free while Derek talks excitedly into the phone. “I…you’re sure? Will that apply retroactively to all werewolves? Okay. Would you bring that to the circuit court? Right. No, sorry, I didn’t go to law school, so…oh, wow. I actually didn’t go to college, but…sure. No, thank you. You have no idea what you’ve done for me and my family. Thank you so much.”

“Congratulations,” Stiles says when Derek hangs up, and squashes all three of them into a family hug.

“She just saved so many werewolves,” Derek says in amazement. “Every single werewolf in the eastern district of Washington who was prohibited from shifting is allowed now. She thinks if she gets another case like mine that's denied at the district court level she could appeal it all the way up to one of the circuit courts, and if they deny her, the Supreme Court. Can you imagine?”

“Yes,” Stiles says, still pressed into his chest.

“Remember when you asked me what I might want to do with my life? I want to help other werewolves in the legal system. Instead of just telling them where they can run to, I want to help them stand their ground.” Derek looks shocked with himself once it’s out. “I mean, I know it’s not in the cards. But Ms. Sawyer was talking about how the legal system needs more werewolf advocates and...I don’t know.” He laughs self-consciously. “I got excited.”

“You should,” Stiles says simply.

“No. I can’t. I have to stay home and watch Mia while you get your degree. That’s the best solution for us.”

“I might have another one.” Stiles takes a breath and drums his fingers. He’s been working on a plan for their future for a while now, and he thinks he finally has the major pieces in order. “I’m still working some stuff out, but I think I might have a way to get us all what we want. Give me a day or two to see if it’s really all doable before I get your hopes up.”

Derek frames his face, eyes tender. “Stiles, I know three things about you. The first is that you’re an amazing father. The second is that you have terrible taste in music. And the third is that you can do absolutely anything if you set your mind to it.” He presses Stiles’s phone into his hand like a kiss. “You did something impossible already. You gave me my life back.”

Mia, realizing that nobody has given her any attention for three minutes and she doesn’t have to put up with that shit, screeches impatiently and strains towards Stiles’s chest to get her dinner.

“Remind me to step up your courtship,” Derek says, glowing with love as he watches Stiles feed their daughter.

The next morning a bouquet of roses are delivered to the front door, with the tag *from your secret admirer.*
“Roses are my favorite,” Stiles admits as he arranges them in a vase.

Derek sniffs contentedly, smelling the flowers and Stiles’s happiness. “I know.”

#

Mia is generally a cheerful baby, but they hit some sort of terrible two-month-old thing that results in a zombiefied Stiles and Derek tiptoeing around the house, just waiting for the next wail. They’ve been wide away through the hours of midnight to six a.m. for an entire week, and Mia’s cries are getting more and more screechy by the night.

“Something has to be wrong,” Stiles rasps, rocking his daughter back and forth with the ferventness of a man at prayer.

“Deaton said—”

“I know what Deaton said!” Stiles has called Deaton so many times the doctor has changed his outgoing voicemail message: Thank you for calling Alan Deaton. If you are anyone other than Stiles Stilinski, please press one now to go directly to the beep. Stiles, your baby is fine. This is perfectly normal. Please stop googling obscure baby diseases and call me during normal hours.

Derek picks up Mia’s stuffed frog and waves it at her. “Look, Mia! You want to cuddle with Froggy?”

Mia wails in Froggy’s face.

Stiles frantically brings up the Sesame Street videos they have bookmarked on Derek’s laptop. “Mia, look at Grover, sweetheart. Remember your friend Grover?”

Mia stares at him with such despair he wordlessly shuts the laptop and buries his head in his hands.

“That’s the end of the list,” he says woodenly. They’ve started a list of “Mia’s Favorite Things,” which is just a list of things that have at one point or another worked to stop Mia’s crying. (Last night, just as dawn had broken, Stiles had suggested, “Maybe it’s time we add whiskey to Mia’s Favorite Things list,” then laughed so hard he cried. Derek and Mia had put him in time-out.)

“Give her here.” Derek snuggles Mia, then thumbs through his iPod. They’ve already tried her favorite songs—mainly fast-paced Disney ones—and Stiles waits resignedly to hear “I Just Can’t Wait to be King” again.

Instead one of Derek’s jazzy old songs starts playing and Derek shifts Mia in his arms. “Let’s dance this out,” he says.

“Der, waving her around is only going to make it worse.”

“Nope, no way can this get any worse.” Derek shrugs down at Mia. “A papa’s got to teach his best girl how to dance sometime.”

He starts to bop around the room with her. At first Mia only screams louder, as if she’s annoyed her papa isn’t taking her tears seriously, but when Derek just keeps dancing her sobs start to relax into soft keens, then sniffles, then tiny whimpers.

Stiles almost collapses to the ground in relief. “You’re a miracle worker. I owe you. I’ll give you anything except my firstborn child.”

“Score one for groovy tunes!” Derek croons to Mia, tickling his fingers over her belly.
In response she lets out a feather-light giggle.

Stiles’s jaw drops. “Did you just make her laugh?”

“I think I did.” Derek tries another tickle and the giggle comes again.

Stiles dashes over and looks down into the face of a suddenly angelic infant. “I’ve been making silly faces at you for weeks, Mia-mine! And you give your first laugh to Papa?”

“Papa is a hoot,” Derek says haughtily, and tries a funny face at her.

She shrieks and kicks her legs for more.

Stiles tries his funniest face and vows silently that if she starts crying again he’s moving out.

She almost chokes on her laughter and he melts in relief. “Daddy’s still got it,” he says, and crosses his eyes at her.

Mia laughs all the way up the stairs and won’t stop grabbing at Derek’s shirt when they try to put her in her bassinet. “All right, silly girl,” Stiles says, tucking the Hale blanket around her. “Joke’s over.”

Her giggles fade, then begin again as Stiles straightens up.

“Okay, Mia, now you’re just being a creeper.”

Her fists pump up and down, face red with exertion. Derek and Stiles exchange bewildered looks. “Should we call Deaton?” Stiles asks.

“And tell him our baby is laughing too much? At five in the morning? He’ll murder us.”

As if she understands him, Mia lets out a screech of joy and keeps it up.

“What the heck are we supposed to do?”

Derek shrugs. “If you can’t beat ‘em…” he says, and grabs Stiles around the waist, tickling him until he’s as breathless as his daughter.

#

Once she discovers laughter Mia is the most cheerful baby the world has ever seen. Her bad mood flies away like it was an outfit she’d tried on for a while and decided she didn’t like, and she dives back into exploring life with gusto.

Stiles is in the living room with her engaging in some tummy time when Derek comes in and sits down with them. “I’m taking you on a date tonight,” he says.

Stiles grins and snaps his fingers up by his face so Mia will crane her head to look at him. “A date? But this little lady already has my dance card all filled up.”

“I got your dad to babysit. He wanted some quality Mia-time since he’s going back to California tomorrow.” Derek waves Froggy at Mia so she’ll stretch her neck the other way.

“Well, who am I to deprive him of Mia-time? I assume you’re taking me to the finest and only restaurant in the Preserve.”

“Actually, Erica’s turning her and Boyd’s place into an upscale dining establishment. Only the finest
“Can’t wait,” Stiles leans down and pretends Mia is talking to him. “But Mia says you should shave your beard if you want to look your best.”

Derek widens his eyes at her in mock betrayal. “No, Mia! Papa’s beard makes him look so ruggedly handsome!” He lifts her and rubs her cheek against his stubble, making her shriek with laughter.

“Derek, we are trying to have tummy time here!”

“Tummy time!” Derek crows to Mia, blowing a raspberry on her belly.

Stiles stands at the top of the staircase and smiles at the sight below. Derek is wearing a suit jacket and tie, beard trimmed to a fine, manly stubble. He blinks up the stairs at Stiles and grins. “You clean up nice,” he says.

Stiles smooths his shirt down. He’s lost just about all of his pregnancy weight. The birth canal, stitched up by Deaton, only lingers in a scar, like a perforation reminding his body where to slit if he’s pregnant again. The only lingering modification are his breasts, but since his upper chest is thick he doesn’t look like a woman. He just looks fertile. It’s sort of sexy.

The Sheriff steps out of the living room, Mia in his arms. “Okay, Mr. Hale. His curfew is ten.” He bends his ear towards Mia, then nods. “Mia says eleven is okay, but no funny business, or she’ll beat you up.”

Stiles rolls his eyes, unable to hide a grin. He’s never brought an alpha home to meet his dad in his life, and he’s glad the Sheriff finally gets to live that fantasy. “We’ll be back in three hours.” He presses his lips to Mia’s forehead. “Be good, sweet pea.”

“Don’t get any bigger while we’re gone.” Derek gives her a big smooch on the cheek to hear her giggle, then takes Stiles’s hand.

When the door closes behind them they look at each other and swallow. “Three hours,” Stiles says bravely.

“It’s not like she’s never gone three hours without us holding her. We’ve slept longer than that.”

“And my dad will call if anything happens.”

“I thought she’d cry when we left. I don’t think she understands that we’ll be gone for a while.” Derek looks towards the door almost longingly, as if he expects to hear a sudden piercing wail summoning him back inside.

“Let’s just do this.” Stiles offers Derek his arm, and Derek nods, takes it, and leads him to the car.

“Welcome to Chez Boydareyes. Table for two?”

“The finest you have,” Derek tells Liam importantly, offering him a five dollar tip.

Stiles has to bite his lip to keep from laughing. Boyd and Erica’s den has been transformed into a wonderfully fancy restaurant, with a single table set up just for them. Liam leads them to their seats, where Erica takes over, handing them a single printed sheet of paper.
“Welcome, lovebirds. I assume you’re here for the Chef Special? We begin with a fine ginger ale, start you off with a small house salad, poached salmon with truffles as your entre, and Lovers Delight for dessert. All our ingredients have been specially driven in from the nearest Costco.”

“I’d like more information on the Lovers Delight,” Stiles says.

Erica looks down at him disparagingly from her three-inch platform heals, obviously what she thinks the finest waiters wear. “It’s the new Ben & Jerrys flavor. It’s just ice cream. It’s got candy hearts in it.” She scowls. “Look, the salmon is obviously what we spent the most time on. Have you ever tried to make truffles?!"

“It sounds amazing.” Stiles hands over the “menu” and Erica totters away.

“So,” Derek says as one of the triplets runs out to give them their ginger ale. “Tell me about yourself.”

“Well, I’ll be nineteen in three weeks, my hobbies include childcare, wolf taming, and hiding from hunters, and my recent accomplishments include learning all the words to “Under the Sea” from The Little Mermaid.”

Derek raises an eyebrow, duly impressed. “Even the fast part?”

“The newt play the flute, the carp play the harp, the plaice play the bass and they soundin’ sharp, the bass play the brass, the chub play the tub, the fluke is the duke of soul!”

“Wow. You really are mating material.”

Stiles grins and gulps his ginger ale like wine. “But my favorite lyric is this one.” He leans in and sings softly: “Darling, it’s better down where it’s wetter, take it from me…”

Derek chokes on his drink. “This is a first date, Stiles!”

“I’m a modern omega.”

It might be because he’s child-free for the first time in three months—and, technically, almost a year—but he feels downright frisky. He starts playing footsie with Derek after the salad course arrives. When the entire pack, looking proud, exhausted, and food-splattered, carries out the salmon, Stiles keeps finding ways to work in words like *orgasmic* and *sinful* and *throbbing*, which is no easy task considering he’s talking about fish. By the time the ice creams comes he’s devolved to making little sex sounds as he eats it, enjoying the naked lust written on Derek’s face.

“If you keep this up, we’re going to be gone from Mia for a lot longer than three hours,” Derek says as the waitstaff clears their bowls.

“I just think maybe it’s time to move this courtship along. Give our bed a workout, if you get my drift.”

“Soon,” Derek promises. “But I want all of this to be special. I wanted our first date, and our first time, and the first *I love you*, to be occasions, not just…expected, because we have a daughter, and we were bonded. Do you know what I mean?”

Stiles does. At least, he *thinks* he does. A part of him just wants Derek to be his. He wants to know that Derek loves him. He’s never been good at waiting; he ends up letting little doubts crawl in and crowd his mind, and if Derek waits much longer he’s afraid he’ll end up crying to Scott that Derek clearly doesn’t really love him and just feels sorry for him.
But he knows that so much of this is for Derek, who did go too fast once before, and is making up for his own lost experiences. So he pulls his foot away, reaches for Derek’s hand, and says, “I at least get the traditional first-date kiss on the porch, right?”

Derek grins.

They pay the bill with a generous tip for all involved and drive home to their daughter. Derek parks, then looks at the house. “No porch,” he says regretfully.

“Should we…steam up the windows?”

“Yes,” Derek says, and leans across the seats so quickly Stiles is still grinning when Derek kisses him. His lips relax into the kiss almost immediately, eyes falling shut with bliss, before Derek pulls away.

“Thank you very much for this first date, Mr. Stilinski,” Derek says, reaching out to straighten Stiles’s collar. “Now let’s get back to our baby.”

When they open the front door they’re greeted with an ear-piercing screech and a harried-looking John.

“She was fine until I tried to feed her,” the Sheriff explains, handing her into Stiles’s arms with relief. Mia looks right into Stiles’s eyes and wails. He tried to give me a bottle! her eyes scream. A bottle!? What is this fuckery?

“Oh, you poor girl.” Stiles hushes her, hiding a grin. “Daddy and Papa won’t ever leave you again. Not even when you’re eighteen and you want us to.”

She smells his milk and is mollified enough to settle down, even giving John a gummy smile when he tickles her foot to see if she still loves him.

“I’m gonna miss this kid,” John says sadly. “You better come home after she’s done teething. I don’t want to hear that you changed your mind and you’ll be along in a year or two.”

Stiles is going to miss his father, so much. “We’ll come home soon. I promise.”

“You better,” John grumbles, then looks at him as though suddenly stricken by a terrible feeling. “You better,” he repeats, and grips Stiles and Mia in a tight goodbye hug.

#

The next full moon falls on Stiles’s birthday, and they decide it’s warm enough and Mia is big enough to take her out into the woods for an hour or so. She’s happily attentive as they walk to the clearing, and she squeals in delight when a bird takes flight out of a tree right next to them. “Uh uh ah!” she says to Stiles.

“Uh uh ah!” Stiles parrots. Now that she’s getting more vocal it’s important to make her feel like her contributions to the conversation are appreciated.

He settles down with his baby girl in his arms against his usual tree, taking out a toy to distract her while the werewolves strip down. Scott is the first to shift, as always, and Kira is right behind him. They roll on the ground together, making Stiles smile; their mating ceremony is a month away and Scott is counting the minutes.

Derek takes his time. He doesn’t leap into his shift as he normally does, but stretches into the form
slowly, as though relishing that he’s still allowed. Stiles can’t take his eyes away from Derek as he straightens into the majestic form that still takes Stiles’s breath away. He looks to his family and begins to trot towards them slowly.

“Look, Mia,” Stiles says softly, nudging her towards Derek.

She looks and her eyes and mouth form wide O’s as she watches him approach. Derek halts before them, then carefully bends his head down to her, looking like a knight paying fealty to his queen.

Stiles holds his breath and waits for her to cry.

Instead she reaches up to Derek, face still slack with amazement. Her hand-eye coordination is getting better by the day, and it only takes her two tries before her hand lands right on Derek’s nose. Derek closes his eyes and lets her explore all over his snout. “UuhhAH!” she says excitedly.

“That’s right, Mia.” Stiles kisses the top of her head. “That’s Papa. Isn’t he amazing?”

Derek looks fondly at him, then curls up over his legs, obviously preferring cuddle-time with his family to pack playtime. Stiles lifts Mia and puts her on her belly on Derek’s back, his hand on her to make sure she doesn’t fall. Mia grips Derek’s fur tightly and squeals.

“You’ll be just like him someday,” Stiles tells her, imagining his daughter running with Derek in wolf form. It makes a lump come to his throat and he swallows before continuing: “And Daddy will always be right here watching.”

#

The next day Derek has to go on his first supply run since Mia’s birth, and he’s a little pouty at the thought of being gone from his daughter all day. “Papa has to go for a drive, but he’ll be back soon,” he croons to her as the time to leave approaches. “What present should Papa bring back for his best girl, hmm? He could bring her back a toy or a new dress or a pony…” he tickles her on each accentuated word, making her squeal.

“Ooh,” Stiles says, coming over to join them. “Don’t let that pony opportunity pass you up, Mia-mine.”

“Ponies for everyone!” Derek declares, blowing a raspberry on Mia’s tummy.

It takes several rounds of kisses and cuddles before Derek is finally ready to leave. Stiles waves Mia’s chubby little hand at him as he walks to the car, then shows Mia how to blow a movie-star goodbye kiss. “Mwah!” he calls, pulling Mia’s hand away from her mouth and blowing the kiss towards Derek.

Derek pretends to catch it, blows one back, then gets in the car and drives off.

Stiles puts Mia in her Babybjörn and pulls out Derek’s laptop to get some work done. His and Derek’s plan for the future has been moving along nicely, but he has a ton of emails to respond to, and he spends several hours getting work done, talking to Mia through it all while she kicks her feet happily at the sound of his voice. He must be getting used to the Maine weather, because the early May air suddenly seems too warm for him, and he has to keep turning the air conditioner up.

Around two o’clock he yawns and stands to go put Mia in her crib upstairs for a nap. They’ve been using the crib for daytime naps as a way of transitioning her out of their bedroom, but Stiles doesn’t think he’ll ever be ready for her to spend the night more than five feet from him. “Beddy-bye time,” he says as he dresses Mia in her PJs, then wraps her in the Hale blanket and puts her in the crib.
Mia, in a sunny mood after her morning of snuggles, beams up at him. “Ah ah!” she coos.

“Ah ah!” he repeats, beaming right back. She grabs his finger and tugs, begging for more cuddles, and he kisses her forehead before gently freeing himself. He catches a yawn from her and goes to sit in the rocking chair, deciding to stay for just a minute until she’s asleep.

As soon as he sits down he feels so tired that he can’t resist his eyes slotting closed. His body is so heavy he can’t even rouse himself, and within moments he’s fast asleep.

#

When he wakes up he’s shocked to see the sun setting through Mia’s tiny window. He must have been asleep for almost five hours— why hadn’t Mia cried to wake him?

Suddenly terrified, he dashes over to the crib and sags in relief when he sees Mia’s chest rise and fall as she slumbers on.

“Come here, sweet girl,” he says softly, reaching in to pick her up. Mia screws her eyes shut and whines, clinging to her blankie, sunny mood gone as she returns to consciousness.

“Oh, I know, princess, I know, but you won’t sleep a wink tonight if I let your nap go any longer.” Stiles rocks her against his chest and hushes her. “Oh, boy, we sure were sleepyheads, weren’t we? We can’t let Papa know Daddy was such a lazy bum today.”

Mia sucks on his shirt as if to say, you’re on your own, buddy.

“No snitching on Daddy, Mia-oh-mya.” Stiles pulls his shirt away, kissing the top of her head in consolation when she complains. “You want dinner, sweet pea? Daddy left the nursing pillow downstairs. Let’s get my hungry girl fed.”

When he opens the door to the nursery— which is weird; he doesn’t remember shutting it— a strong smell hits him, making him cough in surprise.

“Yuck! What is that? That’s poo-tinky!”

Mia grizzles in agreement, pushing her nose into his collarbone to escape the smell.

“That’s…yeah, that’s really not good.” Stiles frowns. It smells like gas, and he knows he needs to investigate. He doesn’t relish taking Mia any closer to the source, but if it is a gas leak and he has to get them out of the house he doesn’t want to have to come back upstairs for her. There’s a beeping sound from downstairs and his frown deepens. “Let’s go see, okay?”

He walks down the stairs, humming comfortingly to Mia, keeping his eyes on her as she continues to whimper at the scent. He looks up when he reaches the bottom, realizing that the house seems darker than it should be.

He takes it all in at once:

The house is dark because the protective bars are down over the windows. That was the beeping he’d heard: the bars and door locks being engaged.

The smell is coming from an oily liquid coating the front hall and the living room. It’s soaking the drapes and couches, splashed so liberally there’s a shimmer in the air around it.

Gasoline.
The only light source is coming from the open side door. Kate Argent is standing there, clutching a rolled-up paper tightly. It’s the newspaper Scott and Kira had made for Mia, and the tip has been set on fire. It burns like a torch, illumining the image of his daughter.

He stares at Kate, and remembers what he’d said to Derek when Mia was born:

*I want her to be a Hale.*

And Kate’s cruel, triumphant voice, as if calling in response:

*Hales die by fire, that’s the rule.*

“No,” he begs, locking eyes with her, separated from the door by five feet of gas-soaked carpet. Not like this. Not another Hale child dead before they could even write their name on the blanket; not another Hale house fire leaving Derek the shattered survivor. Not Mia. Let the house burn, let him burn, let the world burn… but not his daughter. “Please, no.”

Kate stares back at him, eyes blank. She lifts the rolled newspaper and looks down at the picture of Mia’s scrunched newborn face, just starting to blacken from the flame. She smiles.

And then she throws it.

Chapter End Notes

I'm not a COMPLETE monster. Next chapter will be up soon, in which Derek watches his worst nightmare come to life.
Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

I love you all so much for your continued support of this story...even though I have a suspicion some of you created voodoo dolls of me after that last cliffhanger. Brief content warning: because this picks up right after the last chapter, a young child (and her father) is in serious peril for the majority of this chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

After the Hale house had burned, Beacon Hills Elementary introduced a new fire safety course. Firefighters came in to lecture on the importance of smoke alarms and the proper procedure of a stop, drop, and roll. The classrooms that were now short a Hale child were grimly attentive during these lessons, but for most the instructions were nothing more than surprisingly boring recess replacement. After a few months the firefighters stopped coming and that brief period of panic was forgotten. The Hale dead were buried, and the survivors fled, and lighting wasn’t going to strike twice in a place like Beacon Hills.

But now, as Stiles cowers against the stairs with his daughter in his arms, he would have given his life for one more class, if that class would have told him what he needed to save his child. The floor in front of him had ignited as soon as Kate had thrown the flame, cutting him off from the door. The living room is already an inferno. Kate had slammed the door shut behind her almost before the torch had fallen, and he sees the lock glowing red to indicate the door won’t open again.

He shuts his eyes and tried to remember what the firemen had said, but all he can remember is the lesson most often repeated: find your parents. They’ll get you out.

Stiles is the parent now.

He can see the keypad near the entrance to the kitchen. There’s a break in the wall of fire—Kate hadn’t doused the kitchen, since there isn’t much in there to burn. He thinks he can make it, but the locks and bars can’t be disengaged for twenty minutes, and Mia will be dead by then. Still—a plan starts to form. He could unlock the cellar. They can hide down there until the fire has burned itself out.

He pulls the Hale blanket over Mia’s head to protect her little lungs, holds her as tightly as he can, and darts for the keypad. The floor burns the soles of his feet and he can hear Mia crying at the heat and the smoke, but he makes it. He presses the button for the cellar and hears a long, drawn-out whine.

The cellar is locked.

Somehow Kate had gotten down there and locked it from the inside.

How had she known?

Fire bears down on him and he stumbles into the kitchen, gasping for air. There are windows in here. He can smash out the glass around the bars and hold Mia up to them, so she can breathe through. Should he soak the blanket in the sink so it won’t catch fire, or will that do more harm than good? He
doesn’t know what the right decision is, and the wrong one will kill his daughter.

“It’s okay,” he rasps to Mia as she continues to wail. “Daddy’s got you.”

He wraps his left arm around her as tightly as he can and frantically searches for something strong with the other. He finds a meat tenderizer and smashes it into the window, hushing Mia when she screeches at the noise. Cool air comes through the shattered glass like the world’s sweetest kiss.

There’s a dark, glittering powder on the bars and he stares, hardly able to believe it. He knows what this is: spent hours studying it with Deaton while he was still pregnant, to protect the baby still inside of him.

She’s coated the fucking bars with powdered wolfsbane.

He feels even more terror twist at his belly. If wolfsbane is burning in the air, Mia will die very soon. He pulls the Hale blanket as far over her head as he can, but he knows that won’t protect her for long.

He doesn’t know what to do. He has nowhere to run and no way to get his daughter out.

Then, through the window, he sees headlights. Seconds later there’s a roar of terror and fury, and he sees Derek, illuminated by the flames, running for the house as fast he can. Scott and the triplets, his supply run partners, are right behind him.

“Derek!” Stiles screams, afraid Derek won’t hear him over the roar of the fire. Some tiny sprig of luck is still on his side and Derek sees him at the window and comes running. “Papa’s here,” Stiles almost sobs to Mia. “Papa’s here for you.”

Derek puts his hand around the bars and pulls, even though Stiles can see the wolfsbane blistering his skin. He howls in fury when they don’t give way and he disappears for a precious minute, trying to break down the kitchen door, before he returns to try the bars one more time. Outside Scott and the triplets are trying the other doors, and more people are arriving, alerted by the smoke, shouting about bringing buckets and hoses and sandbags and anything that might help, but all Stiles can see is Derek. He won’t stop tugging at the bars, face red with exertion and the heat. His eyes flicker around, frantically searching for some way to save his family, but he comes to the same conclusion as Stiles.

There’s nothing.

The look in his eyes when he realizes it is the worst thing Stiles has ever seen, and he knows, by that look alone, that he’s going to die with his baby in his arms. He can hear Mia crying under the blanket — not her angry screams, or impatient howling, but a keening weeping that he’s never heard from her before, as if she knows Daddy can’t fix this.

Not his daughter. Not his daughter. He shakes in terror when he hears her crying interrupted by a tiny, weak cough. They don’t have long before she won’t be able to breathe.

“No,” Derek says. He rattles the bars again, pulls with all the strength in his body. “Please,” he cries to nobody. “Please. Not my family.”

Stiles knows he will stay until the end, until he has watched their bodies burn to ash and there is nothing left. He will stay at these bars, still trying to find a way in, not so he can save them but so he can die too. This moment, watching the people he loves die and being unable to help, is not a moment Derek Hale can live through again.
Mia coughs again and lets out the softest whimper into Stiles’s shoulder; the sound of a child who
doesn’t want to go to sleep but can’t resist any more.

“Derek,” he moans against the bars. He doesn’t even have anything more to say. There are no words
for this. Derek reaches for his hand and they grasp hold of each other through the bars.

The bars.

Maybe Kate hadn’t thought of everything.

Stiles pulls his hand away. “Go to the back of the house,” he shouts. “Under the nursery.”

Derek doesn’t hesitate. Stiles takes a deep breath and turns, studying the fire. It’s growing by the
second, licking at the ceiling, and the gap he used to get from the stairs to the kitchen is almost gone.
To get back to the stairs, he’ll almost certainly be burned.

This is going to hurt.

He curls over Mia and runs.

It feels like being in the belly of a dragon. He can hardly see for the smoke, and twice his pant leg
catches on fire and he has to stomp it out. He’s sure he leaves half the skin of his soles behind.

But when he jumps onto the first step he almost whoops with triumph. Each step up makes the air a
little clearer, and by the time he reaches the nursery he can think again.

There are no bars on the window in Mia’s nursery. It’s simple glass, so beautifully breakable. Stiles
puts Mia down on the changing table and grabs her baby rocker. He rams the window with it: once,
twice, and the glass gives way on the third.

He pokes his head out and sees Derek waiting below, staring up at him with a steely, sick
expression, obviously understanding what he’s going to do. He raises his arms and nods.

It’s a twelve foot drop, at least. Just the thought of it makes Stiles want to scream. It goes against
every instinct in his body.

But if he doesn’t, Mia will die.

He picks up his daughter and wraps her tightly in the Hale blanket, her superhero cape, the only bit
of protection he can give her. She stares up at him, tear-soaked and confused but breathing a little
easier now that they’re away from the wolfsbane. When he kisses her forehead she tries to nuzzle
against his chest. A sob rises inside of him. She’s so little, so innocent. She just wants this to be over.
She just wants Daddy to make this better.

He wipes away her tears and kisses her again. Daddy will make this better. That’s his job.

But he needs a minute. Just a minute. He looks down at this child who had slept under his heart and
kicked against the world of his womb and unlocked chambers in his soul he never would have
known without her smile. He will not let her die. She’s going to grow old and have children of her
own and run through the woods with her Papa, the proudest, most beautiful wolf the world has ever
seen.

Trembling, forcing himself to think of the wolf she will become, he holds her out the window,
putting his hand over her head to protect it from the jagged remains of the glass.
Her eyes go wide, he thinks with fear, and then she looks right at him and her face breaks into a delighted smile. She has no idea. She thinks it’s all a game. She thinks Daddy is just letting her out to fly with her bird friends. She squeals and wriggles, so that he might have dropped her if he didn’t have such a death grip on her.

He can’t do it. His hands just won’t open.

He hears the floor groan under him and he closes his eyes and remembers the day she was born. When he opens them again, he’s ready. He stares into Mia’s eyes, too young to know terror, and prays that if by some miracle she remembers him it will be the warmth of his arms or a snippet of a lullaby or a single bright snapshot of his smile.

Not this.

“I love you,” he tells her. “You are my whole heart.”

She beams at him, and he does the hardest thing he’s ever done in his life.

He lets go.

The moment when she falls is one of sheer, utter agony. He can’t breathe or look away or even think, and it seems to go on for an eternity. He stays rooted to the floor, eyes unblinkingly staring until he sees her land safely in Derek’s arms and hears her wail of fury that she hadn’t flown after all.

His knees give out with relief.

No Hales will die tonight.

“Stiles!” Derek shouts. “Jump!”

Stiles shakes his head. The window was only large enough for his arms. His shoulders won’t fit though. He’d known as soon as he entered the nursery that it was only going to be Mia’s way out.

He doesn’t regret it. He knows he’s out of time now, but that’s all right. This sacrifice is what was meant to be. He would trade his own life a thousand times over for his daughter’s.

He allows himself one last look at the loves of his short life, safe on the cool grass below, and then he steps away from the window.

The ground moans under him again, making him shudder. Soon the second floor will collapse, sending everything into the inferno below. No matter how this happens, it’s going to be bad, but he can’t go that way. A man should have the right to choose how he dies and the thought of falling into a pit of fire like being sent straight into hell is not how he wants to go.

He makes his way back towards the stairs, pausing only to grab Froggy from Mia’s crib. He cradles the toy in his arms like his baby, needing that bit of comfort; that reminder of why his sacrifice matters.

The stairs are much smokier now and his vision goes grey by the time he reaches the bottom. He stumbles back into the kitchen, feeling the fire bite at his clothes and skin. The kitchen is filled with smoke. He’ll lie on the floor and breathe it in and be gone before the flames consume him.

He collapses onto the ground. He thinks of Mia’s smile. Mia’s laugh. Mia’s dark eyelashes. Derek’s lips. Scott’s smirk. His father’s embrace. Derek’s warmth. Mia’s squeal. He thinks of his mother and the way she has been defined in his life by her death.
And oh God he doesn’t want to die he doesn’t want to die he doesn’t want to die. He wants to be Mia’s daddy for years and years; he wants to be Derek’s mate; he wants to see Scott and Kira’s mating ceremony. He starts to sob on the floor, tears dripping to the ground like a taunt to the flames. There is so much sorrow in his body he thinks he might be able to cry an entire flood to douse the fire, if he just had enough time.

He tries to take another breath and finds that the air is gone.

There’s a very faraway cracking and he realizes dimly that the second floor must be falling. He wants to cover his head with his hands but he can’t move them at all. He hears a roar and wonders if Derek has just heard his heartbeat stop.

It’s over.

For the second time, he lets go, and this time is easier.

Dying is like strong arms scooping him up and rushing him away. It feels like a sudden gift of cool air on his skin and wet grass under him, and then an awful pain in his chest and lips on his and warm air being forced into his bruised lungs. It sounds like Derek shouting his name from very far away, begging him to open his eyes. “I love you,” Derek tells him, voice getting louder and louder. “Open your eyes, Stiles. Please, Stiles, I love you, I love you. I should have said it before. Come back. Please, Stiles, please, please.”

Derek sounds so sad and scared. This isn’t how it should be. He’d rather death was oblivion than this torture.

“Please, Stiles. Come back. Come back to me.”

It’s almost enough to make him think he isn’t really dead, but pain is slowly disappearing from his body, so this must just be some final hallucination.

“OPEN YOUR EYES!” Derek screams in his ear, and it’s so loud and desperate and bossy that Stiles does.

He can see the sky. He forgets how much more beautiful the sky is in Maine than California. It’s a whole galaxy of stars, and the moon is still almost completely full. He smiles at it, and then Derek’s face is in his line of vision.

“How? Can you hear me?”

Scott’s head appears too. Both he and Derek are streaked with soot.

Stiles painfully turns his head and sees the house. It’s an inferno, and he can see a gaping hole in the side just by the front door, big enough for two werewolves.

Holy shit. Derek and Scott had busted in through the wall.

Derek’s hands pet him frantically, taking away pain anywhere he sees a burn. “Stiles, can you talk? Can you tell me if you’re okay?”

Stiles blinks at them. He can’t fucking believe they’d broken down the wall. They were lucky they hadn’t brought the entire house down on top of them. Derek must have known that was possible; must have been desperate enough to choose the possibility of causing Stiles’s death immediately over leaving him in there to burn alone.
Just as he thinks that, the house creaks and collapses, sending sparks high up into the sky.

“Fuck, here, here.” Scott fumbles by his side, and seconds later he straps something over Stiles’s mouth, making him twitch. He Breaths a little easier, but it’s not as good as the night air, so Stiles takes a few deep breaths just to be polite and then tugs the oxygen mask back off. He looks at Scott and tries to grin. “Oh yeah,” he croaks.

“What?” Derek strokes his forehead as if he’s looking for a lump. “Do you know what you’re saying? Do you know where you are?”

Scott puts a hand on Derek’s arm. “Oh yeah,” he says, looking shell-shocked. “The Kool-Aid man. Because we broke through the wall. Like in the commercial.” Scott swallows. “He’s talking about the fucking Kool-Aid man,” he repeats, and then he bursts into tears.

Stiles frowns at him, and then he remembers.

“Mia,” he says, trying to sit up. “Mia.”

“Shh, shh. She’s all right. Deaton has her.” Derek holds him back and hushes him, still trying to find pain to take. “He thinks she’s already healed any damage to her lungs. You got her out in time. You saved her.”

“Mia,” Stiles insists. The fear, the death, won’t go away until he has Mia again.

“Here,” a new voice says, and seconds later the warm weight of his child is in his arms. Mia grips his shirt and tries to scent him; wails when the smell of Daddy is polluted with smoke. Stiles holds her, too grateful to cry any more tears.

He can’t believe what a privilege it is to hold her, something he took for granted only an hour ago. He’ll get to put her to bed tonight. He’ll hear her first word. He’ll get to see if she presents as an alpha, beta, or omega. He gets to watch his daughter grow up, and now every moment with her is going to be a gift.

“Daddy loves you,” he says. The words scrape his throat painfully, but she needs to know. “Daddy loves you so much.” He looks up at Derek. “And you. I love you, Derek.”

Derek holds them both, shaking, staring at the burning tomb that had been their home. “I thought I was too late,” he whispers. “When I saw you on the floor, I couldn’t hear your heartbeat.” He shudders all over and clutches them even tighter. “I love you, Stiles. Don’t leave me.”

“I’m alive.” Stiles looks down at his daughter and marvels in it. “I’m not leaving. I’m alive.”

“We need to get Stiles to the clinic,” Deaton says. He pulls the oxygen mask back over Stiles’s mouth, eyes warning him not to take it off again.

“The fire.” It’s one of the triplet’s voices, sounding horrified. “If it spreads to the woods…”

“Stay. You and the volunteers can make sure that doesn’t happen.”

“It was Kate,” Stiles says behind the mask. He tugs it off, fighting Deaton’s hands, then pulls away from Derek and looks around at everyone frantically. He’s almost forgotten. “She was here. She did this.”

Scott’s jaw drops. “How did she get in?”
“I don’t know, but she’s probably still in the Preserve.”

Deaton’s phone is at his ear in a flash. “Get him into the car,” he orders tersely. Scott takes Mia and Derek gently lifts Stiles before carrying him into Deaton’s huge van, which doubles as the Preserve ambulance. It’s never had to be used before, but that must have been where Scott got the oxygen mask.

Deaton had gotten here almost impossibly quickly, and it makes Stiles think of something.

“Derek,” he whispers as Derek carries him into the back. “She knew too much. She knew you weren’t there. She knew exactly when to light the fire so you would have to watch the house burn. She knew about the window bars and the cellar.”

Derek stares down at him, stricken. They’re coming to the same conclusion, but neither of them want to say it. Derek helps him fit the mask back over his mouth, shaking his head slowly. “It can’t be,” he says softly.

Deaton looks in at them. “I just spoke to the guards. No one has entered or left the Preserve all day except the supply team. And I’ve seen the logs for the past three days. Nobody went in or out.”

“She must have found another way in,” Scott says, jiggling Mia as she keeps whimpering at the smell of smoke.

“There isn’t any other way in,” Derek says, before looking to Deaton. “Is there?”

For the first time ever, Deaton looks a little shamefaced. “Well…yes. Way out in the woods, at the outer perimeter. There’s a door cut into the fence in case we ever have to have a mass evacuation and we can’t leave by the front.”

“Do you have a camera there?”

“Yes, but it doesn’t record, like the front camera. I don’t have that kind of memory storage.” Deaton frowns. “But…that door can only be opened from the inside.”

Derek and Stiles stare at each other in mute horror, unable to deny it any longer.

Someone had helped Kate. Someone in the Preserve had wanted this to happen.

“You’re alive,” Derek says quietly. He puts a hand on Stiles’s chest and tries to draw out the pain from his lungs. “That’s what matters right now.” Still, his voice is flat and hard, the words not even close to convincing either of them.

Stiles shudders and turns to look out the window as Deaton starts the van. He can see his home still smoldering. People are running all around, trying to stop the fire before it can burn the trees. He wonders if it was one of them who let Kate in to kill him and Mia.

Why? Why would any werewolf try to help a werewolf killer?

There is no answer to that question so he just lets himself rest in Derek’s arms, watching the homes of the Preserve speed by through the window. Still, he’s terrified, even through his relief that he’s still alive.

Kate is here.

Someone is a traitor.
The Preserve is safe no more.

Chapter End Notes

Next update, featuring the reveal of the traitor, Derek angst, and Kate trying to out-evil herself, coming Saturday!
Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

Thank you all for your patience as I put together the chapter I've been lovingly referring to as "The One Where the Shit Goes Down."
Here...we...go!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Grabbing her basket, the mother followed the blackbird down the road, over the bridge, through the town, across the field, and deep into the woods to the witch’s hut. ‘Let me in!’ the mother called. ‘I want my children back!’ ‘You can’t come in,’ said the witch. ‘Your shoes are dirty.’ ‘Then I’ll take them off,’ the mother said, and so she did. ‘Let me in!’ the mother called. ‘I want my children back!’ ‘You can’t come in,’ said the witch. ‘Your socks are dirty.’ ‘Then I’ll take them off,’ the mother said, and so she did. ‘Let me in!’ the mother called. ‘I want my children back!’ ‘You still can’t come in,’ said the witch. ‘Your feet are dirty.’ ‘Then I’ll cut them off,’ the mother said, and she went away as if to do so. But instead the mother hid her legs behind her and crawled back to the witch’s door…”

Stiles listens as Derek reads to Mia from one of the children's books Deaton keeps stocked in the clinic. She’d endured her own checkup pretty well, and sat quietly while Deaton gave Stiles a horribly painful bronchoscopy, but she’s a little fussy now while Deaton treats Stiles's burns.

He doesn’t blame her. They’ve been here for hours already, and she’d had to drink a bottle for dinner, and she’s smart enough to sense that something is wrong, especially with the fear and anxiety pouring out of both her parents. Derek is only half-here, even as he reads to the baby. His thoughts are with Kate, and the burned house, and the way Stiles’s burns had been blistering and yellow when Derek had carried him into the clinic.

Stiles hadn’t realized how bad they were at first. He’d thought it was weird that his feet hadn’t really hurt, since they seemed to have gotten the worst of it. Then he saw his right foot, the way the burn was charred and black, and then waxy yellow like some horrific tallow. He understood then why it hadn’t hurt; dead things don’t feel pain. For a wild moment he thought Deaton would have to amputate it. Instead Deaton had held him down and promised he had salves that would slowly but surely fix him.

It’s a slow process, cleaning each burn, rubbing a minty ointment on every blister, and then carefully bandaging them. Stiles desperately wants to go home, but he knows there’s no home here anymore.

“Quick as a wink, the children turned back into themselves. They hugged and kissed their mother, then they hugged and kissed each other. Jumping to her feet, the mother cried, ‘I’ve got my children back. Now you’ll be sorry you ever took them.’ She chased the witch around the hut, out of the woods, across the field, through the town, and onto the field. And the witch jumped off the bridge and was never seen again.” Derek’s voice stops and for a minute the clinic is completely silent.

Then Deaton prods one of the blisters a little too hard and Stiles can’t stop from shouting in pain. Mia immediately starts to cry in response. “Shh, it's okay,” Derek says, voice shaking. “Daddy’s just getting his boo-boos fixed. Let’s read another story.”

Stiles bites his lip until the pain passes. “Daddy’s okay,” he calls to his daughter, smiling so she can
hear it in his voice.

Mia keeps crying, but a second later something diverts her attention and she squeals. Stiles hears her hand slapping the cover of the book Derek’s picked. “That’s right,” Derek says, sounding completely exhausted. “That’s your friend Grover. Smart girl.”

Deaton touches another blister and Stiles squeezes his eyes shut, forcing himself not to make a noise so he won’t alarm Mia again. He keeps his eyes closed, trying only to focus on Derek’s voice.

“The monster at the end of this book. What did that say? Did that say there will be a monster at the end of this book? It did? Oh, I am so scared of monsters!”

Stiles knows this book. Grover keeps begging the reader not to turn the pages and get to the end, where the monster is, and then on the last page it’s revealed that the monster was only ever Grover, after all.

He almost wants to tell Derek not to read that one. Grover isn’t a monster. Stiles knows it’s all for fun, but suddenly it seems heartbreaking, Grover begging and begging the reader not to take him to the monster, only to learn that he’s the monster he should be afraid of.

Someday Mia will be called a monster, and she won’t understand why. Or maybe she will. Stiles isn’t sure what would be worse.

“There we are.” Deaton pushes away from him, looking just as tired as Stiles feels. “Come here, Miss Mia. Your Daddy is good as new.”

Derek carries her over. She looks down at Stiles seriously, mouth hanging open a little as she takes him in. Derek looks downright stricken. The burns almost seem worse now that they’re wrapped, as if each one is mockingly waving a little flag at Derek.

Stiles tries a grin and circles his finger around his face. “At least she didn’t get the moneymaker,” he says.

“When I’m finished with her, she’ll beg for the mercy of fire,” Derek tells him, eyes flat with hatred.

Mia, looking worried, tries to stuff her entire fist into her mouth to remind everyone that she’s supposed to be the center of attention here.

“Give me that little daredevil.” Stiles struggles to sit up and rests Mia against his chest, reveling again that he’s still able to hold her. “You were the bravest girl today, Mia-mine. We might have to sleep out in the woods tonight, so I’m counting on you to protect Daddy from all those mean squirrels.”

“UhAH!” Mia shrieks.

Derek sits down next to him. “We have a place. Ethan and Aiden volunteered to let us stay with them. They used to live there with their whole family, but their parents left after Nathan died. It’s a big house. The pack is going to take turns standing guard.”

Stiles nods, relieved, but as he looks down at Mia he thinks of everything it takes to keep her alive and happy. “We lost everything,” he says. That hasn’t really sunk in until now. All their clothes, Mia’s diapers and crib and toys, that bird mobile Derek had lovingly spun for her every night…

“I know. But people are already donating for us. The pack is setting it all up. We’ll get by.”

Stiles nods and rests his head against Derek’s shoulder. “I can’t walk,” he says quietly, staring at his
bandaged foot.

“It’s okay. I’ve got you.” Derek picks him up, one hand guarding Mia so she isn’t jostled. He cradles Stiles to his chest and Stiles cradles Mia, thinking they must looks like living Russian nesting dolls.

“I’ll drive you,” Deaton says, opening the door for them.

Derek sits Stiles down in the ambulance and crawls in after him. He takes Mia back, smiling a little when she tries to suck his shirt. “I think she’s worried her favorite milk source is dried up,” he says.

“She’s been sucking on stuff a lot this week. I think it might almost be teething-time.”

“God help us,” Derek mutters, and his cell phone rings. “Damn it. What now?” He pulls it out with his free hand and puts it on speaker so he doesn’t have to juggle the baby. “Hello?”

“I finally got to light the match, Derek.”

Her voice is a whisper, almost wraith-like as it floats out of the speaker. Derek goes completely still, eyes unblinkingly fixed on the phone as if it’s really her in the car with them.

“I waited to call. I know you must be grieving. You wolves go nearly mad when your pup is killed, don’t you?” Kate waits for a response, but Derek is sitting petrified. She continues: “I can take that all away, puppy. All that grief, all that guilt…you don’t have to feel it. Come be my good boy again and you won’t have to feel anything but peace for as long as I let you live.”

Horror grips Stiles by the throat. If Kate is calling Derek, she has a Preserve phone, and she’s still within its walls. She could be right outside this car; waiting in their new home; stalking the halls of Scott and Kira’s den. She’s evidently out of the loop, since she seems to think Stiles and Mia are dead, but God only knows who her helper is…

“I saw him, you know. He came downstairs just before I lit the fire. He begged me not to. He was carrying your pup, that sweet little thing. I heard her starting to cry just before I locked them in. Your mate was so scared, Derek. You don’t want to remember that, do you? You don’t want to live with knowing how his skin blistered…how the baby went silent in his arms after choking on my poison…how he died blaming you…”

“Funny,” Stiles says, leaning forward to speak directly into the phone. “I don’t remember that part.”

The shocked silence on the other end is the most gratifying sound in the world.

“I’m afraid you’re as terrible a murderer as you are a human being, Kate. This is, what, the second time you couldn’t kill me and my baby?”

Kate recovers quickly. “You know what they say about third times.”

“You won’t get one,” Derek says. He reaches out for the phone and crushes it in his grip. “I’m going to find you. And I will make you suffer for this, until you’d trade the name Argent for a quick death.”

“It’s not death waiting for either of us, Derek. You’re my pet. You have been ever since I made you fuck me in that little cave. You just decided to run off and be a wild dog, and now you think you can avoid my punishment.” Kate laughs, a high, crazy sound. “Soon you’ll be back where you belong, and your little diversions will be rotting in the ground. I promise, I won’t let you remember how much you loved them.”
Derek ends the call. He breathes through his nose, bull-like, as he stares down at it, and Mia starts to whimper as his heartbeat elevates under her ear.

“Shh, shh.” Derek cradles her close and stares out the window. His expression is wiped clean of anything but hatred. “Papa will kill her,” he promises Mia, and Stiles shudders when the words actually make Mia quiet down.

#

Stiles had expected to be plagued by nightmares when he lays down in their new borrowed bed, but instead he tosses for what seems like hours, unable to sleep. It took a while, but his family finally nodded off. Mia had fussed a little at the strange crib, and even as he sleeps Derek has a hand draped over the side down to her, knowing she needs the extra comfort tonight.

Stiles just starts to feel his eyelids going heavy when he notices that Derek seems…stiff. When he looks over to see Derek’s face, illuminated by moonlight, it’s twisted into a grimace. His pulse races when Stiles checks his wrist. “Derek,” Stiles says, shaking him. “Wake up. You’re having a nightmare.”

Derek moans.

“You’re okay. Wake up.”

“No,” Derek says, “No no no.” He shouts in terror at the same time his eyes burst open, and Mia joins the party with a wail of displeasure. One of Derek’s hands shoots out and grips Stiles by the throat for half a second before Derek comes back to himself.

“Oh, fuck. Fuck. I’m so sorry.”

“That’s okay.” Stiles rubs his neck, ordering himself not to wince. Derek had grazed one of the burns on his shoulder and it’s aching like a bitch. “Sorry, I saw you…”

“Yeah.” Derek looks at him for a second, then turns to pull Mia out of her crib. “Sorry, sweetheart,” he mutters, voice sleep-roughened.

“She’s saying, hey, Papa, it’s my job to wake everyone up at two in the morning.” Stiles wishes they hadn’t stopped nighttime feedings; he’d like the comfort of his baby at his breast right now. “Are you okay?”

Derek nods. He rocks Mia until she’s back to sleep, then just sits with her in his arms for a while, lost in her peaceful face. “I wasn’t there when my house burned the first time,” he says eventually.

Stiles puts a hand on his back, knowing this is going to be bad.

“Uncle Peter took me and Laura on a camping trip, since we were the oldest. We didn’t know about the fire until the morning. They wanted us to identify the bodies. They thought, since we were wolves, we could do it by scent. There was no way to do it by sight. Not after a fire like that.” Derek swallows almost convulsively. “One of the bodies was in wolf form. My Uncle Ned had shifted. I didn’t know why until I saw that some of the little ones had their throats ripped open. He’d done it so they wouldn’t suffer. I’ve always wondered how desperate you had to be, to do something like that. Now I know.”

Stiles shudders and resists the urge to snatch Mia from Derek’s arms; cover her ears so she’s not taking in any of this macabre bedtime story.
“Tonight, I thought coming in through the wall would bring the house down. I really did. I knew it probably wouldn’t kill me and Scott, but I only had a very tiny chance to keep it from being the end of you. I thought, at least that way…maybe you would hear, and know I was trying. And at least it would be quick. No more suffering.”

“But it didn’t collapse,” Stiles says quietly.

“No, But I still killed you in my mind. I made that choice.” Derek’s eyes glow in the darkness. “I hate her for making me do that.”

“I know.”

“No, you don’t. Not really. Even after everything she had done to me, to Laura, to you…I never actually wanted to end her myself. After killing all those other hunters, I couldn’t stand the thought of taking a life again. Not even hers. But now…now I want to kill her. So badly it scares me.” Derek stares at him. In the darkness, with eyes glowing and teeth glinting, he looks wild, something a child’s book illustrator might sketch for a boogeyman. “I never hated her enough to be a killer, but I love you enough to be one. Isn’t that strange?”

Stiles puts his arms around his chest and just sits there, rocking him, unable to give him answers but trying to give him peace.

Mia is the only one who finds any more sleep that night.

#

The Preserve reacts to a hunter breaching its perimeter with a show of force that would put the American army to shame. By the time Stiles has finished giving Mia her breakfast feeding Derek has already organized volunteers into groups. They will tackle the woods inside the Preserve and out, communicating by phone. No swatch of land will go unsearched.

“I should go,” Stiles says, Mia on his hip.

“No,” Derek says simply. He shakes his head when Stiles tries to argue. “I need you here with Mia. I don’t trust anyone else with her.” Looking more serious than Stiles has ever seen him, Derek points to the kitchen counter. “I’m leaving these for you.”

Sitting there are two knives, one long and one short, a handgun, a Taser, and a small bottle of pepper spray. Stiles picks up the pepper spray and cocks an eyebrow. “Really, Der?”

“You never know. You need to have a weapon in hand at all times. It should never take you more than three seconds to have it in firing position.” Derek throws a glance to the wolves outside, then leans in to kiss his baby and Stiles. “I love you both. Be safe.”

Adrian Harris and two other wolves are left to guard Stiles and Mia. At first Stiles is concerned that Kate’s actions might have made Harris’s anti-human prejudice even stronger, but the older man seems to think that Stiles facing her and surviving makes him some sort of honorary wolf.

It’s Harris who searches the ruins of the burned house to see what can be salvaged. Their safe with Derek’s money, Mia’s birth certificate, and their passports is unharmed, but everything else is gone. Stiles is glad Mia isn’t old enough yet to really be attached to any of her toys, because she’s lost everything except the Hale blanket and the oversize teddy bear Derek had bought for her on the supply run, left sitting sadly in the jeep overnight.

Stiles spends the day going through everything that’s been donated to them. Mia has plenty of hand-
me-down onesies, though she’s a little too small for most of them. She takes to her new toys at once, since many of them are loud and brightly colored and perfectly suited to a werewolf child. Stiles feels a little strange in his own new clothes, but it’s mainly the things that can never be replaced that he misses most. His mother’s pregnancy journal. Derek’s secret admirer notes. Even Froggy, his chosen friend for his final minutes.

When Derek returns at the end of the day, Stiles has only to look at his face to know that Kate hasn’t been found.

“We’ll get her tomorrow.” Derek says, taking Mia as soon as he walks through the door and scenting her almost roughly.

But they don’t get her the next day, or the day after that, or the day after that.

They know she’s still nearby, because she sneaks through the Preserve at night, leaving little presents to show how much she’s enjoying having an entire community of werewolves to torture. She digs all the way down to Nathan’s casket and leaves a little bouquet of wolfsbane on top. Erica wakes up to a laminated copy of her family’s obituaries on her doorstep. Adrian Harris’s howl is heard all over the Preserve when he sees a collection of hanged dolls dangling from the tree in his front yard, a mocking imitation of the way his wife and children were murdered.

Incensed, volunteers begin patrolling at night. They guard the back entrance with guns. They dig traps out in the woods and check them every hour. Nothing works. She’s always one step ahead.

As the days pass Derek becomes more and more grim. He sleeps shortly and poorly, consuming nothing but protein bars and energy drinks. In the morning, before he leaves, he doesn’t speak. He just gives Mia a careful kiss on the top of her head and then crushes Stiles in an embrace, laying hot possession to his mouth, every single kiss a goodbye.

When he returns he’s sunk low in fury and depression. He can’t stand to have Mia out of his arms and he insists on holding her from the moment he walks in the door to the moment he puts her in the crib. At first Mia is delighted with all her extra cuddles, but she realizes quickly that this isn’t the same Papa she remembers. This Papa doesn’t blow raspberries or coo down at her or dance around making up little songs with her name. She starts to respond to the new environment, whimpering throughout the day and absolutely screaming when she wakes up at night, as if she’d hoped to go somewhere else while she slept.

Stiles tries to cheer her up as best he can, but when Derek is home Stiles has barely turned his head at her cry before Derek is already hushing her, murmuring in a voice strafed with exhaustion that everything’s all right; she’s safe; Papa won’t let anything bad happen to his best girl again. It’s that again that tears at Stiles every time he hears it, the word spat with thick self-disgust as Derek contemplates how he already failed his promise to Mia once before.

Things are bad. Things are the worst they’ve ever been, and it’s not fair, because only days ago they’d been happier than Stiles could ever have hoped. He hates sitting at home every day, the weak human omega, while Derek and Scott and every other person here risks their lives in the woods. He hates the way Mia is slowly becoming more and more withdrawn, eyes vacantly staring ahead instead of catching his delightedly the way they used to. He hates the way his burns throb and have to be treated every day, the cure almost worse than the fire itself, skin puckering and scarring as it slowly heals.

After two weeks with no sign of Kate he’s ready to just drive away from the Preserve the way many other werewolves have since Kate’s attack. He sighs as he fills the baby bath with water to wash Mia after she spits up all over herself and starts crying as though she’s officially given up on the world
being a good place. “Rub-a-dub-dub,” he sings half-heartedly.

Mia smacks the water with her hand, looks vaguely interested in her new trick, and tries it again.

“You’re going to get water in your eyes, Mia-mine.” He takes a rubber ducky and makes it zoom through the water towards her.

“Uhhhh,” she whines, lip starting to quiver again.

“What? Is the ducky scary?” He takes it out of the water and looks at it sternly. “Bad ducky!”

Mia giggles at his frowny face.

“Miss Mia! Did Daddy just get a giggle?” He lifts her out of the bath and quickly wraps her in a towel so she doesn’t get cold. “Can Daddy hear that again? I missed that sound.” He makes another silly face and she lets out a burbling peal of laughter.

It’s amazing how much lighter his heart is at the sound. “There’s my happy girl!”

She beams, looking positively angelic. Stiles waltzes her over to the changing table to put on a fresh diaper, pausing only to blow a quick raspberry on her tummy. “Can we save some of those smiles for Papa?” he coos as he dresses her in a bright yellow onesie. “Papa really needs to see that pretty smile.”

Mia kicks up at him, and just then the front door slams open. Derek storms through, Scott close behind. “Derek,” Scott is saying, “Erica is going to be fine—”

“I don’t want to hear it, Scott. This is going to put us out for the entire day. Goddamnit!” Derek punches the wall and Stiles freezes where he stands.

“Well, maybe that’s good. We need to regroup.”

“What happened?” Stiles asks, hoisting the baby onto his hip.

“Wolfsbane bomb,” Derek says shortly. “Erica got it right in her eyes. We had to rush her to Deaton. He thinks Kate’s got a whole fucking collection of different wolfsbane powders she’s been using to cloak her scent and keep us from finding her.” He braces his hands against the counter. “That thing could have killed one of us.”

“Well, it didn’t. Erica will be fine by tomorrow.”

“Erica would be fine right now if you’d been covering her ass instead of texting sweet nothings to Kira all day,” Derek snaps, rounding on Scott.

Scott’s face turns bright red, fire in his eyes. “Sweet nothings? I’m texting Kira to make sure she’s still alive, you asshole. You think you’re the only one scared out there? Kate already killed me once before, so don’t act like you’re the only one hurt by her.”

Mia looks too stunned even to cry at her always-cheerful Uncle Scott’s outburst.

“I should go,” Scott mutters, immediately deflated. “I need to shift. And I need a fucking beer. And I need Kira. And then I need to sleep.” He nods at Stiles, and Stiles is horrified at how exhausted he looks. “See you.”

“Derek,” Stiles starts as soon as the door shuts.
“I don’t give a fuck if he’s mad at me, Stiles.” Derek growls in frustration. “God, how did she know to put it right there? It’s like she has eyes on us every minute. Fuck her. Fuck her!” He shakes for a second, then holds out his arms. “Give me the baby.”

Stiles hesitates, looking down into Mia’s scared little face. “Maybe you should take a second to calm down.”

Derek’s eyes flash in a way Stiles has never seen before, the flash of an alpha telling an omega to mind his place. “Don’t ever infer that my daughter isn’t safe with me,” he says coldly.

Stiles bites back the thousand angry retorts that spring to his lips. They’re exhausted, and terrified, and they can’t both lose their heads. “I would never think that,” he says instead, fighting hard to keep his voice calm. “I know you would never, ever hurt our little girl.” He carefully hands Mia over, smiling at her reassuringly. “Here you go, Papa. She was smiling earlier. See if you can get her to do it again.”

Derek looks almost lost when Stiles doesn’t fight him, and he stares down at his daughter, expression slinking towards ashamed. Stiles turns his back and busies himself in the kitchen for a few minutes, waiting for Derek to calm down.

He hears a soft, strangled noise, and when he turns around Derek is crying.

It’s such a strange sight that he just stares for a second. Derek has never cried in front of him before, not even the night of the fire. His face is twisted to the point of pain, red and quivering as his shoulders heave with silent sobs. He sits on the couch so he won’t shake Mia and he curls over her like a drooping flower.

“Derek,” Stiles manages to say. He sits next to him and stretches out a hand, wanting to touch Derek but unsure if he should. “Don’t cry. Please.”

Derek shakes his head, staring down at Mia. His words come out in choked bursts. “Every other father in the world, when he looks at his daughter and sees his mother or his sister…he’s happy. But when I look at her, and I see Laura in her eyes and my mother in her smile, all I can think of is all the Hale women who have died before her. That’s her inheritance from me.”

“No, Derek.” Stiles puts his arms around Derek carefully, until his hands and Derek’s are both cupping their daughter. “Don’t put all that on her. Look at her. All she knows in the world is Daddy and Papa and love and warmth. When you’re holding her, she knows that she’s safe. That’s her inheritance. Love and protection for all the days of her life. And I know, and she knows, that you will always, always give her that, no matter what.”

Mia coos and reaches up to Derek, giggling at what she thinks is a funny face just for her.

“What we have, and will always have, is love,” Stiles finishes, dropping his voice so it won’t shake. “Kate can take a lot of things from us, but never that.”

“Never,” Derek echoes. He bends down to kiss Mia, then beckons Stiles closer, until the omega is practically on his lap. “I love you,” he tells Stiles quietly, before kissing him gently.

“I love you too. Always.”

Miracle of miracles, all three of them sleep through the night.

#
The next morning Deaton calls before Derek has left the house. Kate left a gift at the clinic, a box all taped up and covered with wolfsbane. It’s addressed to Derek and Stiles, and given the wolfsbane Stiles is the only one who can open it.

“Destroy it,” Derek snaps into the phone.

“I can’t. I can’t even touch it.” Even Deaton is sounding constantly on-edge these days. “If it sits in here I can’t treat anyone. Stiles, I need you to do something with it.”

Derek turns his glare on Stiles, silently forbidding him to leave the house, and Stiles rolls his eyes. “I’ll be there soon,” he says, ending the call before Derek can argue.

“She wants to lure you there without me. You’re not going.”

“Come with me if you want. I can’t just leave a box of poison sitting in Deaton’s home.” Stiles bends over Mia, watching her totally nail a belly-to-back roll.

“We can’t take Mia. God only knows what’s in it.”

“So I’ll call Scott and get him and Kira to watch her.” Stiles picks Mia up when she get stuck on her back and kisses her forehead to praise her. “She’ll be just as safe with them as she is with us.”

Derek sighs, but he’s not in the mood to fight, so he just snatches Mia from Stiles and stalks off with her. When Stiles calls Kira, she’s absolutely thrilled at the thought of taking a few hours off from Kate-scouting. “I’m going completely crazy,” she confesses. “Poor Scott is so on edge. Last night he was so amped up he had to go for a midnight shift, and when I woke up and he wasn’t there I freaked out.” She sighs shakily into the phone. “Is this ever going to be over?”

Stiles feels a pang of guilt. If Scott and Kira, the two most cheerful people he knows, are this badly affected, God only knows how the rest of the Preserve is surviving. “Soon, I hope,” he says, lamely but honestly.

Derek is still sulky when Stiles hangs up. “Where’s your gun?”

“On the table.”

“And the pepper spray?”

“What? God, Der, I don’t know. If Kate shows up, I’m not going to wait for her to get close enough to use the pepper spray.”

“Find it,” Derek snaps. Mia lets out a pop of air as if she’s agreeing with him, and Stiles makes a face at her. “Remember who feeds you,” he mutters to her as he goes to search of the pepper spray.

When Scott arrives, he seems a little shamefaced about fighting with Derek yesterday. “Sorry, man,” he says, sticking his hands in his pocket awkwardly. “I’m not cut out for a soldier’s life, I guess. It gets my heart racing. I had to snuggle with my cuddle-bug for hours after I got home yesterday.”

Stiles fake-gags so loudly he thinks he might have burst blood vessels in his eyes.

“Aww,” Kira leans in and pecks his cheek. “You’re my snuggle-bear, Scotty. Now, Derek, show me all the exit and entrances of the house before you explode.”

Stiles hands Mia over to Scott as Derek and Kira walk out. “You know how to babysit, but just to run over everything: call my cell phone if you need anything, she doesn’t like being patted on the
back except to be burped, and be constantly vigilant every second, preparing to defend her with your life.”

Scott grins and bounces the baby gently. “Not to worry. Uncle Scott is on the job. I haven’t shifted in like three days, so if Kate shows up I am ready to rip her throat out.”

Derek walks in to hear this last bit, and he throws Scott a glare. “You can’t be around my daughter if you’re not in control.”

Scott rolls his eyes and makes a show of swallowing a suppressant. Derek and Stiles give Mia goodbye kisses and leave before they can change their minds about not taking her. “Scott needs to get his wolf under control,” Derek mutters as he starts the car.

Stiles shakes his head at Derek’s overprotectiveness. “He’s fine. He’s still a relatively young wolf, but he’s taking care of himself. Besides, he and Kira need the practice for their own kids.” Even as he says it he throws a longing glance towards the house. He has a nagging feeling that leaving Mia is a terrible decision, his omega instincts kicking into gear to tell him his baby is only safe in his arms. Derek’s paranoia is catching.

Derek must be feeling the same way, because he drives to the clinic at a near breakneck speed. Deaton is waiting outside for them, lines of exhaustion tight around his eyes. “In here,” he says shortly, leading them into the back room. There’s a box in there, little springs of wolfsbane taped all over it, with a brightly colored tag written in curlicue: For Derek and Stiles, the happy couple.

Stiles prods it. It’s light, with something inside that makes a noise when he shakes it. “I want to open it.”

“That’s a terrible idea,” Derek says, leaning in far too close for safety with all that wolfsbane. “I have to know what it is.” That awful sense that something is wrong is getting stronger by the minute, and before Derek can argue again he rips open the top.

Inside is what looks like an oversize dog muzzle connected to a leash, along with a note. Stiles reads it out loud: “Puppy: put this on, come to the woods outside the Preserve, and bite down. I’ll be there soon. Looking forward to our time together, Kate.”

Deaton takes the muzzle from Stiles and flips it inside-out, so Stiles can see a thick pouch that would fit between the front teeth if someone put the muzzle on. He leans forward and sniffs it, then shakes it until Stiles can see a faint red light blinking from inside the pouch. “Clever,” Deaton says flatly. “If you were to put this on and bite down, it would release wolfsbane that would paralyze you, and, I assume activate the tracker inside.”

“The first time I saw Peter he was wearing something like this,” Derek says, looking sick. He takes it from Deaton and runs his finger over the pouch. “Why would she send this to me? She thinks I’m ready to just give up?”

Stiles resists the urge to snatch it out of his hands and throw it as far away as possible. “Why would it be addressed to both of us and left here?” It’s almost like she’d wanted to lure them out and Stiles shivers, wrapping his arms around himself to quiet that little voice inside, now almost a scream that something is terribly, terribly wrong.

“Where is she?” Derek’s eyes glow red. “Goddam her, where is she? I want her dead!” His claws burst through the skin of his hands and he groans, bracing himself against the steel table to fight his shift.
Deaton tsks and bends to meet his gaze. “Derek, you must calm down. You’re no good to anyone if you lose control.”

“I’m all right,” Derek grits out. “Just…need…a second.”

“It’s been like this for a while,” Stiles confesses to Deaton, rubbing a soothing hand over Derek’s back. “Would giving him a temporary prescription like Scott’s help?”

“Hmm?”

“You know, the pills gave you gave Scott to help him control his wolf.”

Deaton frowns. “I’ve never given Scott any prescription.”

Stiles stares at him. The voice inside is still shrieking, louder and louder. “Deaton, Scott’s been taking pills you gave him ever since he got here. They help keep his wolf from taking over. He takes, like, five a day, and even with them he has to go out and have extra shifts all the time.”

Deaton shakes his head emphatically. “I never gave him pills for that. There aren’t any pills that can do that. And I told him he might need a few extra shifts when he first got here but after all these months there’s no reason his wolf is any stronger than a born werewolf.”

It’s only when he says that that Stiles realizes what it is that’s been nagging at him ever since he left the house. “I haven’t shifted in three days,” Scott had said.

But Kira said that Scott had been out in the woods last night.

If he wasn’t shifting… what had he been doing?

But no. No. This is Scott. Stiles’s best friend. The closest thing he has to a brother. To even think about him with suspicion is worse than crazy, it’s disloyal. Scott is the one person here besides Derek Stiles trusts without reservation. He’s Mia’s godfather.

And yet. Scott had been with Derek on the supply run. He could easily have texted Kate their location so she knew when to light the fire. He’d lived at Deaton’s house, so he would have known about the back entrance. Derek had accused Scott of texting sweet nothings to Kira in the woods, but what if he had been actually talking to Kate, helping her stay one step ahead? Even the leak at the police station had only started after Scott started helping out there…

“The pills, Stiles,” Deaton says. He looks like he’s coming to the same awful realization as Stiles. “What did they look like?”

Stiles tries to remember. “They’re capsule pills. Kind of a dusty yellow, I guess?”

Deaton grabs a book and flips through it. “Like this?” He holds it out so Stiles can see a small yellow flower.

“Yeah. That’s the right color. What is it?”

“Wolfsbane. A crossbreed I’ve been researching after Derek told me about his uncle. It’s called ‘Shadow-wolf.’ It…it’s hard to explain, but are you familiar with the id, ego, and superego? Shadow-wolf suppresses everything except a wolf’s id, the part of the wolf that’s unable to moralize or even rationalize. It suppresses the human entirely, while still keeping the wolf in human form. This, I believe, is what the hunters used on Peter Hale. The id of a wolf is very easily trainable, and responds well to a master giving it orders. If a wolf’s id is trained to respond to a master it will devote
itself to pleasing her.”

“It’s impossible,” Stiles shakes his head, unable to believe. “This is Scott. If he’d been working with Kate this whole time…”

“Not this whole time. Only after he takes a dose. When the id isn’t in control, Scott won’t even remember what happened. I’m sure that part of his consciousness supplants false memories, so he really did believe that I gave him these pills. She can only control him right after he takes a pill… probably for an hour or two, depending on the dosage level inside each capsule.”

Stiles and Derek exchange horrified glances.

Scott had taken a pill right before they’d left, and Scott has Mia.

Derek turns and bolts for the car, Stiles and Deaton right on his heels. Stiles can hardly breathe as Derek stars up the car and barrels forward. Stupid, so fucking stupid, it had been in front of him this whole time and he’d been too wrapped up in Derek and the baby to see. Kate had stopped the hunters from shooting at Scott when he ran because she’d wanted him to escape. He’d been her unknowing spy in the Preserve this whole time, giving her all the information she needed.

Please, he thinks desperately as they stop in front of the house. Please oh please oh please don’t let us be too late.

But he smells the blood as soon as they open the door, and knows that they are.

Kira is lying on the floor, right next to the mat they use for tummy time. Blood soaks the carpet from her torn-out throat, one hand stretched plaintively towards the door as if she’d tried to stop him even as she bled out. She tries to lift her head when they come in, moving her mouth soundlessly.

Deaton drops to his knees in front of her and turns her over. Stiles can see the wound healing, all those ripped cords and vessels trying to knit back together. “You’re going to live,” Deaton tells her firmly, almost ordering her to do so as he puts a hand over the wound to draw it closed and help it heal. “You’re going to be all right.”

“Where’s Mia? MIA!” Derek bellows, turning around in a circle like she might be hiding behind the couch.

Kira makes a choking sound and is healed enough to say: “Scott…took her…” The words end in a geyser of blood and Stiles stumbles away, horrified.

Derek is out the door, shifting in midair, and Stiles follows, half-healed burns on his feet aching with every step. The black wolf tilts his nose to the ground, trying to track, and then bolts to the woods. He’s too fast for Stiles and in an instant he’s disappeared, but Stiles keeps running anyway. His daughter is out here somewhere. His child is in danger, and she needs him, and he is so terribly terribly afraid he won’t get to her in time.

There’s a howl and Stiles stumbles after it, spotting Derek all the way by the back entrance gate, just as the wolf tilts his head up again to send a cry of grief over the body in the grass.

Stiles hears himself moan and he falls forward onto the ground, hands scrabbling in the grass towards this awful thing, and oh God he’s so sorry, he’s sorry, this is all his fault and he wishes he could take it all back, he’ll do anything to fix this, just not his brother, not Scott.

Scott turns his head to look at Stiles, eyes huge in his graying face. Derek tears his shirt and Stiles sees the wound: a wolfsbane bullet shot right into the flesh of Scott’s shoulder, purple-black veins
spreading out slowly, showing the poison making its way to Scott’s heart.

“\textquote{I realized what was happening.}” Scott whispers. “\textquote{I tried to fight it. She didn’t like that.}” He closes his eyes and swallows as the poison climbs up his neck. “Kira,” he begs.

“She’s alive.” Stiles reaches for his friend, trying to prop him up to slow the poison’s spread. The Hale blanket is lying next to him, crumpled in the grass, boasting the names of the dead. “Oh God, Scott, I’m so sorry. This is all my fault, I should have seen…”

Scott shakes his head. Stiles can see that his lips are already tinted blue. There’s a rustling from behind them and Deaton enters the clearing, wide eyes the only thing betraying his horror.

“\textquote{Help him,}” Stiles begs. He knows Deaton can treat wolfsbane poisoning, but it might already be too late; Scott might already be lost forever.

“I can try.” Deaton hoists Scott into his arms, stronger than Stiles would have believed. Scott gasps in pain as he’s jostled and Deaton’s expression, when he looks at the wound, is grave. “\textquote{We have to be quick.}”

“\textquote{Wait.}” Scott holds a piece of paper out to Stiles. A tear, black-tinted, snakes from his eye. “\textquote{I’m sorry. I’m so sorry.}”

Stiles watches them leave, shaking, too grief-stricken even to cry. He opens the paper with trembling fingers and reads:

\textit{Derek:}

\textit{Put on the muzzle. Wait for me in the woods outside the Preserve. If you do, I swear on my name Argent that your child will be safe from me until she comes of age.}

\textit{If you don’t come, you’ll find the baby’s corpse at your front porch tomorrow morning. I’ll let you bury her as my gift to you. That will be the end of my mercy. Your mate will die. Your friends will die. And I will keep you as my muzzled dog for the next seventy years of your life, reminding you with your every breath about all the people you killed because you were too stupid to obey.}

\textit{If anyone else comes into the woods, they and the baby die.}

\textit{You have until midnight.}

Stiles drops the paper and falls to his knees, unable to breathe. He clutches the Hale blanket to his heart because it still smells like her. “\textquote{MIA!}” he screams into the woods, the word dissolving into sobs.

Derek howls with him, animal and human crying out together. Stiles hears Derek panting as he shifts back and reads Kate’s note. He whimpers, still sounding more wolf then man.

“\textquote{Bring her back,}” Stiles sobs, but Kate can’t hear him. “\textquote{Bring her back.}”

Derek touches him even though Stile wasn’t talking to him. “\textquote{I will,}” he says. There are tear tracks on his face, as though he was crying in his wolf form, and only then does Stiles see that he’s holding the muzzle in his hand. He must have kept it clutched tight when he ran from Deaton’s clinic, then held it in his mouth while he ran through the woods.

He’d kept it, as if…
“Why do you have that?” Stiles tries to grab it from him, but Derek holds firm. “Derek, why?”

Derek stares down at it as though surprised to see it’s still there. “Stiles,” he says. “Go back to the house.”

“Tell me why you have that.”

Derek shakes his head. His hand clenches around it, refusing to give it to Stiles. “Stiles,” he says. “Go back to the house.”

“No, Derek, you can’t. You can’t. She won’t give Mia back if you do, no matter what she said.”

Derek looks down at the note again. “She swore on her name,” he says, almost to himself.

“It’s a lie, Derek. Please. Please. If you put that on, you’ll be killing Mia.” Stiles gasps around tears that aren’t falling anymore, but stay trapped in his throat. “Promise me you won’t.”

Derek’s brow is furrowed as he looks at the muzzle and the note, a two-piece puzzle he doesn’t want to put together. “I promise you I’ll bring Mia back to you,” he says without looking up.

“That’s not what I asked.” Stiles tries to pull the muzzle away again with all the strength he has, but he’s a human, and an omega, and that means he will always be the weaker one here. “God, Derek, please, don’t. Please don’t do this.”

Derek looks to the woods outside the Preserve. “Stiles, I love you. Go home.”

“No, Derek. Please. Don’t do this, don’t leave me.”

“I won’t put it on unless I have to. I swear I’ll bring our daughter back.” Derek turns to look at him. His eyes are wildly sad. “I love you,” he says again, and then he reaches for the handle in the gate, and walks through. He doesn’t kiss Stiles goodbye, and that’s how Stiles knows he’s not planning on coming back. He wants to leave Stiles with the kiss from last night, when they’d been a family and they’d thought they had something that made them invincible.

His family is gone now, likely forever, Derek and Mia and probably Scott. Stiles is alone in the grass, staring at the door in the gate. Go home, Derek had said, but Stiles can’t. He can’t, and yet that is his role as the omega, to wait at home while the alphas do the saving and the sacrificing. The omega is meant to sit at home and bear the weakness and bear the children and bear the grief, because in this world there are heroes and there are villains and there are those who simply endure.

He is not a hero or a werewolf, and so he must wait for someone else to save or destroy his world.

But.

Kate’s wolfsbane powders, cloaking her from a werewolf’s nose, won’t work on a human.

She won’t be expecting an omega, and if she finds one, she’ll underestimate him.

Maybe this time the omega needs to do something more than wait for the hero.

Go home, Derek had said, but there is no home, unless Stiles goes out and brings it back.

Stiles wipes the tears from his face and stands. He looks at the blood on the grass and feels it build inside him, something that roars like passion and sings like hope.

For Scott, and for Mia, and for Derek, and for Laura Hale, and for Kira, and for Peter, and for all the names on the Hale blanket, Kate Argent will die tonight.
And Stiles will be the one to do it.

Chapter End Notes

If anyone can name the first story Derek reads to Mia at the beginning of this chapter, you win a prize. Gotta give big ups to everyone who picked up on my clues that Harris was the leak, but I'm afraid they were nothing more than red herrings to keep the Scott reveal from being too obvious. Coming soon: the final battle! To make sure I'm reading the room right...everyone's rooting for Kate, right? We're all really hoping that Kate gets her happy ending? Just checking ;) See you back here soon!
Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

This update took FOREVER and I am so sorry! I have two decent excuses: I had food poisoning, and I work for lawyers, who like to DRINK, and take their interns to drink, and then drink some more, and my weak little law student body cannot keep up. (My third excuse is not decent, it just involves an unhealthy addiction to Game of Thrones.) But at least I got this chapter up within five days!

Spoilery trigger warnings in the end notes.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Once upon a time, Stiles had loved prowling through the woods. Back in high school he and Scott had gotten into geocaching, but since there weren’t any caches in the woods they had taken turns setting little treasure piles up for each other. Stiles would sneak out when his father was on shift and search through the woods at the end of town, looking for what Scott had hidden, freezing in delicious fear whenever he heard an animal nearby.

Now, as he moves through the woods outside the wall, he can almost pretend that he’s just playing another game. There’s a prize out here in the woods, and he has to avoid the wolf also searching to get to it first. He has to think of Mia like that, as a prize he must find, because if he lets himself think of his daughter’s smile his breath gets short and he swears he hears her laughter drifting through the trees. It’s not easy. The burns on his feet are rubbed raw by the walking, and more than once he wants to collapse in despair. There are so many miles of woods, far more dangerous that the woods in Beacon Hills. There are little cliffs, drop-offs ranging from five feet to fifty, coming up nearly out of nowhere. Thorns grab at him, spider webs get in his eyes, and animals rustle around him, smelling an omega and trying to see if he’d make a good dinner.

Kate has probably been out here for months, learning her way around. She could be miles and miles away.

Where would he go, if he was her?

Deep into the woods to avoid capture, but not where the trees are thickest. Decently close to a water source. Somewhere she could sit with the baby, awaiting Derek’s summons.

He imagines her with Mia and his mind stutters on the thought of what she might be doing to his daughter right now, to amuse herself while she waits. He can picture her hurting the little girl, holding a lighter up to the arch of Mia’s foot and laughing at her tears.

Hales die by fire, that’s the rule.

No. He bares his teeth and shakes off the memory of those words. He will not let himself be distracted by fear, not when his daughter is waiting. “How do Argents die?” he whispers to the woods, needing to hear his own voice for courage.

The sunlight coming through the leaves winks at him. Let’s find out.

He takes a breath and starts forward. She’s out here somewhere. He just has to find her without
Derek finding him.

Luck is with him and he doesn’t hear a single howl from Derek, but luck is against him and he can’t find any sign of Kate. He keeps his ears trained and his steps careful, until the sun has just started to set, and then he hears it: the soft, snuffling whimpers of a child who has long since cried herself out.

He goes boneless with relief and creeps forward, focusing on the sound, until he can hear a silver-fine voice speaking in a whisper:

“— took the children from their beds and dragged them out to the woods, back to the den, where they ate all but the bones, then gave the bones to the pups to chew…”

Stiles peers through a canopy of green to see Kate sitting on a stump in a clearing, Mia in her arms. She bends over the little girl, speaking urgently. “You can’t teach a creature like that. You just have to put it down. The wolves are born bad, killing machines, dragging us all down with them. Every one is a monster. That’s what you are. Yes. That’s what you are.”

Mia makes a sad, questioning sound, but Kate doesn’t seem to hear her. She’s sitting in a circle of wolfsbane and in her free hand is a gun, laxly pointed towards the dirt. She looks like some sort of cruel fairy goddess with a changeling, waiting in the dying light for something magical to happen.

Stiles raises his gun and points it, but his hand is shaking so badly he’s afraid to pull the trigger. Kate’s unable to sit still, Mia quivering in her arms, and it’s just too risky. He can’t guarantee a clean shot, not from this distance, and if he misses…

He needs to be holding Mia before he makes any move against Kate. He could rush her, but if she drops the baby, or shoots, or just manages to overpower him, he’s done for. Besides, there’s nowhere to run. She’s chosen this clearing wisely. There’s a dropoff just behind her, stretching nearly half the circumference of the clearing. He doesn’t know how deep it is, but knowing how treacherous these woods can be, he doesn’t want to risk it.

What would Kate expect an omega to do?

If he plays into that—if he makes her complacent—he might have a chance. But he hesitates. If he does, he’ll be putting himself in a vulnerable position, looking for the slightest opportunity to outsmart her. He wants to just run and swoop in to pull his daughter away from the threat.

It’s a hard decision to make. Impossible. But for once he just trusts his instincts and makes his move.

He deliberately steps forward onto a branch and hears it crack under his foot.

Kate’s head snaps up and within seconds she has the barrel of the gun pressed to Mia’s forehead. “Three seconds before I shoot,” she says coldly.

Stiles doesn’t even let her get to one. He stumbles forward into the clearing, hands up, heart galloping at the sight of the gun against his daughter’s head.

“Drop the gun.”

He does. Mia is squirming in Kate’s arms, smelling him nearby, and she lets out an impatient cry when Kate only grips her tighter.

“Toss your pack to me.”

He hesitates, then slowly shrugs his backpack off his shoulder and throws it to her. She searches
through it with one hand. First his knives, then a handful of bullets. She snorts in derision when the
next thing she pulls out is Mia’s blanket. Under that is a tiny stuffed animal, and an opaque baby
bottle. That last she shakes suspiciously, but when she hears the liquid sloshing around she rolls her
eyes and tosses it back in the bag.

“Only an omega would pack a baby’s toy instead of weapons,” she says with disgust, stuffing
everything but the knives back inside.

“I did pack weapons.”

“And then you gave them up immediately once you saw the baby. Stupid bitch.” Kate peeps past him
into the trees. She’s on-edge, overly jittery. “Where’s Derek? Tell the truth, or I’ll shoot your
daughter in the head.”

“I don’t know, I swear. Out there looking for you.” He can’t take his eyes off his baby. She doesn’t
look like she’s been hurt, but her face is a teary, snotty mess. She hates having a runny nose. He
aches to hold her.

“He won’t find me. Wolfsbane cloaks my scent. The baby’s, too.” Kate looks down at Mia. “I was
just explaining to the little monster why it needs to die. It looked at me so reproachfully
reproachfully when I shot
the McCall boy. It doesn’t even know what sort of creature it is. I explained it.” She smiles. “I think
it understands now.”

Stiles forces himself to breathe calmly. “She’s not an it, Kate. Her name is Mia. She’s not even five
months old. She’s just a little girl, and she’s scared and hungry and tired. Give her to me. Please.”

Kate ignores him. “Is McCall dead?”

“I don’t know.” He hesitates, words bitter in his mouth. “Probably.”

“Shame.” Kate shivers a little as the sun sinks lower. “He was a good puppy. Very easy to train. Of
course he had to fuck it all up at the end— fight the wolfsbane and try to run with the baby. He’s no
good to me if he can’t obey.”

“How’d you do it? Train him?” Kate is still so jittery; Stiles can’t do a thing until she’s relaxed.

“Simple enough. I grabbed him the first time after he left your house, the day you and Hale skipped
town. Wanted to see how well he could take commands. I brainwashed him, got him to start working
down at the Sherriff’s office and pass me information. But humans can’t be kept as pets. Werewolves
can.” It comes out almost sing-song. He can’t tell if she’s mocking him or if she’s just over the edge
of sanity.

“So you turned him.”

“Made him come into the woods to me. I gave him his lycadone and put him to sleep. As soon as he
woke up he was frantic. They’re easy to train that way. You give them the wolfsbane and that starts
the pain and makes them afraid. Then you pull the dosage back, so they can breathe, but not quite
enough that they can think. When an animal is afraid, they see the face of God in whoever takes the
pain away. McCall’s wolf, that little newborn thing, was mine from the first moments of its life.”

“And he never knew,” Stiles says, stomach turning. His poor best friend.

“No. The first command I gave was to keep it from his conscious mind. That’s when I gave it the
lycadone pills and gave it its orders. I told it what I wanted it to do, gave it all the information it
needed, and told it to run. It did. It ran all the way to you, and then it took its pills and called me
every day and followed each order just like a good doggy.”

“Why did you kill the other hunters?”

“Because they were weak!” Kate barks, suddenly incensed. Mia should be crying at the noise, but she just keeps whimpering, no more tears left. “The Argents always had a code. Do whatever it takes to kill the beasts. But those hunters— barely worthy of the name— thought we should only kill when provoked. They didn’t like the thought of using McCall to infiltrate the Preserve. They said those wolves were peaceful. Well, I have a code of my own. If you won’t help me burn my enemies, you’ll burn with them.”

Her fingers keep flexing around the gun as she speaks and Stiles realizes she’s even more insane than he realized. That’s not good. He has no way of knowing what her next move is if she can’t know herself. “So you want Derek to be your new Scott?”

“Oh, he’ll be even better, babydoll. I allowed Scott his freedom for most of the day. When Derek is mine again, he won’t need any freedom. I’ll teach him to kill, and like it. I’ll let him have the Preserve.” He face is almost rapturous as she pictures it. “Can you imagine? We’ll travel across the country, wiping out packs. He’ll be magnificent.” Her gaze snaps back to Stiles. “He’ll come to me, you know. He might wait until it’s nearly midnight, but he’ll come. He knows who his master is.”

Stiles fights back a retort, not wanting to make her angry, but his expression must change because Kate chuckles. “He always has, babydoll. I almost had him last year, but then you had to come along and make him think he deserved more.” She flicks a hand, as if the things Stiles gave Derek— love, hope, family— are mere distractions. “I let him have his fun. Scott told me how happy he was with you, how much he loved the child, and I thought…it will be so much more painful if I wait. And like I said, when the wolf is in pain, and you take that pain away, you become God. No worse pain than the loss of a pup.”

Stiles grits his teeth, battling down terror. “You swore on your name Mia would live.”

“No, I swore she would be safe from me. I didn’t say anything about her being safe from him.” Kate’s lips stretch over her teeth. “Besides, I also said if anyone else came into the woods today, the baby would die and so would they. And here you are, babydoll. Pretty fucking stupid.”

A cold wind whips through the trees, chilling him to the bone. “Kate, please. Don’t hurt her. She’s just a little girl. She’s my little girl. You could get her to smile at you if you tickled her. She’s never been held by someone who doesn’t love her; she can’t even understand that someone might not love her. She thinks you’re her friend, that’s how innocent she is. Look at her, Kate. Look at my little girl.”

Kate does. For a moment she seems entranced. “She is a little sweetheart,” she says almost lovingly. She lifts the gun and caresses the side of Mia’s face with it, making Stiles shudder. “It would be easy to pretend she’s not a monster… for a little while, anyway. I could keep her. I might like that. I can never have children of my own, you know.”

“I know.” He itches to run and snatch her from Kate’s arms, but she won’t hesitate to shoot the both of them.

“But you don’t understand why. You think it was pointless. Omegas aren’t the only ones who can have babies…beta females can, even some alpha females. That’s what the doctors said when I wanted my surgery. That’s what everyone says. You think I’m crazy for what I’ve done. Don’t you?”
“I don’t think you’re crazy. I’m an omega too. I know how you feel.”

Kate shakes her head. “You could never know. Right after I presented I begged my father to fix me. He said no. He said if my body wanted me to be a little whore, I’d be a little whore in service to him. Then he sent me off to seduce Derek Hale.” Something glints on her cheek, and Stiles realizes in shock that she’s crying. “I hated Derek for that. He thought he owned me. And my body…” she shudders, breath coming in a little gasp. “It thought so too. I wanted him, even though I knew it was sick. My father knew. One night when I got home he made me strip in front of everyone so they could all see how wet I got for a beast. He made me fuck Derek. He said he’d see how much of an omega slut I really was. If my body was so whorish that it would take a werewolf’s seed and whelp a werewolf pup, I was no better than the monsters, and he would put me down.”

“That’s horrible,” Stiles says gently, but he’s chilled to the bone. She’s only telling him this because she plans to have him dead by morning, unable to spill her secrets to someone else.

“It was right,” she says savagely. “It was right! He saw the weakness in me. So I let the werewolf fuck me and I looked at him there, all knot-sated and thinking I belonged to him and I swore to myself—he’ll know what it is to be weak and hurting and owned. But I never will. Never again.”

She stops, and for a moment the only sound is the wind through the trees. What little light there was is almost gone now, and he can’t even make out Mia’s features. This would have been easier if he could see, but Kate isn’t calm enough yet.

“Then Derek killed my father,” Kate says. A little scowl comes back to her face and her grip on Mia tightens once more, as if she remembers that she’s holding a monster in her arms.

“He didn’t mean to, Kate. He wasn’t in control.”

“Werewolves are creatures that lack control, that’s why they need to be eliminated! He killed my father and my brothers and sisters and every other Alpha in the Argent clan. My father never got to see me become what I am. He died thinking I was weak. He died hating me.” Kate hesitates, still staring at Mia. She touches a finger to the rounded flush of Mia’s cheek. “And I was pregnant,” she says, almost as an afterthought.

“Then Derek killed my father,” Kate says. A little scowl comes back to her face and her grip on Mia tightens once more, as if she remembers that she’s holding a monster in her arms.

“Werewolves are creatures that lack control, that’s why they need to be eliminated! He killed my father and my brothers and sisters and every other Alpha in the Argent clan. My father never got to see me become what I am. He died thinking I was weak. He died hating me.” Kate hesitates, still staring at Mia. She touches a finger to the rounded flush of Mia’s cheek. “And I was pregnant,” she says, almost as an afterthought.

Stiles’s stomach turns. “You…with Derek?”

“I found out just after I buried my family. I was going to kill myself, but it wasn’t fair that Derek got to live when I had to die. I found someone to do the surgery I wanted. Take it all, I said. Kill what’s inside and cut out the rest. The Argent pack would have collapsed without me, so I found a way to make myself strong.”

Stiles can’t imagine; doesn’t want to imagine…but God, for the child’s sake, he’s glad Kate had chosen an abortion rather than letting it be born. To be the half-werewolf child of Kate Argent isn’t a fate he’d wish on anyone. “You’ve suffered,” he says, unable to come up with anything more.

“But killing them won’t change that.”

“Because of werewolves. They’re the reason we’re born alpha and omega now, you know. They think werewolves existed in secret, way back before we ever lived this way, and it was the mixing of their blood that changed us.”

Stiles has heard that theory before, but it seemed like crackpot science to him. He can tell that Kate believes it; has made it a catechism in her gospel of hate. “But killing them won’t change that.”

“You don’t know that.”

“Kate—”
“Shut up,” Kate says tiredly. It looks like reliving the past has sapped her energy. “Just… I don’t want to hear your pathetic voice again. Look at you. Little omega whore. You might have lived if you’d just stayed away. But this is how you want it, isn’t it? You’d rather die than live without your child.”

Stiles looks at his baby, still straining her head to try and see him. He imagines life without her; thinks of the way she’d kicked inside his womb, wanting life before she even knew what life was. “Yes,” he says quietly.

She nods. “Weak,” she says with triumphant finality. “Children make you weak. This one even makes Derek weak. He’ll come for it, and then he’ll be mine.” She sighs and looks up at the sky again. “But I’m tired of waiting,” she snaps, eyes going cold and resolved.

“He’ll put on the muzzle soon. You know he will. You must be exhausted, Kate. I can…”

“Then I’ll have to go out and get him. He’d come if he heard gunshots, wouldn’t he?” Kate’s hand tightens around the gun thoughtfully, and then she smudges the wolfsbane circle open with her toe. “I’d wanted him muzzled before I approached him, but he’ll come running if I shoot you and the pup. Then, once he sees, he’ll be too distraught to fight me.”

“You said you might keep her,” Stiles pleads. “Remember? She could help you wipe out werewolf packs, once she’s big enough. Derek would never run as long as you had her. Don’t you want that? You can have her, Kate. Let her live.”

“Children make you weak,” Kate repeats. “It’s a werewolf pup, not a baby for me to pretend is my own. When I looked at it, I forgot for a moment what it is. I was almost fooled, but… it’s not something to keep, it’s something to kill. It’s more merciful this way.”

“No, Kate. You don’t have to do this. Please.”

“If your biology didn’t force you to love it, you’d be thanking me,” Kate tells him, something almost like compassion in her voice. “It’s just an animal. Now it won’t ever grow up to be a killer. It would probably eat any human babies you might have, you know— they do that to weaker young. Don’t worry, you’ll be following it soon. I won’t make you wait long.” She puts the barrel of the gun to Mia’s head and rests her finger on the trigger.

“WAIT!” It bursts out of him in a desperate, animalistic screech. Mia is making little squeaks of fright at the sound of his cry, squirming away from the cold, alien thing pressing into her forehead. “Please, please, Kate. Just listen to me for a second. I-I understand that you have to do this. You’re a hunter. You’re just doing what you need to do. I know that I can’t stop it. But please… even a hunter shows mercy. She’s just a pup. Look how scared she is. Don’t do it like this.”

Kate hesitates. She stares into Mia’s eyes and Stiles’s breath catches in relief when her finger falls away from the trigger. Whatever little bit of omega is left in Kate responds to the baby, he can see that. Some part of her doesn’t want to shoot Mia. “How, then?”

“Give her to me.” He holds his hands out when Kate automatically shakes her head and clutches Mia tight, fingernails gouging into her chubby arm. “Look at me, I’m unarmed. I have nothing. If I run, you’ll shoot me in the back. Let me hold my daughter. Let me say goodbye and rock her to sleep. Then, once she’s sleeping, you can do what you have to do to us. Derek will hear the gunshots and come running, and then you can do what you have to do to him.” Tears he hadn’t even felt waiting rush over his cheeks, and he lets them fall. “I understand what you need to do. But please— please— let my little girl be asleep for it.”
Kate shakes her head again, a little slower this time. “I know you’re trying to trick me, babydoll,” she says with an echo of her old sneer, but her eyes are trained on Mia.

“I’m not, Kate. I wish I was. I wish I could stop you, but… I just don’t want her to suffer. That’s not so much to ask, is it? I know you’re not a monster. I know you’ll let me say goodbye.” The words are half-lost in his flood of tears, like flotsam tumbled about in waves, but Kate looks torn. She glances down at Mia, who, bless her, takes the opportunity to let out the saddest, most lost little whimper Stiles has ever heard.

Kate swallows and thrusts Mia at Stiles as if the baby is suddenly burning her. “Here. Just… do it fast.”

Nothing in the world has ever felt as good as his child back in his arms. Mia sniffles pathetically, then squints up and recognizes him. He feels her relax a little in his arms and she gives him a tiny, tremulous smile. *Thank God you’re here, Daddy!* he can almost imagine her saying. *You won’t believe what this crazy lady’s been saying!*

He laughs at her a little through his tears and picks up her hand, soft and wrinkled and red. “My girl,” he whispers. “Oh, you’re so cold, sweetheart.” He puts her hand to his lips and blows on it. She likes that, and her smile grows.

Kate is watching him suspiciously, gun still trained on them both, so he lifts the hem of his shirt and wipes Mia’s face. He lets his voice fall into the gentle cadence of an omega father, a loving parent just trying to get his little girl to sleep. “That’s better, isn’t it? There’s that pretty smile I love. You’re all right, Mia-mine. We’re just going to get warm and then we’re going to take a nice long nap together. Daddy’s got you, sweetheart. Daddy’s right here.”

He’d said that to her once before, when they were in peril in another woods and she was still curled up in his womb. He wonders if some part of her remembers.

Mia mewls and tries to burrow her face into his shirt, searching for milk. She’s playing her part so perfectly it’s as if she knows what his plan is. Her lips press against his nipple but under these circumstances he’s dry as a bone.

“No, Mia.” He lets his voice break. “Daddy can’t feed you right now.”

She whines, kicking impatiently.

“Shh, baby, shh.” He rocks her and looks back at Kate. “Please, may I feed her? With the bottle in my bag?”

She shakes her head, scowling. “That wasn’t the deal.”

“She can’t sleep when she’s this hungry. Please, Kate, she’s starving. Just give me the bottle and she’ll fall asleep as soon as her belly’s full.” He look at her from under his eyelashes, cringing a little to show his obedience, still messily crying. Just a pathetic omega trying to prolong the inevitable for his child. Just a weak human longing to make his child as comfortable as he can before she dies.

Kate rolls her eyes and stalks over to his bag, still keeping the gun trained on him. “You want the toy, too?” she says sarcastically, pulling out the bottle and shaking it again to make sure there’s nothing in there but milk.

“The b-blanket, maybe? So she’s not so cold?”

Kate picks up the blanket and looks at the writing on the wolves. Her lips twist up and Stiles knows
she likes that imagery: Mia wrapped in the names of the dead, bleeding in her father’s lifeless arms when Derek comes running. “You have three minutes to get her to sleep, or I’ll shoot her twice for wasting my time.”

He nods and takes the blanket when she holds it out. He can only wrap Mia loosely but she smiles and coos when she feels the soft fur against her skin. “That’s right,” he whispers. “Now we’re all nice and warm. Isn’t that good, sweetheart?”

She beams and snuggles into his chest. He realizes with dread that he may have played this too well — her eyes are drifting closed. He can’t have her falling asleep before Kate gives him the bottle, so he silently apologizes to her and gives the flesh of her foot a tiny pinch. Her eyes fly open and she wails with displeasure.

“The milk,” he says over her cries, bouncing her soothingly. Kate hands it over, lip curled at the noise, stepping close to look down at Mia.

“Here we go, Mia-mine.” He carefully twists the head of the bottle top to the left, unscrewing it. Kate doesn’t notice; she’s too busy staring at the tiny girl’s tears, trying to get the courage up to actually shoot her. “Daddy has what you want.” He unscrews the cap just a little more until it’s almost dangling off, and then he clutches Mia tight to his chest and throws the contents of the bottle in Kate’s face.

She howls and stumbles backwards, hands flying up to scrub at her eyes as the pepper spray he’d filled with bottle with blinds her. The gun falls to the ground and he scrambles for it, holding on to Mia for dear life.

She lunges at him, eyes streaming tears and face twisted into an animal snarl. He leads with his shoulder and shoves her backwards, hoping to make her lose her balance.

It almost works. She starts to fall, but she catches herself and windmills her arms, staggering backwards to keep herself from falling. He catches his breath, then runs at her, Mia still pressed into his chest so tightly he can feel her heartbeat through his shirt. He raises his foot and kicks Kate in the stomach.

Her eyes widen in shock as she tumbles off the edge of the dropoff and out of sight.

For a minute Stiles just gasps, drawing in raggedy breath after raggedy breath and still somehow not getting enough air. Mia whimpers against his chest and he carefully loosens his grip, looking down at her to make sure she’s not hurt.

She frowns at him, lip trembling, whole and alive.

“You’re the best girl in the world,” he tells her, filled with a dizzying gratitude as he takes her in.

She blinks, tired and teary and looking a little irritated at all this fuss. “Ahhh-uh,” she mewls, fist flailing.

“Ahhh-uh,” he agrees, pressing his lips to her forehead. He tightens his grip on Kate’s gun and begins to climb down the ravine, squinting in the gloom to see where she is. It’s a decent-sized fall but he’s surprised he doesn’t hear her scrambling around, trying to attack again.

When he reaches the bottom, he sees why.

She must have landed on a branch, because there’s a jagged, bloody stick bursting out of her chest, like a wooden stake meant to kill a vampire. She’s lying there trapped on the ground, nearly
hyperventilating as she tries to pull herself free. It looks like it might have pierced a lung. He can see a little trickle of blood at the corner of her mouth.

She looks at him without really seeing. Her eyes are wild, pleading with him and the night sky and the entire world. Terror hangs thick in the air. He almost—*almost*—feels pity.

“It’s okay,” Stiles says. His voice sounds strange, sort of foreign as it echoes in the quiet woods. She stares at him, teeth bared, hands curling into fists even though she can’t move. “I’m not going to let you suffer. I won’t stand here and taunt you and enjoy watching you die. I won’t play with you like you’re something less than human.” He pulls the Hale blanket over Mia’s head to protect her little ears, the raises the gun. His hand isn’t shaking at all. “Only a monster would do that.”

Her eyes, cloudy with pain and hatred, widen in her gray face.

This time the gun doesn’t jam.

It’s a clean shot.

Mia screams at the noise and clings to him. He drops the gun and cradles her against his chest, hushing her as best he can. He shuts his eyes against the sight on the ground. “It’s okay,” he chants. “Shh, baby, shh, Daddy’s here. I’m not letting go. I’m not ever letting go.”

Something slams into him, taking him completely by surprise. He barely has time to be terrified before he realizes he’s being protected by whatever has grabbed him, cradled carefully so neither he nor Mia is jostled. “Derek?” he gasps.

Derek shoves him frantically. His eyes are wide and terrified; he must have heard the gunshot and come running. “Stiles, go! Now!”

“You have to run, you have to run now, before she gets up!”

“She’s dead, Derek. Look at her, she’s dead.”

Derek shakes his head. His eyes move frantically: to Kate and then away, to Stiles, to Mia, to the treetops as if she might suddenly leap down upon them. “No, Stiles—she’s tricking you—she pretends, and then she gets back up—”

“Derek, look at her. Look.” Stiles grabs his arm and forces him to see. “It’s over, Derek. She’s gone. She isn’t getting up.”

Derek stares. He goes limp under Stiles’s grip. “She always comes back,” Derek says quietly. He can’t seem to look away from her. “Always.”

“No this time.” Stiles lets him go and sees it clutched in his hand: the damn muzzle.

He wonders how close Derek had come to actually putting it on, and the thought is too horrible for this moment. He reaches down and tugs it away until Derek’s hand opens and meekly surrenders it. Stiles throws it as far as he can and then slips his own hand into Derek’s to replace it. “You’re free, Derek,” he says. The words almost bring new tears, real ones this time instead of those he’d forced in front of Kate. “She won’t come back. This will never happen again.”

Derek tries to drag his gaze away from her back to Stiles. “Did she hurt you?”
“No. She wanted to, but she didn’t.”

“When did you— how did you find her?”

“I went into the woods a half hour after you did. I needed to find Mia.”

Derek scowls at him. “I told you to go home,” he scolds, but the words are so saturated with relief and admiration that Stiles almost laughs.

“I did go home. I had to pack a bag. Then I found her.”

“How? How did you do it?”

Stiles gives the body one last hard look. “She underestimated an omega.” He grins shakily. “And I learned never to underestimate pepper spray again.”

Derek shakes his head slowly, looking completely shell-shocked. Stiles thinks of all the years Derek has lived in terror of Kate. All the people he’s loved gone because of her and her family. He feels a rush of tenderness towards his werewolf. “It’s okay to be happy about this,” he says gently. “It’s okay to be sad, even. It’s okay to feel however you want to feel.”

“I feel,” Derek says, then stops and looks at Stiles. “I love you,” he says simply. “That’s how I feel.”

Stiles chokes on a laugh. “I love you too.” He looks down at his daughter, worriedly sucking at her fist, her last few tears clinging to her lashes. “Now are you going to give your best girl the hug she wants so badly, or are you going to make her wait?”

Derek’s gaze tears away from Kate and lights on Mia. “Oh, my baby,” he says, lifting her from Stiles’s arms. “Oh, my best girl, my very best girl, you’re okay. Papa was so scared. Papa loves you so much. So much, so much, so much.” He covers her face with kisses, then just cradles her, shaking. “It’s like I can’t hold her tight enough,” he says. “You saved her twice now, Stiles. How can I ever repay that?”

“Trust me. No repayment needed.” Stiles smiles down at his daughter, who peers sleepily at him, eyes asking if it’s really over. “She did half the work, honestly. She even managed to charm a hunter! Who knew we had such a good secret weapon on our hands?”

Derek shudders. “I don’t care how good you are at that, Mia. You’re never ever ever doing it again.” A haunted look crosses his face and he presses Mia closer to his chest. “I’m so proud of you and your Daddy, little warrior-princess. You get a hundred bedtime stories tonight if you want them.”

“She was so brave. She made Daddy proud.” Stiles puts his arm around them both, blocking them from Kate. “Let’s take her home and get her fed and changed and washed and into bed.”

“What about…her?”

Stiles doesn’t look back. “I think we’re done with her.”

Derek hesitates, then nods. He kisses Mia’s head and the baby makes a tiny, guttural sound as she snuggles into sleep against his chest. “I agree.”

“Can you get us home?”

“Yes.”

Stiles slips his arm around Derek’s waist and they walk together, step by step, until Kate has faded
away into the night.

Chapter End Notes

WARNINGS: Gun violence threatened against a baby, character death (but not a character anyone likes), sexual abuse in the home due to gender/gender discrimination discussed, Kate tells Stiles about her abortion and hysterectomy.

End of the angst! (For the most part). NEXT UP: A mating ceremony, some long-awaited smut, and Derek and Stiles finally share their plan for the future.
Chapter Notes

Oh dear, this took a while. Er...holiday weekends don't count? Forgive me for breaking my usual five-day rule!
Also, our heroes finally do the dirty in this one, so if you are the sort of person who loves fan fic but hates sex scenes, keep an eye out! (Are there any of you out there? You are absolutely fascinating)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Stiles waits outside Deaton’s clinic with Kira. They’re both silent, though Stiles keeps staring over at Kira, unable to look away from the puckered scar on her throat. She’s crying silently; has been for almost fifteen minutes. When he tried to comfort her she only cried harder, so he’s giving her some space.
The door opens and Deaton steps out. He shakes his head. “I’m sorry,” he says. “He’s still refusing to see either of you.”

Kira wipes at her eyes. “Did you give him my note?”

“He wouldn’t read it.” Deaton hands it back to her, expression grave. “I’m sorry.”

Stiles gets up. He’s done. He’s been sitting here with Kira for hours now, waiting for Scott to finish his pity party, and he’s got a baby at home he wants to get back to. “Fuck it,” he says, and strides past Deaton to open the door to the clinic resting room.

“Stiles,” Deaton calls weakly, making absolutely no move to stop him.

Scott has his face to the wall when Stiles enters. His shoulder is bandaged and his color is still a little off, but Stiles knows it’s not that keeping him from turning his head to look at Stiles. “Go away,” he says dully.

No."

“I don’t want to see anyone.”

“Then keep your face turned away. It was never anything great to look at.”

Scott gives a huge, put-upon sigh, and rolls over to stare up at the ceiling. “Fine,” he says to the light. “Just get it over with, then. I deserve it.”

Stiles frowns. “What do you think I’m going to say, exactly?” He pulls a molded plastic chair over to Scott’s bedside and takes a seat.

“You hate me. I’m a traitor. You never want to see me again. I’m officially relieved of my position as Mia’s godfather. Just say it. Then leave and let me sleep.”

It takes Stiles a few seconds to find words. “Scott…are you serious? You actually think I feel that way?”
Scott keeps staring resolutely at the ceiling. A single tear slips down his cheek to puddle on the pillow.

“Scott, I came here to ask for your forgiveness. I’m the only person here who really knew you before you turned. I should have seen. I should have.” Stiles’s own throat is tight. “You have absolutely nothing to be sorry for. You know you fought the wolfsbane, right? Deaton says what you did is practically impossible, but you fought it, because you knew Mia was in danger. Those few seconds when you tried to run with her might have made all the difference. So thank you, for what you did for my daughter. And please forgive me for what I didn’t see.”

Scott shuts his eyes against his tears, but they just keep coming. “You killed her,” he says. It’s not a question; Deaton must have told him what had happened.

“Yes.” It’s been two days since Stiles shot Kate, and the entire Preserve has taken a breath of relief. “It’s over.”

“I want to see her. I have to know for sure.”

“You will.” After Stiles and Derek had come back to the Preserve, they’d told Deaton and the other Preserve leaders everything. It was decided that the body shouldn’t be left out there for the animals, but should be disposed of with the dignity Kate had never shown her victims. The werewolves weren’t the monsters, after all. “They’re out in the woods getting her now. Tonight they’re going to have some sort of ceremony. A lot of people need to see for themselves that she’s dead.”

“And after that I just want to die,” Scott says softly, curling even tighter into a ball.

“Well, that would be a pretty fucking stupid thing to do now that you’re finally free. Deaton says all you need is a few weeks of hypnotherapy to retrain your wolf, and you’ll be fine now that you’re off those pills.”

“And then what? I can’t even trust my own memories. I don’t know what was real and what was Kate’s influence. She made me do things…awful things…” Scot lets out a shuddery breath. “You saw what I did to Kira.”

“Kira is alive, Scott. That’s what matters.”

“I saw her yesterday when she tried to come in. Her throat…what I did…” Scott is crying so hard he’s having trouble speaking. “It’s scared. It was supposed to be scarred from my mating bite. Now it will always be there— reminding her what I was…what she thought she loved…”

“Kira loves you; she loves you so much she hasn’t left this clinic since they brought you. Scott, please let her come in. She misses you. She’s out there crying because she wants to be in here.”

“She can’t trust me,” Scott says, almost to himself.

“But she does trust you. Kate made you a victim, not a villain.” Stiles reaches for Scott’s hand. “You know that your love for Kira is real. Kate didn’t create that. She’s taken so much from werewolves already, Scott. Don’t let her win this one. Get out of this bed and live your life. Be with Kira. Make lots of werewolf babies with her. And then go out and fight for werewolf rights. You’re an Alpha, and you’re young, and people like you. They’ll listen. The world needs you, so get up and celebrate the fact that you’re still alive.”

Scott turns to look at Stiles, finally. “I can’t,” he says, almost apologetically. “I’m not ready.”

“I know it’s hard. But you can’t hide, Scott. Werewolves have been hiding long enough. It’s time to
get out of bed and fight.”

Scott looks towards the door. His lip is still wobbling, but the tears have stopped. “She really wants to see me? She misses me?”

“Of course she does. Will you let her come in?”

Scott nods, then shuts his eyes tight, terrified.

Stiles walks over and opens the door. Kira is still sitting out there, tears cutting tracks over the makeup she’s used to try and hide the scar on her throat. “Kira? He’s ready for you.”

Her eyes widen and she stands. Stiles steps away from the door and lets her take his place in the room.

Scott offers her a tiny, tremulous smile. “Hi, cuddle-bug,” he whispers.

Kira lets out a sob and dives forward. Stiles stands there until the door swings closed, watching Scott hold her and cry into her hair and sputter out all kinds of apologies and promises. “I love you,’ he tells her. “I love you, I love you, I—”

The door shuts off whatever else he was going to say, but that’s all right. All Stiles needs to know is that Scott is going to be okay. He can leave his friend to heal now.

He has his own family waiting for him at home.

#

That night Stiles walks with a group of werewolves solemnly past the gates of the Preserve. He’s next to Scott, both he and Kira there in case Scott falters. The still-weak werewolf is using a cane, but his face is set with grim determination.

Derek had elected to stay home with Mia. He hadn’t needed or wanted to see this, but he’s in the minority. There are at least fifty people here. Some, like the twins, were personally victimized by Kate; others by members of the Argent clan years ago; some just choosing to let Kate represent all the hunters who had torn their lives apart.

Her body is waiting for them. They’ve decided to burn her outside of the Preserve, and someone has hastily erected a sort of altar. She’s all packed in with straw drenched in lighter fluid. The smell of it, along with the rot of death, makes Stiles’s stomach curl, but he forces himself to look straight at her.

The smell of omega had apparently still been strong enough to attract animals, he sees. He swallows hard, glad that the Preserve leaders had decided to recover the body. Nobody deserved to rot alone in a forest, picked away at by animals. He supposes it’s a good thing she had already been presumed dead by the world; it frees the Preserve to have this bit of justice.

Everyone halts in a circle around the body. In the darkness, with only torches held by the leaders illuminating Kate’s features, this night feels like some momentous, almost holy, event. Everyone else must be feeling the same way, because for a moment everything is silent, even the crickets.

Deaton steps forward, and when he speaks his voice is grave and sonorous: “Tonight we do not gather in hate. Instead we gather in pity. Pity for those like Kate Argent, who wanted to hunt us to our deaths, and eventually hunted us to her own. She was the last of the Argents. I know that many of you were in disbelief that she could really be gone, after all she and her people had done, and killed by a human, no less.” His eyes flicker to Stiles and then away. “Let this put your fears at ease.
She will not be buried with our people, or inside our walls. We will bury her here. But it is only fitting that she be put to rest with the sword she used in life.” He holds out his hand and accepts a torch. “Fire was the Argent weapon of choice. Many of us were touched by it. This is the last Argent fire. And this one, we control.”

He touches the flame to the straw and steps back as it lights. Stiles has to squint past the sudden billow of smoke. For a moment he swears he sees her eyes open, as if she has one last fight in her, but it’s just a trick of the flame.

Her skin begins to blacken and he feels his burns ache at the smell of it, as if in memory. He’s glad Derek chose to stay home. It’s justice, but a hard, ugly sort of justice.

At first all he can hear is the crackle of the fire but then, to his left, he hears the triplets speak in tandem. “Nathan Carver,” they say, just loudly enough to be heard.

From the other side of the pyre comes a voice Stiles doesn’t know: “Lauren Miller. Hadley Miller. Joshua Obadagoshi.”

“Bonnie Reyes,” Erica says, staring at Kate’s body as if she’s seeing the gunman leaning through her car window all over again. “Maria Reyes. Joey Reyes. Lindsey Reyes. Polly Reyes.”

They all start to speak up then: names of people Stiles doesn’t know and will never know. “Diana Lahey. Jordana Inglsey. Colby Mack. Osha Jones,” Isaac says.

“Rebecca Harris,” Adrian Harris says. He’s crying silently as he watches Kate burn. “Annabelle Harris. Genevieve Harris. Brianna Harris. Spencer Harris. My littlest one, who wasn’t yet born.”

“Paul Deaton. Elspeth Deaton.” Deaton’s eyes reflect only fire. Stiles has no idea who the names are to Deaton—parents, siblings, a mate and child—but Deaton bows his head in grief when the words are spoken and does not look up again for a long time.

“Laura Hale,” Stiles says. “Peter Hale. Cora Hale.” He lists every name he can remember from Mia’s blanket, but he never has to say Derek Hale or Mia Stilinski-Hale, and he clings to that fact so the names of the dead don’t tug him into despair.

The last name has just been spoken when the fire finally takes over completely and blocks Kate from view. It takes a long time for a body to burn and Stiles is swaying on his feet by the time the flames have finally burned themselves out and all that is left is blackened bone.

You never would have known that she was a human rather than a werewolf; an omega rather than an alpha. You never would have known she had been so consumed with hate.

It almost seems like a gift to give that to her, to burn away what had made her so cruel.

Some people stay to watch the bones actually be buried, but Stiles has seen enough. He takes Scott’s arm and they walk back together, breathing shallowly until the air is finally clear from ash and burned flesh.

Stiles stops by Scott and Kira’s just long enough to take a shower, so he won’t greet Derek smelling like smoke, and then he goes home. Yesterday they’d moved into their third house, not wanting to intrude on the triplets anymore. They’re currently living in one of the houses left empty after Kate’s reign of terror had caused several families to flee. It’s small and safe and just fine for now.
By the time he makes it home it’s very late, but Derek is still rocking Mia in the soft glow of the nursery night-lights. He smiles tiredly when he sees Stiles. “Someone was outraged at the idea of going to sleep without a good-night kiss from Daddy,” he says.

Stiles puts his arm around Derek’s waist and leans his head against Derek’s shoulder so he can study his daughter. Mia is suffering no ill effects from her time with Kate, save for a nasty diaper-rash and maybe a newfound aversion to being away from one of her parents. She pokes out a trembling lower lip at him, eyelashes starred with tears. “Poor baby,” he says, heart welling with tenderness towards her. “Daddy will give you two kisses, as interest. How about that?” He leans forward and gives her her kisses, one right after the other. She yawns hugely and doesn’t fuss when Derek carefully leans down and places her in her crib.

“Nighty-night, Mia,” Derek says softly, stepping away. He puts an arm around Stiles’s shoulder and leads him out of the nursery. “Is it done?” he asks quietly once the door is shut behind them.

“It’s done.” Stiles buries his head in Derek’s chest and breathes until he can’t remember the smell of Kate burning.

“And?”

“I’m glad it’s over.” He means all of it— the burning, the months fearing her, the entire Agent clan. It’s over.

“Me too.” Derek tilts his head up and kisses him softly.

Stiles has to smile. “You can’t go to sleep without a good-night kiss from Daddy either, huh?”

“I don’t want to sleep.” Derek’s eyes catch his. They’re dark with want, with need. Stiles’s breath stutters.

Finally.

“You have a better idea?”

Derek nods and in a sudden move he has Stiles lifted in the air, hands gripping him around the waist, so Stiles has to wrap his legs around Derek to stay upright. “I’ve smelled you when you were a stranger. I’ve smelled you when my body thought you were my mate. I’ve smelled you when you were my daughter’s father and my bedmate and the omega I was courting. Now I want to see how you smell when I’ve been inside of you.” His lips brush over Stiles’s neck, pausing to suck a mark just under his ear. “Because I think that might just be the best yet.”

Stiles groans as Derek’s lips keep traveling, tasting him all over. “You’re sure?”

“More than sure. You saved me by killing Kate. What better way to reward you than with exactly what you rescued?” Derek teeth scrape his earlobes. “My mouth.” His hand sneaks through Stiles’s legs, rubbing at the seat of his pants. “My hands.” He adjusts Stiles so Stiles can feel his erection straining through. “My cock. I wanted our first time to be at an occasion. Kate’s dead, we’re safe, and I want you right now more than I could ever have imagined. Let’s celebrate.”

Stiles’s eyes roll back into his head as Derek sucks another mark right on the most sensitive part of his neck. “Bedroom,” he manages.

“Yeah, that’s a start.” Derek doesn’t stop kissing him, even when he’s carrying Stiles into their new shared bedroom. He even manages to kick his own pants off through some werewolf wizardry. He gets Stiles onto the bed, then bends down to torture his neck and throat some more. “I’m going to
give you a mating bite here,” he promises, voice going a little rough between kisses. “Just not yet. Once that’s done my body will already know that I’m yours and you’re mine.” He tugs Stiles’s pants off and frees the leaking cock. “But tonight, I want you to show me.”

With shaking hands Stiles gets himself on his stomach, ass up for Derek. He’s slicker than he’s ever been before and he spreads himself open so Derek can see. “All yours,” he gasps. “Forever.”

He’s not in heat. His body isn’t recognizing Derek as anything more than the best-smelling alpha in the universe. There’s no insistent biology at work here. He just wants Derek, because this is the man he loves and trusts more than anyone in the world.

Derek kisses him there. “All yours,” he promises when he comes up. “Forever.” There’s the rip of a condom and Stiles sits up so he can roll it on for Derek. He stares into Derek’s eyes as he does it, hoping that Derek isn’t remembering Kate and the last time he gave all of himself to an omega.

He’s not going to tell Derek about what Kate had said about her pregnancy. It would only hurt him, and that chapter of his life is closed now. He doesn’t want Derek to ever have to go back there, even in his mind. “I love you,” he says instead, finishing up with the condom and placing a little kiss on the head when he’s done.

“God, you’ve got a perfect mouth. That’s the second thing I noticed after your smell. That perfect fucking mouth.” Derek cups his ass as he gets back into position. “I love your mouth. I love you. I am so fucking glad the clinic hired that fucking incompetent intern.” He leans back down to push his tongue inside of Stiles, and then he uses his fingers, and then he finally, finally gives Stiles his cock. It swells inside of him until he’s thoroughly knotted, stretched full and wide and moaning Derek’s name as he buck his hips for more.

And Stiles is no longer the world’s only virgin father.

#

Two weeks later they manage to drag themselves away from their new favorite pastime to take Mia out to the woods. The clearing is beautifully set up with chairs and an altar all twisted with vines and a white aisle runner covered with red rose petals.

Stiles and Derek take their seats in the front. Mia, who has just started teething, is on Derek’s lap so he can take her pain, giving the stink-eye to just about everyone. She isn’t a fan of the frilly baby-of-honor dress Kira picked out, and Stiles is pretty sure she’s going to craftily try and puke all over it so her fathers will never make her wear it again.

“Don’t worry,” Stiles tells her, giving her lacy-sock-clad foot a little tickle. “You can wear your PJs to Daddy and Papa’s mating ceremony.”

She drools at him.

When the music starts and Scott steps up to the altar everyone stands and faces the back of the aisle. Kira looks absolutely resplendent in her dress. She’s chosen to go nontraditional and it’s a beautiful, rich purple, shot through with red. Even Mia coos in delight when she sees her favorite aunt walking down the aisle on her father’s arm.

Deaton performs the ceremony. Scott cries a few times during it, but when he takes her in his arms to give her the mating bite his eyes are clear of everything except overwhelming love. Kira returns the favor, and then they both put mating necklaces on each other to proudly show off the new scars. Stiles is pleased to see that the puckered line from Scott’s attack fades in comparison to his mating
They’ve both decided to take each other’s last name, and Stiles whoops louder than anyone when Deaton announces Mr. and Ms. McCall-Yukimura. One of the pack members starts a howl and everyone takes it up, even Stiles. Mia looks positively delighted by the sound and lets out a little squeak, trying to join in.

“Ferocious!” Derek praises her, tickling her belly until she shrieks with laughter and drums her feet in the air.

That night they make love slowly and tenderly. When Derek’s knot catches on Stiles’s rim Stiles moans so loudly he has to muffle his voice in the pillow. He loves how full he feels, tied to Derek in a way nobody can break. “I love you,” he sighs, lost in the bliss of his own orgasm, brought about just by the feeling of Derek inside of him.

“I love you too,” Derek murmurs, pulling him close to cuddle him until the knot goes down. “I have a present for you.”

“I know, I feel it, I love my present.”

Derek chuckles. “Not that.” He pulls out of Stiles and turns to rummage in the bedside table, where he pulls out a wrapped box. “This.”

Stiles tears off the wrapping paper to see the same box Derek had given him for Christmas. “Did you build me another house?”

“Not quite. Open it.”

He does. Inside is a door key.

“The house is finished. We can move in any time.”

Stiles hesitates, tracing the design on the key with his finger. “You’re ready?”

“I am.”

Stiles crushes the key in his hand and kisses Derek until he’s lightheaded. “We’re going home,” he says. It’s almost incomprehensible to think of leaving the Preserve, but he thinks of everything he can show Mia. Of seeing his dad again. Of starting their life together out there in the wide world.

Derek smiles and strokes his cheek. “We’re going home,” he echoes.

They call a pack meeting three days later. Scott and Kira show up giggling and covered in love bites, but everyone else is a little wary and surly. They know what Stiles and Derek are going to say. Erica takes Mia right away, putting her hand on the baby’s cheek to take her pain, and cuddles her with a sad little pout on her face.

“Stiles and I have some news,” Derek starts.

“You’re leaving,” Liam guesses. His lip is wobbling a little bit, but he tries to sound blasé.

“We’re going home,” Stiles confirms. He slips his hand into Derek’s and looks around at all the sad faces. “We’re going back to Beacon Hills in three weeks. And we’d like all of you to come with us.”
Everyone just stares at him, jaws hanging. Even Scott and Kira stop canoodling for a minute to look at him like he’s completely lost his mind.

Erica recovers first. “Derek, you’re my alpha. A part of me says to follow you wherever you go, but…there’s nothing for us out there. We’re not safe. And what would we do? Work in a café like you and be hated? Sorry, but…that’s not the life I want.”

“You can do anything you want to do,” Derek tells her. “Stiles and I have more money than we know what to do with, and we agreed that we want that money to go towards giving our daughter a good future. Having her pack around her is part of that. You all have high school diplomas. If you want to go to college, we’ll pay. I’m starting at Beacon Hills University this winter. We can all do it together.”

“Wait, wait, wait,” Isaac says, holding up in hand in a whoa slow down gesture. “You’re going to college? Since when?”

“Since I decided what I want to do with my life. I’m going to try and get my undergraduate degree in three years— it’s not like I care about the college party scene— and then I’m going to law school. I want to be a werewolf rights lawyer.” Derek throws Stiles a quick, proud glance. “Stiles gave me the idea and put me in contact with the right people.”

Stunned silence greets this for a moment before Kira hesitantly asks, “So you’re both going to college at the same time?”

Stiles shakes his head. “I’ve decided to forgo college.”

Kira undeniably looks a little disappointed at that, clearly thinking he’s decided to be a stay-at-home omega instead. “Oh. Okay.”

“I realized I don’t need a college degree right now to do what I want to do.” Stiles picks up a stack of papers from the table in front of him, a little nervous now. Kira is a major part of his plan, and he isn’t sure what she’s going to say. “Have you ever heard of LOVEYourself?”

“The number-one nonprofit for omega rights? Of course.”

“Their corporate offices are in Stanford, which is only about twenty miles from Beacon Hills. I used to volunteer there every single summer. I still had a bunch of contacts, and after you told me about the struggles omega werewolves have today, I thought somebody should be doing something about it. I contacted my friends at corporate and they agreed. We’ve been working on this for a while now, and they eventually decided this is too big a project to be juggled with everything else they do.” He pulls out the paper with the logo and passes it back to her.

“OWNYourself,” she reads from the paper. “Stiles, what…?”

“It stands for Omega-Werewolf Nexus. It’s the new nonprofit branch of LOVEYourself, focusing exclusively on helping omega werewolves. It’s also going to be partnering with United Wolves, the only werewolf nonprofit that isn’t completely defunct. United Wolves has been floundering, but with the support of LOVEYourself behind them now we think they can make a comeback. They’re even moving their corporate offices to California and we’re hoping they’ll be flourishing within five years. As for the rest of our goals…well, you can see for yourself.” He tosses her the entire folder of printed materials.

She flips through the five-year-plans and organizational charts and promotional material mock-ups. “Stiles, this is amazing,” she says in awe. “This is exactly what omega werewolves need.”
“Glad you think so.” Stiles takes a deep breath. “Want to help me run it?”

She chokes. “Me? What? Are you kidding?”

“Not at all. It’s going to be run by a board of directors. I already have my seat. A few others are coming straight from LOVEYourself. But we all agreed that it would be crazy not to have an actual omega werewolf helping us make decisions.” Stiles shakes his head to cut off her immediate protests. “You’re smart, and you care about this, and you have first-hand knowledge and experience. We need you.”

“I never even went to college, I can’t…”

“Neither have I. You don’t need a college degree to know how to help people. We need your voice on the board.” He pauses. “Say yes, Kira. There’s going to be a nursery at our headquarters, so omegas can bring their children to work. It’s right in Beacon Hills. It’s ideal.”

Kira glances helplessly at Scott. “We just got mated…Scott’s studying here with Deaton…we can’t just leave.”

“One of the goals of OWNYourself is to promote study of omega werewolf biology. Part of that means giving scholarships to students who plan to study medicine in a way that benefits werewolves. Students like you, Scotty. You could go to medical school. The Preserve already has Deaton— you can do what he does, for all the werewolves out there.”

“Medical school,” Scott repeats. He looks at Kira and they share a quick, private conversation. “I mean, I never thought about it… I almost failed biology in ninth grade…”

“I believe in you,” Stiles says simply.

“Me too,” Kira tells her mate, resting her head against his chest. “I…I think we should go. I wouldn’t mind going back out into the world again. I mean, if we’re with Stiles and Derek…”

“Are you sure, baby?”

“I’m sure.”

Stiles looks at Ethan. “There’s room for you too. All of you— United Wolves and OWNYourself need volunteers. They’re going to be based out of Beacon Hills, since I told corporate wolves wouldn’t want to live and work in the city. That will likely bring other traffic to Beacon Hills, so there are going to be plenty of jobs open— ”

“You’re going to base the two biggest werewolf-rights organizations out of one town?” Isaac shakes his head, still looking doubtful. “Sounds like an invitation for a hunter attack.”

“We disagree,” Derek says, stepping up to stand beside Stiles. “Hunters never attack in a way that brings attention to their activities. They don’t want the public to know they’re hunting werewolves, in case that would lead to humans actually trying to protect us. We’re hiding in plain sight. Attacking two nonprofits— especially one filled with omegas and children— would cause national outrage. No hunters would risk it.”

“But just in case, the Beacon Hills police force has agreed to expand,” Stiles adds. “They’re going to be increasing their number and assigning new deputies to exclusively watch the headquarters.” He looks pointedly at the triplets, Boyd, and Erica, the strongest werewolves in the room. “I bet they’d love to have some of you guys on the force. You’d pass the entrance tests with flying colors.”
Eyes dark back and forth as the werewolves communicate silently. Derek speaks up quietly: “The Preserve should always be here as a place to run and heal and grieve, if need be. But it was never meant to be a place to live your lives. We should all be free, and we should all be together.”

“Nathan is buried here,” Ethan says helplessly.

“I’ve been here since I was five years old,” Erica mutters, staring down at Mia, currently sound asleep and pillowed against Erica’s chest.

“I was born here,” Boyd adds.

“I’m not commanding you as your alpha. I would never do that. The decision is yours. You have options.” Derek nods to his pack. “Take some time to think it over. We’d like to know by the end of the week, so we can arrange housing for everyone.”

Stiles takes his baby back from Erica and then goes over to sit with Scott and Kira while everyone else quietly, intensely converses. “Why didn’t you ever say anything?” Scott asks him, point-blank. “You must have been planning this for months.”

“It took a while to arrange everything. I didn’t want to get your hopes up.”

“I can’t believe I’m going back home. After I got here, I thought I’d never leave again. And to do it this way… I mean, medical school…” Scott looks at Kira and grins. “You want a doctor for a mate, baby?”

“You’re going to have to learn fast,” Kira tells him. “I won’t have Deaton to look after me when Scott Junior comes along.”

“Who, knowing you guys, is already on his way,” Stiles mutters, rolling his eyes fondly when Scott and Kira both blush. If Kira isn’t already pregnant, Stiles is a weremonkey.


Stiles smiles and cuddles his daughter close when she coos in her sleep. Mia is going to be proud of her omega parent. If she presents as an omega, she’s going to know that the entire world is open to her. For the first time ever, the idea of having an omega child doesn’t fill him with dread. He’s going to do his part to make the world a safe place for her. “I just hope we all go back together,” he says, looking around the room at his pack. This is his family, just as much as the people back in Beacon Hills.

“You know what,” Scott says, as Erica and Boyd nod, obviously coming to a decision. “Something tells me that we will.”

#

“Did you check under the beds?”

“Yeah. And the crib. It’s clean.”

“Dressers?”

“I checked Mia’s. Didn’t you check ours?”

“…Maybe. I’ll look again.”

Stiles lugs his suitcase out to the car and slams the trunk. They’re not taking too much back to
Beacon Hills; most of what they own here is borrowed or donated, and their new home is furnished, so they’re giving most of what they have back to the Preserve. Still, Derek is frantically running around, making sure they have everything they want. Delaying the actual moment of leaving, Stiles thinks, but he keeps that to himself.

Mia is excused from the packing frenzy and is currently propped up in the living room, showing off her new sitting skills, happily gumming on one of the animal-head teething rings Derek bought for her on the last supply run. She flashes Stiles her three new teeth when he walks back in and holds out the ring with the bird to him, babbling. He catches a few distinct consonants, but she’s not quite ready to call him Dada yet.

“Look at my independent sitter!” he coos, bending down when he sees her about to topple over. “You’re such a big girl, going on your first plane ride.”

“Ah ba ba!”

“That’s right, plane! You’re going to fly just like the birds!” Stiles takes her teething ring and flies it through the air. “Then when we land we get to see Grandpa. You missed your grandpa, didn’t you?”

She falls over, receiving a soft landing on the pillow. She giggles delightedly at him and raises her arms so he’ll lift her back up.

“Bedroom is clean,” Derek reports, coming out with his own suitcase in hand. “Is that everything?”

“Yep. Scott just texted. He’s with Kira, the triplets, and Liam. Isaac, Boyd, and Erica are already waiting at the gates.”

“So we’re good to go?”

“I think so.”

Derek nods and picks up Mia. “Say, bye-bye, house,” he tells her.

“Guh-gah!”

Stiles takes a moment at the door. They haven’t lived here long enough for it to really feel like a home, but he was with his family here. It holds only good memories. “Bye-bye,” he says softly before he walks out to the car. Derek buckles Mia into her car seat and Stiles climbs in the back with her to entertain her on the long ride to the airport.

“Last chance to kidnap Deaton,” Derek says as he starts the car. The entire pack has decided to move to Beacon Hills with Derek and Stiles, but Deaton refused their offer to come along. He said he was needed here more than out there. Stiles has a feeling his position will change eventually—he’s doing his best to get the Stanford School of Medicine to offer him a faculty spot, even on a visiting basis. OWNYourself is having a hell of a time finding doctors as well-versed in werewolf biology as Deaton.

“I wish. He could bring the Quaaludes.” Stiles knows the transition is going to be difficult for the pack. Hell, the transition is going to be difficult for him. But he’s excited to see his father and the converted OWNYourself headquarters and the new house. Still… “I’m going to miss this place,” Stiles says as the familiar streets whip by. He’s been here for nearly a year now, though in some ways it feels like even longer.

“I’m going to miss the walls, and the guards, and the cameras,” Derek admits as he slows to a stop in front of the gates, where the two other cars holding the pack are waiting. “But…I’m looking forward
“And our big, big house,” Stiles says to Mia as the gates swing open. “With our big, big woods to run in. What kinds of animals will we see in the woods? Will we see bunnies?” He holds up the teething ring with the bucktoothed bunny head. Mia squeals and makes grabby hands for it. “Bunnies like to go hip-hop, don’t they?” He holds it up so she has to reach, straining her neck tummy-time style.

“Yeah, that’s good,” Derek says. “Tire her out so she sleeps on the plane, please.”

Mia’s car seat faces the rear of the car, and she watches through the back window as the gate swings shut behind them. It’s the first time she’s ever left the Preserve, save for that one time with Kate, and she gives Stiles a questioning look. “Ba?” she asks, a little worried, as if she thinks her crazy daddies might not know what they’re doing.

“That’s right, Mia-mine.” Stiles kisses her nose and puts his arm around the car seat, snuggling her as best he can. “That was a good place for us for a while. But now we’re going home.”

A bird outside catches her attention and she tries to reach for it, immediately distracted. Derek reaches his free hand back and Stiles grips it, taking a deep breath, grinning into the sun as they start the journey home together.

Chapter End Notes

I hope that burning scene convinced you SKEPTICS that Kate is really dead. She really is! On my honor as a Sterek shipper, she is!

NEXT UP: The werewolves transition into their new life, new relationships are formed, and Derek and Stiles christen their new home.
Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

So...this took a long time. I'm sorry. Shitty RL week. And originally I planned to have just one chapter back in Beacon Hills before the epilogue, but I didn't want to be like "Then they went back to Beacon Hills and everything was perfect the end!" when there would for sure be some growing pains and stuff that had to be tied up, and the chapter ended up getting so long that I had to either chop it in half or doing something crazy like cut the GRATUITOUS SEX. So this is the chapter of loose ends and setups, the next chapter is the one with the fluff and smut, and then the epilogue taking place a few years in the future will be posted next Saturday, which (not-so) coincidentally is the day I'm moving out of the city. Some of you might remember that I posted the first chapter the day I moved here, and I'm a nut for symmetry like that. Anyway, enjoy this chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Werewolves aren’t meant to fly in planes. Stiles hears every member of his pack draw in a collective breath of terror as soon as they lift off, and for most of the flight they whisper about the uselessness of seat belts and the probability of engine failure and the acrid smell of the canned air. Mia gets passed around like a human stress ball, each pack member taking a moment to cuddle her before she’s being grabbed up and squeezed by someone else. Finally Derek gets fed up and snatches her out of the air mid-transfer, plunking her onto his lap with a scowl that dares anyone to reach for her again.

For his part, Stiles stares out the window, watching the earth pass by in patches of green and gold. This is the country he traveled with Derek months ago, those endless roads reduced now to gray squiggles. “Aww,” he says. “I think I just saw that motel we stayed at where the people in the room next to us were filming amateur porn.”

“That never happened,” Derek grumbles.

“I saw what I saw and I heard what I heard and what I saw and heard was the filming of pornography.”

“They were just having sex. Loudly.”

“Most people don’t have someone yelling, ‘find your light!’ during sex. Unless…would you be into that?”

Derek shakes his head and looks down at Mia. “Your daddy is a silly goose,” he tells her, giving her another teething ring to suck to relieve pressure in her ears. Mia looks up at him and nods. Stiles tries not to take it personally. Nodding is her new thing; he and Derek have spent more hours than they care to admit spouting ridiculous nonsense at her just to see her nod along.

They touch down in California with only two expletive outbursts from pack members and minimal crying from Mia. What looks like half the Beacon Hills police force is waiting for them by the luggage carousel, and Stiles makes a mad dash for his father. “Dad” he yells.

John’s face breaks out into a wide grin and he holds open his arms. “Mia!” he shouts back, eyes
locked on his granddaughter.

Stiles lets the Sheriff have the baby, hoping she remembers him enough that she won’t cry. Luckily she’s pretty mellowed out after the flight and she lets the Sheriff bounce her on his hip, even reaching up to curiously smack at his hat. “Oh, look at you,” he coos. “You got so big. Look at that face! You know what you are? You’re a cutie-patootie.”

Mia nods sagely and then devotes herself to pulling John’s shiny Sheriff badge off his chest.

“Is there a reason you brought most of the force with you?” Stiles asks in a low voice, not wanting to alarm the slightly freaked-out pack members waiting for their luggage.

“You needed transpo.” The Sheriff grimaces slightly, patting Mia on the back. “And…ever since the nonprofits got approved I’ve heard some grumbles about the number of werewolves going to be moving to Beacon Hills. I thought if those people saw that you all had us on your side they wouldn’t try anything stupid.”

Stiles frowns. “You never mentioned that.”

“I was a little distracted by you nearly burning to death and then walking into the clutches of a serial killer.”

“Yeah, well. As always, I’m glad you taught me how to shoot.” Stiles really doesn’t want to relive what happened with Kate right now, so he turns to call his pack over and divide them up between cruisers. Everyone looks a little terrified at the thought of being separated from their Alpha but Stiles and Derek and Scott make a show out of greeting the deputies by name so no one feels threatened.

Derek and Stiles are obviously going with John, and Stiles quietly tells Derek what his father just said while they walk outside and John bonds with his granddaughter. By the time they reach the car Mia is wearing John’s Sheriff hat and looking at him like he’s the eighth wonder of the world.

“I miss the jeep,” Derek mutters a little mournfully as he climbs into the back of John’s car.

“We needed a more family-friendly car anyway.” Stiles straps Mia into the car seat John already has waiting, glad to see that she evidently has enough California in her blood that the extreme heat isn’t bothering her too much. “Okay, Dad. Tell me the truth. How bad is it here? What kind of opposition are we facing?”

John sighs as he starts the car up. “There were some protests when they were renovating the old factory buildings for your headquarters. About a month ago someone threw a couple rocks through the window, so we put some guards there, and there hasn’t been much since. I honestly don’t know what to tell you, buddy. I can’t imagine they’d ever turn violent, but…”

“But the last thing any werewolf needs is to feel threatened by humans,” Derek says, turning to stare out the window suspiciously at the houses passing by. “They’ll be on-edge moving to a new place already, and werewolves don’t like to stay any place hostile to them. If the wrong buttons get pushed OWNYourself and United Wolves could collapse.”

Stiles groans, annoyed with himself for not seeing this as a possibility. His pack are the first new werewolves to move to Beacon Hills, but once the nonprofits are up and running they’re estimating an influx of at least two hundred and fifty werewolf families moving in over the next two years. The town council had approved the nonprofits being operated here in part for that reason; it was expected to cause a huge economic boom for the town. Evidently some people aren’t as pleased. “Maybe they just needed to get it out of their systems.”
“Or maybe they’ll decide a smashed window is just the start and turn to more permanent measures.” Derek looks at Mia, one hand protectively reaching out to touch her cheek, eyes grim at the thought of someone hurting her to send a message. He stays grave-faced for the rest of the car ride, only speaking again to tell Stiles not to clue the pack in to any potential issues just yet. They’re nervous enough as it is.

They’re transitioning the pack into life outside the Preserve slowly, and for now they’ll be staying in an apartment complex only about three miles from Derek and Stiles’s home. Derek think it will be good for them to be living right next to and on top of each other for a little while, until they feel comfortable enough to actually become homeowners.

The complex itself looks just as perfect in pictures as it had online— small enough that the werewolves won’t feel outnumbered by their human neighbors, secluded, and close to the woods. The landlord greets them pleasantly, though Stiles sees a few people peering out of their curtains, obviously wanting a surreptitious look at the wolves.

The apartments have come furnished, but there’s still quite a lot of setting-up to do. Derek divides up the jobs, sending Mia and Stiles on a mission to charm everyone they can find. Stiles waltzes Mia around the property, greeting each person who walks by, introducing them to his daughter and letting Mia do her thing before he lets slip that they’re with the werewolf posse.

It works like a charm, and by the time the pack members are settled in everyone seems more than willing to accept the werewolves if it means the werewolf baby will be stopping by to say hello. Mia adores all the attention, which at least soothes any worries Stiles might have had about her ability to reintegrate into mixed society. Still, she’s tired from her big day, and she’s yawning on Stiles’s shoulder when he carries her back to her Papa.

“How did it go?” Derek asks, taking Mia from Stiles’s arms and kissing the top of her head when she snuggles against him contentedly.

“She’s still our little charmer.” Stiles looks around Boyd and Erica’s apartment approvingly. “You got everything moved in already, huh?”

“You’re sure these people aren’t going to murder us in our sleep?” Erica huffs, moving the couch all by herself while Boyd finishes hanging some curtains.

“I think you’re probably safe.”

“Swell.” Erica gives the couch another shove to get it into the position she wants. “There. Done. Now will you two get the hell out of here so Boyd can move his penis into my vagina?”

Stiles flails in his desperate attempt to cover Mia’s ears. “Jesus Christ, Erica, my child is in the room.”

“When you move into a new home you have to have crazy sex in it. It’s a rule.” Erica waggles her eyebrows at him. “Like you haven’t been fantasizing about Derek popping his knot into you on your brand-new sheets tonight?”

Derek slaps his own hands over Stiles’s to gives Mia’s ears extra protection.

“If we’re finished with this line of conversation,” the Sheriff says painfully from the doorway.

“Very finished.” Stiles shakes his head at Erica and turns to his father. “Is everyone settled?”

“I believe so.”
“Then let’s go.” Stiles holds his hand out to Derek. He is dying to see the house and have a little private time with his family, though not for the reasons Erica suggested.

Well, not entirely for the reasons Erica suggested.

Derek needs some more time to fuss over his pack members like the mother-hen alpha he is, but eventually Stiles manages to drag him away and back to the car. “You think they’ll be all right?” Derek asks, throwing a longing look back to the complex as the Sheriff drives them away.

“They’re fine. Stop worrying.” Stiles does notice that Jordan Parrish’s cruiser is still in the lot. John must have given him orders to stick around and make sure nothing bad happens.

John looks at Stiles in the rearview mirror. “I figured you might want to stop by…by your old room to pick up some things you left.”

“Oh. Yeah.” The wording—your old room takes Stiles by surprise, and when the house he’d lived in for his entire childhood looms in front of him he has to swallow past a lump in his throat.

That’s not his home anymore.

It’s a sudden, painful pill to swallow, and in the moment it hits him he feels very young again. This is where he grew up; where his mom died and he’d presented and he’d lived with his dad. He won’t ever come back here as anything more than a visitor.

His father must be having similar thoughts because he puts his arm around Stiles’s shoulder as they walk up to the door, Derek carrying Mia a few steps behind. “Sunday dinners,” he says, trying and failing to sound stern. “Every week. Or I’ll eat McDonald’s, and you can’t stop me.”

“Every week,” Stiles agrees. When the door opens and he smells his home he almost wants to cry.

He loves Mia and Derek; he loves being a father; he loves the direction his life is going.

But he loved it here, too.

“I’m going to run up to my room,” he says without looking at Derek. “You just hang out here.”

“You sure you don’t need help?”

“I’m sure.” He walks up the stairs slowly and feels the first tear slip down his cheek when he pushes the door open. His dad left everything just as it was. The sheets on his bed are still all mussed from where he and Scott had laid a thousand years ago, talking about the size of Derek’s werewolf dick.

He’d been so young when he was here last.

He finds his old lacrosse duffel and starts tossing things inside, things he knows he doesn’t need but can’t bear to leave behind. His favorite red hoodie. An old yearbook. A photo strip from an arcade trip he’d taken with his mom the week before her cancer was diagnosed. They feel like relics from another life.

For months he’d felt like he’d been on the run, always waiting to come back to this place. Now he knows that he’s leaving for good. His childhood feels left unfinished, but he supposes that’s the way it is for everyone. Before you even realize it, you’re already gone.

He hears the sound of a throat clearing from the doorway and he turns to see his father, eyes suspiciously moist.
“Dad,” he manages to say before he’s crying in earnest and feeling like an absolute sap.

John holds out his arms and Stiles practically falls into them. “You’ll always be my son,” John promises, holding him tight. “You’re my boy, Stiles. I missed you so much while you were gone, but God, I was so proud of you. I’ve always been so proud of you.”

Stiles snuffles into his dad’s shirtfront. “I don’t want you to be alone,” he sobs out. His dad has been rattling around in this big old house for almost a year now, but Stiles had been too caught up in his own life to think about how lonely it must have been.

“I’m not alone. Don’t you worry about your old man. I’ve got a son I couldn’t be prouder of, a son-in-law who will always look after you, and the best granddaughter a man could ask for. I’m the luckiest father in the world. I’m not alone.” John hugs him tight. “You grew up. God knows I didn’t tell you to do it, but you did, and now it’s time for you to do the next part without me. You’ll be all right.”

Stiles nods and wipes his face on his sleeve. He’ll be all right. His family isn’t minus John now; it’s just been added Mia and Derek. This may not be the place he lays his head at night, but it will always be a sort of home to him. “I love you,” he tells his father.

John hugs him tight for another second, and then he lets go. “I love you too.”

#

When Stiles lugs his bag downstairs fifteen minutes later Derek is showing Mia the family photos John has in frames over the fireplace. “That was Daddy’s school picture,” he tells her, pointing. “Daddy was so funny-looking, wasn’t he?”

“Rude,” Stiles protests, but he doesn’t put much rancor behind it, because God knows his fifth-grade picture was funny-looking.

“And this was Daddy when he was just as little as you.” Derek picks up one of Stiles’s baby pictures and smirks. “Look at that nose. Is your nose that big, Mia?”

“It was an excellent nose. I was a gorgeous baby. Nurses at the hospital said I should model. Dad, tell him.”

John shakes his head. “That did not happen.”

Mia reaches for Stiles and he takes her gratefully, snuggling her tight to chase off any residual sadness. “I’m you’re finished insulting me to my daughter, should we go see this house you built for me?”

Derek nods and puts an arm around Stiles to lead him towards the door. “You okay?” he asks softly.

Stiles nods. “I’m okay.”

And he is.

Mia is making sleepy noises and kneading her hands into Stiles’s shoulder as if trying to magically turn it into a mattress when John starts the car back up. “Wake up, sleepy-bug,” Stiles croons to her, taking her hand and giving it a little wiggle. “You don’t want to miss the first sight of our new house, do you?”

“I oversaw the nursery myself,” John says. “You’ll love it, Mia-girl. Lots and lots of toys!”
“Grandpa is trying to spoil you rotten,” Stiles whispers conspiratorially into his daughter’s ear, making her giggle and perk up a little.

Derek puts the tips of his fingers on the glass and stares out at the street. “What’s up?” Stiles asks him.

“Nothing. It’s just…it’s weird. This is always the way I used to go home. It’s strange taking the way home to go home, but…it’s not the same home. Does that make sense?”

“I think so.” Stiles shifts Mia to put a hand on Derek’s back. “I know it has to be tough for you. Just let me know what you need.” John takes the turn to head up to the woods, and Stiles catches his breath when he sees the house. It’s a beautiful two-story, all modern and sleek, brown and white. “It’s amazing,” he breathes, craning around Derek to see. “Look, Mia. Look what Papa designed for us.”

He’s seen the blueprints, and his dad had emailed some photos as it all came together, but actually seeing it in person completely overwhelms him. He can hear Derek breathing a little heavily as he looks out the window and takes it in. “I can’t believe it’s really here,” he says softly.

John parks and they all sit in the car for a minute, not speaking. “Do you need help carrying everything in?” John asks finally, breaking the silence.

“I think we’re okay.” Stiles leans forward to hug his father as best he can. “Thank you so much, Dad. For everything.”

“We’ll get a car tomorrow so you don’t have to keep chauffeuring us around,” Derek adds, looking like he wants to hug Sheriff Stilinski too but not really sure if he should.

John claps Derek on the back. “Don’t worry about it. It’s good to have you both back.”

Derek grabs all of their bags, showing off his werewolf strength and letting Stiles carry Mia into their new house. As soon as Stiles steps inside he inhales deeply, relishing the fresh, earthy smell. “God, Der. It’s perfect. I love it.”

The furniture they’d picked out online is already in place and Stiles has to take a long moment to marvel at the living room. Derek had put in a huge window, almost the entire length of the wall, facing the woods, and even in the fading light he can see perfectly straight through the trees. It’s all clean and bright and modern and immediately feels like home. Stiles takes Mia to every room, showing her the furniture and wallpaper and accents while she rests her head against his shoulder and yawns pointedly.

“All right, all right. I get the picture. Time for beddy-byes.” Stiles finds the nursery, located on the second floor right next to the master bedroom, and coos in delight as soon as he opens the door. John had made Mia’s nursery his passion project and it’s absolutely beautiful: wide and airy, with light blue carpet and cream walls. “We owe your grandpa a big thank-you,” he says in awe.

John must have spent half a year’s salary on new toys for his granddaughter, Stiles sees with amusement; there’s a dollhouse that Mia won’t be able to play with for a long time yet, and a mat for her to crawl on decorated like a little town, and a shelf filled with half a dozen stuffed animals, just the right size for Mia to cuddle during the day. He sees a Grover doll in the place of honor and has to grin. His baby is so loved.

Stiles puts her on the changing table and pulls pajamas out of the baby bag he’s been carting around all day. “Can you do Daddy a big, big favor?” he asks her softly. “Can you sleep sound for, like,
three hours, so Daddy and Papa can have a little grown-up time?”

She blinks at him innocently, then smiles and yawns again. “Ba-ba,” she mutters sleepily, waving her hand at him in what he’s going to assume is some kind of baby thumbs-up.

“She’s out for the count,” Stiles says, slipping his hand into Derek’s and squeezing. “Atta girl.” He gently gives her a goodnight smooch and places her in her crib. “You’re the bestest, Mia-oh-my. Nighty-night.”

Derek nods, still looking out the window. “This is the only part of the original house plan I kept. I loved this window. The view hasn’t changed. For a second… I was ten years old again.” He shakes it off and turns to look at Stiles. “Thank you for bringing me back here,” he says.

“Thank you for bringing me here. It’s so perfect, Derek.”

“Yeah?” Derek puts an arm around him, grinning a little wickedly. “You like this house I made for you?”

“I love it.”

“It wasn’t easy, planning it all without you knowing for the longest time.”

Stiles gets where this is going. “I guess I should give you a proper thank-you, then.”

“There’s the gratitude I like to see.” In a heartbeat Derek has Stiles hoisted up in the air, making him squeal. “Der! Put me down!”

“Why?” Derek asks innocently. “You carried around our daughter all day. I’m just returning the favor.” He looks towards the stairs. “Hm. We have a bedroom we need to break in…or I could just fuck you here, in front of the window. I like the thought of taking you outside. Someday I’ll knot you right out in the woods…against a tree, maybe.”

And fuck if that imagery doesn’t make Stiles shoot to full-mast in a heartbeat. “I’m up for it,” he manages to say.

Derek chuckles. “Not tonight. Tonight we’ve got a house to christen.” He lowers Stiles to the floor and kisses him while his fingers work at the button of his jeans. “Erica gave me condoms before we left,” he admits a little breathlessly, pulling a handful out of his pocket.

“How many?”

“Four.”

“We’ll need more tomorrow.”

Derek grins as he tears the first wrapper open. “Kiss me first,” he demands, and Stiles leans forward to brush his lips over the head of Derek’s cock, making the werewolf suck in a moan.

“How many?”

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“You want me to make out with it?” Stiles asks, batting his eyes up at Derek innocently. “Give it a little French kiss?” He licks a stripe up the vein and feel Derek throb under his tongue. “It’s not
“kissing back,” he complains with a little faux-pout.

“Oh, it will.” Derek fumbles on the condom, eyes half-feral. “It’s just looking for a slightly different mouth.”

Stiles turns and has to bite the flesh of his arm to muffle his moan as Derek fits his cock into the crack of his ass, torturously dragging it down. “Almost there,” Derek whispers.

“Fuck, stop, stop teasing, God.”

“I know there’s a nice wet mouth around here somewhere…” Derek pushes a finger into Stiles’s ass and hums triumphantly. “Found it.” He brushes the head of his cock over it. “You want a kiss here?”

“Please, please.”

Derek pulls his dick away, making Stiles whine in frustration, then kisses Stiles’s hole with his mouth. Stiles feels himself flutter, opening up for the touch. “You taste so good when you want me,” Derek says. He wraps an arm around Stiles’s torso and touches his mouth to Stiles’s. “Taste.”

Stiles kisses him nice and hard just as Derek slides inside of him. “Don’t you dare make a mess on our new carpet,” Derek whispers in his ear. He thrusts out and in, getting a nice rhythm going before Stiles feels him starting to swell.

“I’m too close,” Stiles moans, stars exploding behind his eyes.

“I come prepared.” Stiles snorts at the pun— he’s not sure if it was unintentional or if he’s just rubbed off on Derek way too much— while Derek fumbles in the baby bag and pulls out a handful of wet naps. He balls them up in his hand and grabs Stiles’s dick, jerking him off half-languidly the way Stiles likes.

“Ingenious,” Stiles puffs.

“If I just let you christen everywhere I want to fuck you, we’d have dozens of unexplained stains.”

Derek’s knot is locked in firm now and the first gush of come floods into Stiles. “Now you,” Derek whispers, giving Stiles’s dick a hard tug.

Stiles groans and lets go, eyes shut tight with bliss. The smell of his come in the air sets off Derek’s second orgasm. “Short one tonight,” he mutters, wrapping his arms around Stiles so they can ride out the rest as slowly as possible. Derek is a competitive man, even with himself; he likes when he can space out his orgasms enough to stay tied to Stiles for at least an hour.

Stiles wiggles closer to Derek, trying to set him off again, making the werewolf growl and hold him even tighter. “You’re not going anywhere.”

“Nah,” Stiles agrees, yawning a little, come-sated. “I’m right where I want to be.”

Derek pulls out of him about a half hour later and scoops him up in his arms again. Stiles doesn’t complain this time. “Bedroom?” Derek says, pushing his nose into Stiles’s neck to scent him happily.

“Mmhm.”

Derek walks him up the stairs, cracks open the door to the nursery to check on Mia’s gurgling baby-sleep breaths, then deposits Stiles onto the bed in the maroon-and-white master bedroom. “I think you need a couple minutes,” he says fondly.
Stiles grabs Derek’s hand and tugs him down onto the bed. “Snuggle with me for a second and I’ll be ready to go.”

Derek obliges. “I can’t wait to do this with you forever,” he whispers, right into Stiles’s ear, which is definitely speeding Stiles’s recovery time. “I want to take you everywhere, every way.”

“What if…what if I took you?”

Derek’s hands still from where they’re stroking Stiles’s back. “Hm?”

“If I rode you, maybe just once?” Stiles doesn’t even know where the request came from. He just knows that the thought of it is making his cock plump up curiously. “Just to see what it was like?”

Derek considers it. “You want that?”

“Maybe?”

“Then sure. We’ll give it a try someday.” Derek kisses his neck and grabs Stiles’s length with one hand. “Mm. I wouldn’t mind having this inside of me.”

“We could roleplay, where I’m the big bad alpha and you’re a naughty omega with a smart mouth.”

“A smart-mouthed omega? I can’t even imagine.” Derek smirks at him. “Now, I’m a perfectionist, so you’ll have to tell me…how should an omega respond when an alpha does this?” He pushes two fingers into Stiles without warning, making him moan and arch his back. “Okay. Interesting. How about this?” He adds another and simultaneously sucks a mark on Stiles’s neck, teeth scraping the skin. “And this?” He slides inside of Stiles and Stiles’s eyes nearly roll into the back of his head.

They use up all the condoms before they finally fall asleep.

Stiles isn’t even ashamed.

#

“Mia-girl,” Stiles croons the next morning, leaning over his daughter’s crib. “Daddy’s so proud you slept through the night in your new room!”

Mia smiles at him with her eyes still closed. She’s been sleeping sound for hours now, obviously agreeing very well with the California air. When he lifts her she yawns and cracks her eyes open to say a proper hello.

“Do you know what today is, sweet pea?” Stiles carries her over to the changing table. “It’s your sixth month birthday! Can you believe you’ve been rocking Daddy’s world for half a year already?”

Mia gurgles and sucks her fist while Stiles strips off her wet diaper and expertly drops it into the trashcan.

“Papa went out to get us a new car and groceries, but when he gets back he’ll give you a big birthday smooch. Like this, mwah! Now, where did grandpa put diapers…here they are! Ooh, they have flowers, you’re going to be such a fancy lady today.” Stiles tickles her foot as he puts the new diaper on. “Do you remember when you were tiny and you liked to play a mean trick on Daddy by going poo-poo just when Daddy took off your diaper?”

Mia smiles dreamily, as if she remembers those days fondly. He beams back at her, feeling wonderfully well-rested and happy. It’s good to be home.
“You are so cute,” he tells her. “You’re so cute you’re lucky nobody eats you up.” He pretends to munch on her foot, which she likes so much she flails and kicks him in the face. “Ooow. At least we know you can defend yourself from rogue baby-eaters.”

He carries her downstairs for breakfast— she’s doing well with solids, and he’s already gone down a cup size in response as her need for his breast milk lessens. She loves sweet potato most of all and he figures she deserves it, seeing as it’s her half birthday. “Airplane!” he says, zooming the spoon to her lips.

She swallows and bangs the tray for more. She’d eat the entire jar if he’d let her, but he caps it when she’s had enough and carries her into the living room. “We still have to unpack, but I think it’s okay if we play for a little bit while we wait for Papa. We could watch Baby Einstein on Daddy’s laptop, or we could read a story, or, ooh, we could play hide and— ”

The window shatters just a few feet away from him and he drops to his knees instinctually, holding Mia for dear life. Something’s been thrown through, sending glass everywhere; if he’d been standing another three feet closer both he and Mia would have been sliced. Kate, he thinks wildly. The window, she’d shot it out just like she did at his home. She’s here for Mia, for him, for Derek; it’s Kate…

Kate’s dead. She’s dead.

He hears a car roughly starting up and he bolts for the door, wrenching it open just to see a red four-door filled with people zoom back to the main road. He manages to see part of the license plate— MX, and then two zeroes— before it disappears around the turn.

Mia is wailing in his arms and for a moment he’s terrified to take her back inside. What had they thrown through the window? What’s in his house right now?

He peers cautiously into the living room. It’s a brick, lying amongst the shards of glass on the brand-new carpet. With a sour taste in his mouth he carefully walks over and picks it up to read the note rubber-banded to it:

WEREWOLVES GET OUT

He drops it back to the ground and tries to hush his daughter, staring at the broken window. The window Derek had put in to remind him of his family, now jagged and ruined. After everything they’ve been through; everything they’ve suffered— they still have to face this?

Despair quickly gives way to fury. Fuck them. Fuck them! Beacon Hills is going to be a safe place for werewolves. It has to be, because Derek and Mia and his pack are already here, and Stiles will be damned before he lets anyone run them out of town.

He’s not sure how long he stands there, staring in furious silence at the window, before the front door suddenly opens and closes. Stiles whips around, hand cradling Mia’s head protectively. “We have a car!” Derek shouts to him from the hallway. “And I finally got you a new phone— come help me…” his voice trails off and in seconds he’s by Stiles’s side, dragging him away from the glass. “What. Happened.” He has to bite off the words past the fangs suddenly crowding his mouth.

“Brick. I didn’t see who.”

“Where are they?”

“They drove away. I don’t know how many.”
Derek’s eyes glow a fierce red. “Are you all right?”

“Yeah. It wasn’t hunters, just…assholes.”

“How do you know?”

“I don’t,” he admits quietly.

Derek bends down to look at the brick. He grips it so tightly Stiles is surprised it doesn’t turn to dust in his hand. “Every time I leave you alone you get attacked,” he says tonelessly.

“Good thing I’m starting work soon and you won’t be leaving me anywhere. This damsel in distress is out of business.”

Derek isn’t in the mood for jokes. “I can’t fucking believe I wasn’t here.”

“Maybe it’s a good thing. If you’d wolfed out and gone after them…”

Derek looks at him with sickened understanding. “Which is probably exactly what they wanted. To goad me into a shift and show all of Beacon Hills why I shouldn’t be here.” His eyes widen. “Fuck, if they try this with the pack, they’ll get the reaction they wanted. They’re all on-edge enough as it is — if they feel attacked, they’ll rip apart half the apartment complex.”

They stare at each other grimly. “Pack meeting,” Derek says finally. “Today at noon.” He looks down at the bag in his hand, then thrusts it at Stiles. “Your new phone.”

“Thanks.” Stiles strokes Mia’s hair soothingly as she keeps sniffling. Derek stalks off to get a dustpan and Stiles carries his daughter away from the mess of glass. The perfect day is ruined now, all because of an asshole and a brick.

He manages to cheer his baby up by giving her the Grover doll and letting her push a bunch of buttons on his new phone so she can see the screen light up, but Derek is not nearly so easily distracted. He’s thinking about running. Stiles knows it, and it fills him with so much anger and frustration he wants to scream.

There has to be a way to fix this, preferably without bloodshed.

“You think it would be good to introduce the pack to some of my human friends?” he calls to Derek as he flips through his contacts. He hasn’t spoken to his high school classmates in a long time, but he imagines they haven’t gone back to school yet, and he wouldn’t mind introducing them to his pack. It can’t hurt to have a whole human network on their side. “Kind of ease them into being social with humans?”

“Yeah. Good idea. Invite them to the pack meeting. I wanted to have meetings here, but I don’t want them to be looking at the window the whole time, so give your friends Erica’s apartment number.”

Stiles’s fingers fly over his new phone. Lydia is a given, but he’s a little concerned about Jackson, given the way he’d originally reacted to Derek. He reaches out tentatively and is pleased to receive a warm response and a pleading request for baby pictures. Stiles is more than happy to oblige and after a gratifying number of heart emojis Stiles goes ahead and extends an invitation. Maybe Jackson’s grown up in the past year. Stiles certainly has.

“You ready?” Derek asks, jangling the keys to their new car. He’s boarded up the window and double-locks the door when they leave, making Stiles’s heart ache. Someday, his werewolf isn’t going to be so paranoid. Stiles will make sure of it.
If only the rest of the world didn’t make it so fucking difficult.

None of the pack members have been visited by brick-wielding maniacs, Stiles and Derek are relieved to learn. In fact, they seem to be taking the human world pretty well. Boyd has already ventured outside the apartment long enough to locate a Krispy Kreme shop, which they all agree is far superior to the Dunkin’ Donuts they had used to stop at on supply runs.

They’re a little wary around Stiles’s friends, but Lydia makes herself at home among them quickly, and Jackson brings along his new boyfriend Danny, who used to work under a werewolf boss and immediately falls into happy conversation with Kira about omega rights. Jackson can’t take his eyes of his boyfriend— clearly he’s not holding a torch for Stiles anymore, which makes Stiles undeniably relieved. He can’t help but notice that Lydia keeps eyeing up the triplets. Lydia’s never been with an omega that he can remember, but she and Ethan would make a cute couple.

Derek tells the pack about the brick incident, trying to downplay it as much as possible. “If it happens to one of you, you have to stay cool,” he orders. “Don’t shift. Don’t yell. Don’t even flash your eyes. We’ll have the police handle it for you.”

“So we’re neutered dogs,” Isaac says, arms folded tightly as he leans back on the couch. “Awesome. Isaac was the hardest to convince to come to Beacon Hills with everyone else, and it looks like he’s already regretting his decision. Stiles knows that Isaac’s a hybrid like Mia; his human father had taken him in after his pack members were killed by hunters and proceeded to physically and mentally abuse him in the hopes it would repress his wolf. Leaving the Preserve and immediately being bombarded with the threat of violence must be killing him.

“Scott and Kira are the only ones here who spent more than half their lives outside the Preserve,” Derek says, looking just as frustrated as his packmates. “I know it’s an adjustment. I promise I wouldn’t have brought you here if I didn’t think I could keep you safe, but we have to keep ourselves under control until we know the town has accepted us.”

The mood is decidedly grim by now, and Stiles can’t stand that his pack’s worst nightmares are coming true right now. He sits with Mia for the rest of the meeting, lost in thought, and is surprised when it abruptly ends. Everyone looks a little dissatisfied, if not downright afraid of what might be about to happen. Scott is cuddling Kira soothingly. Isaac is practically sunk into the couch, scowling. Erica and Boyd are deep in conversation. “Do they hate us for bringing them here?” he mutters to Derek.

“I don’t know. Maybe.” Derek sighs. “Maybe they should.”

Stiles grits his teeth. Werewolves, just like omegas, just like everybody, deserve freedom and safety. “We’ll fix it. Somehow.”

“Somehow,” Derek agrees doubtfully. He looks over Stiles’s shoulder and smirks a little. “Looks like your integration plan is working pretty well, though. They don’t hate all humans yet.”

Stiles follows his gaze to see Danny and Jackson chatting up Isaac, and Lydia over with the triplets. He grins. “You think Isaac would be into a trifecta?” Relationships with an alpha, beta, and omega aren’t exactly common, but nor are they entirely taboo. Based on the way Isaac smiles at Jackson and lets Danny curl up close to his side, Stiles thinks they might just be seeing one form.

“Maybe. If it makes him relax a little, I hope so.” Derek jerks his head towards Lydia. “My money is on those two falling into bed by tonight, though.”
“She would look so good with Ethan. Two redheads? Total power couple.”

Derek snorts. “Look again, babe. She’s not talking to Ethan.”

Stiles looks closer and realizes that Lydia and Aiden are the two animatedly talking, while Ethan is showing Liam something on his new cell phone. “Wait, what? But Aiden’s a beta and Lydia’s an alpha.”

“Aiden’s trisexual. And I’m pretty sure your friend is, too.” Derek grins when Lydia throws her head back to laugh and slips her hand up Aiden’s arm. “I’m positive your friend is, actually.”

“Oh, wow. I’m stupid.” Stiles snorts as Lydia steps even closer to Aiden. “Ethan is so getting sexiled tonight.”

“He deserves it, seeing as he kicked Aiden out yesterday so he could…hang out with your father’s alpha deputy.”

Stiles’s eyes nearly boggle out of his head, remembering the squad car that had still been parked in the lot long after the other deputies went home. “Parrish? Ethan had sex with Jordan Parrish? On his first night here?!?”

Derek shrugs. “They’ve been living in the same small compound with the same people for years. You have to give them credit. They’re really going for it.” Across the room, Danny puts his head on Isaac’s shoulder and Aiden lets his fangs come out for Lydia to see, proudly showing off.

Stiles watching them all for a minute, feeling a little better. “See?” he says softly. “They can be happy here. You did the right thing by convincing them to come.”

Derek puts his arm around Stiles and looks at his friends thoughtfully. “Yeah,” he says. “Maybe.”

“We skipped breakfast,” Derek realizes as he pulls out of the parking lot.

Stiles shrugs. “Well, two of us did. The Princess back there wouldn’t put up with missing a meal for a second.”

“Shit, I’m sorry. I didn’t even think about it. You hungry?”

Stiles grins. “Coffee Karma? Back to where it all began?”

Derek smiles back and squeezes Stiles’s hand over the center console. “Sounds good.”

The town hasn’t changed much in the past year, and Stiles gets a nostalgic little swoop in his stomach when he sees the Coffee Karma sign coming up. There aren’t many cars in the lot, which is a good thing, because Derek and Stiles make complete idiots out of themselves trying to figure out how to open Mia’s new stroller. For a solid two minutes they just stand there flashing their eyes at it as if trying to force it into submission while Mia makes herself half-sick giggling. They’re probably prouder of themselves than they should be when they finally get Mia into it, but whatever. It’s the little things.

As they head across the parking lot Stiles looks at the cars to see if he recognizes any. It wouldn’t be a terrible idea to call up some other people from high school and introduce them to the pack.

His eyes fall on a red four door, license plate TMX-0042 and he stops short. “Der,” he says. “That’s
the car that was at our house this morning.”

Derek follows his gaze and his expression turns to stone. “I know that car,” he says tonelessly. He looks through the window of the café to the man working at the counter—the same man who had been working there a year ago, wiping the counter with that perma-smirk still locked on his face. “Matt Daehler.”

Holy shit. Stiles had almost forgotten about that asshole barista, but he suddenly remembers the last time he’d seen the guy, right here in this parking lot. “He’s the one who told Kate’s minion about me and you.”

Derek’s face goes from lifeless to murderous in about two seconds flat. “Are you sure?”

“Positive.”

Derek takes his hand away from the handles of the stroller. “Take Mia back to the car,” he says quietly, gaze locked on Daehler.

“What? Derek, Jesus. You can’t kill him.”

“I’m not going to kill him. I’m going to bend each of his fingers back, one by one, until they break, and then I’m going to knock out his teeth and force them down his throat. That should teach him not to throw bricks or talk about people behind their backs, don’t you think?”

“You’re going to storm in there and beat him up in front of all those customers? Great plan, dude. That won’t be giving him exactly what he wants at all.”

“We are not neutered dogs!” Derek grows it so fiercely Mia, still in her stroller, lets out a little whimper. “I’ll take him out behind the restaurant, if that makes you feel better. Maybe I’ll call over the pack for a free punch each.”

Stiles tries not to groan aloud as he imagines his father having to come and arrest Derek for assault tonight. “Ten minutes ago you were telling everyone to stay cool.”

“That was before I knew he was the reason Kate took you. He almost got you and Mia killed, Stiles. You realize that? And instead of being sorry about it, he threw a fucking brick at you and my baby. I had to tamp down my anger at that dipshit every day before, and now it’s over. He’s done. Get Mia out of here and let me take care of this.”

Stiles grabs Derek’s hand desperately as he imagines the werewolf starting forward. “Wait. Just wait, okay? We can do this a better way. I can have my dad over here in five minutes—”

“And the kid will get off because nobody can prove it was him. I’ve done this dance before, Stiles. I won’t wolf out, but I’m still stronger than him. He’s not going to get away with hurting my family. He and his buddies will think twice next time they want to fuck with werewolves.”

Stiles tugs his hand when he tries to move again. He’s not going to be able to convince Derek to walk away…but maybe walking away isn’t in their best interest. He doesn’t want to hurt the asshole, but putting the fear of God into him certainly can’t do any harm. “Hey. Hey! Look at me. We’re a team, right?”

Derek looks at Stiles a little suspiciously, wondering where he’s going with this. “Right.”

“So let’s take him down together.”
Derek frowns. “What?”

Stiles looks through the window at Daehler again and smiles. “I’m saying we can do this without breaking any fingers. We can take care of this problem right here, right now, and no blood has to be shed.”

Derek snorts. “How’s that? We ask him politely?”

“Oh,” Stiles says, grin spreading even wider. “There will be nothing polite about it.”

Chapter End Notes

Jackson and Danny’s little ficlet of a love story can be found in the comments of Chapter 11, thanks to a lovely commentor who prompted it.
I got way too clever for my own good when it came to Lydia and Aiden and sexuality in an A/B/O verse, forgive me :)
Next up: (probably Tuesday, maybe Wednesday) Stiles and Derek show Matt Daehler who runs this town, Derek buys Stiles an important present, and Stiles gets to experience Reason Why Being an Omega Actually Rocks #1.
Matt Daehler’s eyes widen slightly when Derek and Stiles walk into the Coffee Karma. It’s almost completely devoid of customers, save for a few people buried in newspapers and laptops, and Derek and Stiles exchange quick glances before they start towards the counter. For half a second Matt looks a little frightened, but then he swallows and finds his smirk again. “Can I help you?” he says, meeting Stiles’s eyes in an obvious show of alpha aggression.

Stiles gives him a bright smile and puts his elbows on the counter, getting right in Matt’s space. Derek is a few steps behind him, gripping the handles of Mia’s stroller tightly. “It’s Matt, right?”

“Yeah. You ordering?”

“In a minute. You ran away from my house so quickly this morning I didn’t get a chance to say hello.”

Matt’s smirk twitches, but other than that there’s no reaction. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“When you threw a brick through my window this morning, Matt. You remember? With that nice little note attached?”

Matt keeps smirking and Stiles realizes sickeningly that he’s glad to be caught; he’s proud of what he did. “Sorry. Doesn’t ring a bell. Are you just here to make accusations, or do you want coffee?”

“No, I’m also here to say this.” Stiles leans in even further, eyes flashing. “This time—this time—we’re going to let you off with a warning. The next time you mess with any of the werewolves in Beacon Hills, you’re going to wish you hadn’t. Do you have any idea how terrifying it was for my six-month-old daughter to have a window shatter right next to her? Can you even imagine that type of fear? The next time something like this happens, you won’t have to imagine. We’ll make you feel it a thousand-fold.”

Matt laughs at him and looks at Derek. “You really should keep your omega muzzled before he gets himself into trouble, Hale.”

“What did you just say?” Derek steps forward with teeth bared, voice coming out in a growl, and the color leeches immediately from Matt’s face. He clearly remembers the Derek who used to work here; the Derek who kept his eyes to the ground and desperately tried not to make trouble. He’d expected Derek to hang back and let Matt do and say whatever he wanted.

Sucks for him that the old Derek is gone now.

“If you shift, I’ll call the cops,” Matt says, smirk turning into a full-blown scowl. “You want to get shot in front of your kid, Hale?”

“You haven’t heard? Derek’s not on probation anymore.” Stiles slips his hand into Derek’s, giving it a soothing little pulse. “But if you want to call the police, go right ahead. I haven’t gotten around to telling my father about your little stunt this morning. Wouldn’t he just love to hear that you threw a brick in his granddaughter’s direction? Hell, I’d call that attempted murder. I bet the DA would agree.”
“It was nowhere near the baby,” Matt snaps before he can stop himself. He gulps as soon as he realizes what he just admitted and Derek growls warningly, deep in his throat.

“But if I had moved, or your aim had been off…you know what your problem is, Matt? You don’t think about consequences. Just like you didn’t think about the consequences when a stranger asked you if I was Derek Hale’s omega. You remember that, don’t you?”

“He asked a question and I answered it. I didn’t—”

“You know who that man was. You had to have realized it after I was kidnapped. I almost died with this little girl still in my womb. Helpless.” Stiles’s voice sharpens, and now it’s Derek giving Stiles’s hand a soothing squeeze. He takes a breath to calm down before he continues. “That man was working for someone. Her name was Kate. She tried to hurt our family, and now she’s dead. Guess what happened to her?”

Matt’s gaze slides back to Derek.


Matt’s eyes flicker between them, a disbelieving little smile on his face. “You expect me to believe that you killed her?”

“I did.” Stiles keeps his voice dead-calm. “I shot her to save my family. I didn’t like doing it, but I had to, so I did. Now, I’m certainly not going to kill you for what you’ve done, but it would very easy to make your life difficult, Matt. You like this job, don’t you? I bet the owners wouldn’t like knowing that you gave away a customer’s personal information. And soon you’re going to have a lot more werewolf customers— someone who can’t control his own prejudice really shouldn’t be working here. It would be terrible for business.”

“You can’t—”

“I can. I want to. I will.” Stiles leans even farther forward, dropping his voice to a purr. “And that’s just the start. We. Will. Not. Let. You. Win. This town— this world— doesn’t belong to people like you anymore.”

“It sure as fuck doesn’t belong to you freaks.”

“You know what I think?” Stiles tries to keep his voice conversational; he can see a woman in a booth a few feet away desperately straining to hear what’s going on. “I think you’re jealous. You probably wish you had a werewolf’s abilities. It is amazing—the speed, the increased hearing, the strength… they’re the world’s greatest predators. And look at you. You remind me of a little bunny rabbit. Derek’s favorite prey, in case you were wondering.”

Matt flushes. “Fuck you,” he says.

Derek puts a protective hand on Stiles’s back. “That was impolite,” he says calmly, eyes red and murderous. “And we’d tried so hard to keep this civil.”

A tense moment stretches between them, and then Derek leans down and fumbles with the stroller. Matt skitters backwards, looking completely terrified, but when Derek straightens up again all he has in his arms is Mia. The baby flashes a drooly smile, two fingers in her mouth, and she snuggles her head against Derek’s shoulder contentedly. “Do you have children, Matt?” Derek asks quietly.

Matt shakes his head slowly, eyeing Mia like a bomb that might go off as he cautiously steps back towards the counter.
“When you do, you’ll know what it’s like to need to protect someone so fiercely you’d tear down the entire world for them. I brought my daughter to Beacon Hills. I will make it a safe place for her. Listen to what I’m saying, Matt. Stiles already killed for her. That’s how far we’re willing to go.”

Derek’s voice is so soft Stiles has to strain to hear, but he knows Matt is catching every word. “She’s everything to me. You are nothing to me. Forget that, and you’re dead.”

“You’re the one who brought your carnival of freaks to our town,” Matt hisses. He’s the color of paste and his voice is shaking, but the hatred in his eyes hasn’t diminished in the least. “You were all better off in hiding. Find someplace where it’s just your kind, far away from humans. Take your kid there. She’ll be safe from us, and, more importantly, we’ll be safe from you.”

“We’re not going anywhere.” Stiles puts a hand on Mia’s back and stares Matt down. “This is our home now. Soon it’ll be home to many, many more werewolves. If any of them are given any trouble, you’ll answer for it. You should probably pass that along to any of your friends. We’d have no way of knowing whether or not you were involved, and it would be such a shame if you had to suffer for the actions of someone else.”

For the first time, Matt is speechless.

“And if I ever see you on my property again,” Stiles adds, voice dropping so low it almost sounds like a snarl, “I’ll remember every lesson the Sherriff ever taught me about how to shoot.”

Derek leans forward. “And if he misses, I’ll be right behind him.”

“Puh,” Mia adds, glaring at Matt with an expression that clearly says, You break my windows, I break your face.

Matt swallows hard and nods. “Okay. You made your point. Now can you please leave?”

Stiles shakes his head. “No way. We came here to celebrate our daughter’s half birthday. We want two carrot cupcakes and…you guys still sell organic puddings? What’s today’s flavor?”

Matt glares at Stiles, but eventually he mutters sullenly, “Sugarfree banana butterscotch and chocolate cinnamon.”

“We’ll take a small bowl of the banana. Thanks.”

Matt stares at them for a second. When they just stand there waiting he scowls and turns to get their order, shoulders hunched up to his ears. Stiles watches him to make sure he doesn’t try and spit in it or anything, but he’s evidently suitably cowed, and when they pay and take the food he doesn’t even look them in the eye.

“Listen up, Mia-bo-bea,” Stiles says as they find a booth near a window. “Violence is never the answer. But sometimes, the threat of violence is.”

Derek sputters. “Don’t tell her that!”

Mia giggles at them and slips her fingers back into her mouth.

“Don’t eat your fingers, sweet pea. Here, Daddy has a treat for you.” Stiles scoops a bit of the pudding onto the tip of the spoon and holds it out to her. “Say ahhh.”

Mia opens her mouth obediently and swallows, then looks at him delightedly. “Ba!” she shrieks, banging the table for more. He lets her have another few tastes before putting it back on the tray and pushing a cupcake towards Derek. “To our best girl,” he says, holding his up in the air.
Derek smiles and raises his as well. “To our family.”

They bang pastries and eat, Mia nuzzled against her Papa, customers looking on with little smiles at the happy family.

#

Matt must get word around fast, because the werewolves don’t hear a single peep over the next month. The initially wary pack slowly start to lower their guard and mingle with the outside community. Boyd, Erica, and the triplets all begin training for the Beacon Hills police force and become fast friends with the other cadets. Isaac continues to casually hang out with Danny and Jackson. Even Liam ends up joining, of all things, a library book club, where he meets a boy named Mason he’s immediately and completely gone over.

Kira, like Stiles, is immersed in the startup of OWNYourself. Most of their current duties revolve around aiding workers in their transition to Beacon Hills, which Stiles can generally do from his own home with Mia in his lap, but he and Kira also spent hours touring their newly renovated headquarters. One day they claim offices right next to each other, and stand there together, staring at rooms that will house all the people they’ll be in charge of. “It’s going to be nuts,” Stiles says eventually.

Kira nods, looking a little queasy. “The wildest ride of our lives.” She puts a hand over her stomach and Stiles eyes it pointedly. She sees where his gaze is and grins sheepishly. “We just found out. Scott already bought a crib, then smashed it in anger when he couldn’t figure out how to put it together.”

“Sounds about right.” Stiles wraps his arms around his friend. “Congratulations, Kira. I look forward to your baby and Mia’s mating ceremony in twenty years.”

Kira laughs. “We can only hope. Speaking of mating ceremonies…why are you and Derek making us wait for yours?”

“Hey, don’t look at me.” Stiles has a feeling Derek’s proposal is coming any day now, but he honestly doesn’t mind if Derek wants to wait. “We’ve been pretty preoccupied.”

“That’s no excuse.”

“Trust me, we’re not neglecting each other.” Stiles smirks as he thinks back to the long hours they’d spent loving each other last night. “We’re just enjoying it. Every minute. And we totally had a bet about when you and Scott would be making your announcement, so thank you very much. You just won me a blowjob.”

Kira makes a face. "Ew." She leans against him and they survey their burgeoning empire together. “Let’s go have it all,” she says.

#

When Stiles gets home Derek is in the living room with Mia, encouraging her to crawl across the room to him. “Honeys, I’m home,” Stiles says, tossing down his bag so he can join them on the carpet.

Mia shows her dimples and new tooth before switching course and determinately making her way towards Stiles, Grover clutched in her fist. “That’s my girl!” he coos, holding out his arms to her.

She squeals, scooches another foot forward, and collapses onto her belly in front of him. “Buh bah!”
she shouts, preening.

“Good job, sweetheart,” Derek says, crawling over to join them. “Just like we practiced.”

Stiles gives him a questioning look and turns back to Mia to see there’s something stuck to her Grover doll. She pushes it towards him, beaming and blowing a raspberry, her way of asking him to play.

He takes it and sees that it’s a tiny, familiar box, rigged up like a little necklace around Grover’s neck. This is the box Derek had put the wood shard and key in— the box Stiles had initially thought might hold a mating necklace.

“Go ahead,” Derek says softly, hooking his chin around Stiles’s shoulder. “Open.”

He does, and inside is a tightly folded necklace. He unfurls it to see that it’s leather with a soft underside, so his neck won’t be chafed. The hole to show off the bite gapes proudly, and their initials are branded into the strap, linked with an infinity symbol.

“I have a matching one,” Derek says. “Do you like it?” He sounds a little hesitant, and Stiles turns his head to give a reassuring kiss. He’s got embarrassing tears in his eyes, such a stereotypical omega. He’d spent his life dreading this moment as inevitable, trapped by his biology to accept an alpha’s ownership, but this is so much more than he ever could have hoped. He’s with the alpha he loves; the alpha who will always be his equal because their broken edges match up completely.

“I love it, Derek. It’s perfect.”

Derek’s thumb brushes over his cheekbone. “So you…you’ll be my mate? My partner in all this, forever?”

“Forever.” Stiles rests his forehead against Derek’s. He can’t stop grinning. “I love you so much.”

“I love you too.”

“Guh-guh-ga,” Mia sings, sucking on Grover’s head.

# They plan a quiet, private ceremony, nothing very fancy. Stiles forgoes white and chooses a black tux to match Derek’s. Mia grudgingly allows her fathers to put her in a pretty green dress, with no frills or lace. John performs the ceremony for them; he’d gotten certified years ago after nontraditional couples in town were turned away by the churches.

They want the guest list to feature humans and werewolves, so they wait until Stiles’s friends are back from fall break in early November. Stiles knows he’s supposed to spend every second in the meantime planning his special day, but there’s so much to do for the nonprofits he doesn’t have much time. Besides, he doesn’t care a bit about the difference between cream and ecru napkins or whether the guests should throw birdseed or blow bubbles as they walk back up the aisle together.

Derek couldn’t give a shit either, and he’s been busy arranging for him, Scott, and Isaac to start at BHU in January, so they end up scrambling at the end to pull it all together. It won’t win any awards in Martha Stewart Magazine, that’s for sure.

But the second he joins Derek at the back of the aisle so they can walk down together, there’s not a single detail he would change.
They walk slowly, hand-in-hand, while heads turn to watch them. John is waiting at the front and when they come to a stop he smiles at them and asks, in the traditional words, “Who comes to be mated today?”

“Dada!” Mia shrieks from her spot on Scott’s lap. A soft laugh rises from the crowd and Stiles quirks a triumphant eyebrow at Derek, any nerves gone. As soon as Mia had hit eight months they’d started battling over what her first word would be, but it hadn’t been settled until Halloween night. Stiles had found Mia the most adorable little lion costume and had wrangled her into it after tossing on his own hastily assembled police officer outfit. When she was dressed he’d cooed over how cute she looked and held up a mirror so she could see. Mia had stared at her reflection in dismay, looked down at the bushy tail by her side, and said, “Dada,” in the most disappointed, why-have-you-done-this-to-me voice Stiles had ever heard.

They’d made quite a trio that night: a maniacally grinning cop, a sulking cowboy (Stiles had forced Derek to go as Curley from Oklahoma!) and the most disgruntled lion cub the world had ever seen, urged to say her new word at each door as the trick part of the evening.

Every time she’d said it since Stiles had preened in front of Derek, and now Derek just rolls his eyes and grips Stiles’s hand tighter. “Derek Hale,” he says in response to John’s question. “Alpha.”

“Genim Stilinski. Omega.”

They’ve chopped down the ceremony to the bare essentials— a good chunk of it is sexist bullshit, honestly— and John rushes through the various vows and pronouncements. Stiles feels himself getting more and more nervous as they approach the bite. He knows it’s not like his whole personality is going to just disappear or anything, but…there’s no going back after something this permanent.

When the time comes Derek takes a breath, closes his eyes, and tilts his head. He’s offered to buck tradition by letting Stiles go first, which touched Stiles absurdly. He leans in and finds the mating vein, nuzzles it with his lips, and then bites.

He tastes blood on his lips and watches the mark flush and deepen. Because Derek is a werewolf it closes up, but leaves the scar, a perfect circular imprint of Stiles’s teeth.

Derek touches it, eyes going slightly feral, then nods to Stiles to tilt his own head back. Stiles heart jackrabbits in his chest as he does. It’ll only hurt a little, he knows. The endorphin rush will practically make it feel like nothing. And this is Derek. Derek would never hurt him.

Derek’s teeth sink into just the right spot and when Stiles takes his next breath it’s his mate standing next to him again, smelling just the way he had when he had first walked in on Stiles and his father in the clinic waiting room. Home. Safety. Protection.

Love.

“Mate. Mine. I love you,” Derek says, and they go in for the kiss at the same time. The congregation rises to applaud them and when they turn Stiles sees every face beaming up at him. Well, except for Mia, who is looking around bemused as to why everyone is clapping just because her fathers are kissing, since they do that all the time anyway. Stiles stops to grab her from Scott as they make their way back up the aisle together. “We did it!” he squeals to her.

“Dada!”

“Papa,” Derek pleads, but she just giggles at him and reaches up to tug at Stiles’s new necklace.
The reception is a wild blur of drinks and dancing and laughter. Stiles insists they have their first
dance to “People Will Say We’re In Love” from Oklahoma, and Derek capitulates on the grounds
that their second is “Dancing Cheek to Cheek.” The cake is a fantastic three-tiered confection and even
Mia gets to try a little bite. Stiles is just starting to feel the evening winding down, his face smushed
into Derek’s shoulder as they sway to another song, when Kira suddenly tugs on his elbow. “Hey,”
she says apologetically. “You need to see this.”

Stiles takes her phone when she holds it out and groans. Ever since the WSJ had published a profile
on the founders of OWNYourself the prior month, Stiles has faced a sudden and uncomfortable
amount of notoriety in certain circles. Plenty of people out there are happy about the services
OWNYourself will provide, but there’s no such thing as good without bad in this world, and he’d
also had to battle plenty of negativity.

His biggest critics are Alpha Rights groups, anti-werewolf protestors, something called Omegas
Accepting Biology, and some assholes who don’t think humans and werewolves should be allowed
to marry each other.

There really is a very diverse species of asshole in the world.

Apparently an Alpha Rights protestors named Donovan has posted some sort of blog about today’s
ceremony, completely with a blurry cell-phone picture of Derek and Stiles getting into their car that
someone in Beacon Hills must have sent him:

Own Yourself? Not anymore! Looks like Whoremega Stiles Stilinski is a slave to his biology after all.
Today Stilinski— in a very hush-hush ceremony— mated his Alpha, former convicted felon Derek
Hale, with whom he has a child. Guess he could only hold out so long before he had to follow his
nature and do what’s right. Notice that Stilinski’s new mate is a WEREWOLF— probably because
no REAL Alpha would touch him. Vote in our poll below: will Stilinski give up his position at
OWNYourself now that he’s been collared?

“I’m so, so sorry,” Kira says. “It’s crazy to have to bother you with this. Maria from Media Relations
called and wanted to know if you want to confirm that you and Derek are mated now.”

Stiles swallows. The idea that the details of his personal life are owed to the world is a level of
scrutiny he wasn’t expecting and doesn’t appreciate. He hadn’t even imagined that people might take
his mating and use it to devalue OWNYourself.

“No, honestly, they probably will. But some people will think less of me either way, so. Tell her yes.
Here, just…let me think up a statement.” Stiles screws his eyes shut and let it form in his mind.
“Okay. Tell her to say that I mated the love of my life today, and that doesn’t make me any less of an
omega rights activist. Derek loves me and supports me as an equal, and being mated to him only
strengthens my resolve to continue fighting for the rights of omegas everywhere, because each and
every omega deserves the love, support, and respect that I’ve found with Derek. We are stronger
together, not because of what we are, but because of who we are. She can clean it up, but that’s the
gist I want.”

Kira nods and scurries away to relay that to the Media Relations team. Derek hooks his arms around
Stiles’s neck. “Who we are, not what we are. I liked that,” he says.
Stiles smiles and nuzzles in. Every breath he takes sends a soothed feeling through his entire body; a reminder that he has someone intrinsically tied to him now, forever looking after him and loving him. “I meant it.”

“I’m glad.” Derek traces the leather ring around his mating bite. “What do you say we end this party and go…study biology together?”

A delicious shiver runs down Stiles’s spine. Mated sex is going to be amazing. “I say that sounds just perfect.”

They don’t take a real honeymoon, but three days after the ceremony they finally load the pack up and go to the beach. Stiles feels like a complete ass for waiting so long to actually take them; it’s practically a rite of passage for new Californians.

It’s warm and sunny for a November day and Stiles puts a little cloth sunhat to protect Mia’s skin. She pats at it, brow furrowed, then pulls it off and gives it to him with a triumphant smile.

He rolls his eyes at her and puts it back on.

She grabs it and throws it down to the sand, clapping her hands in delight at the game. “Na-na-na!” she shrieks.

He shakes his head, grinning, then brushes the sand off the hat and returns it to her head, tying the straps under her chin this time. When she tries to pull it off it doesn’t budge and her mouth drops open in shock and betrayal.

“Trust me,” he tells her. “You’d hate a sunburn more.”

Her face screws up, but then she decides she’s having too much fun to spoil the day by throwing a tantrum. Instead she squints across the beach to where Boyd and Erica are reveling in the childhood they never had and building a sandcastle. “Bo dee ba ga,” she says sagely.

“You said it, kid.” He blows a kiss into her neck, tasting sunscreen and making her squeal. Derek runs up to them, water droplets flying. He was racing the triplets out in the surf and the triumphant smirk on his face suggests he won.

“You ready to go in the ocean, Mia?” he asks, holding out his arms for her. She goes willingly and babbles at Derek, tugging at her hat and pouting, clearly trying to convince him to take it off for her. Such a little hustler.

They walk past Scott, trickling wet sand over Kira’s mound of a belly, and Liam, doing something with shells and his boyfriend Mason. Stiles sits down at the edge of the water and Derek slowly lowers Mia down so her toes skim right where the waves break.

Her eyes widen and her mouth forms a perfect O as a foamy wave crashes over her feet. She kicks experimentally and an amazed grin steals over her face as the water flies up and glints in the sun. Once he’s sure she’s not going to burst into terrified tears Derek hands her over to Stiles. He sits with her against his chest so the waves lap at them. “I think we’ve got a beach bum on our hands,” he says as she continues to squeal and splash at the water.

“The last time I was here I was doing exactly this with my baby cousin,” Derek says softly, picking up a wet mound of sand to dribble over Mia’s toes. “I never thought I’d come back.”
“Hey!” Erica waves to them from across the beach, sandcastle crumbled at her feet. “We should run in the sand! Wolf race!”

Derek grimaces and looks around the beach. It’s not as crowded as it would be in summer, but there are a few families milling around, many looking up sharply at Erica’s words. “That might not be a great idea, Erica.”

Erica rolls her eyes and cups her hands around her mouth. “Hey! Anyone here mind if our pack shifts and has a race?”

There’s a painful silence. Stiles sees parents exchanging quick, nervous glances, and his stomach sinks. Then a little boy, no more than seven, starts jumping up and down excitedly. “I wanna see!” he yells. “I wanna see!”

The mood shifts just like that. A few people nod in Erica’s direction, and one or two whoop encouragingly. Derek rolls his eyes and drops a kiss on Mia’s head. “I guess we’re doing this.”

“Go win, baby.”

The wolves disappear behind the changing rooms so they aren’t exposing themselves to the entire beach. Kira comes to sit with Stiles and Mia—there’s not a lot of science on whether it’s safe for a pregnant werewolf to shift, so she’s not risking it. “This should be something,” she says.

Stiles nods in agreement and scooches around so Mia can see. Scott rounds the corner first, kicking up sand, fur a dark blur in the sun. Erica is trying to outflank him, but it’s the wolf emerging last who pulls ahead, outracing all the others.

“Look at you,” Stiles whispers, a lump in his throat as his mate runs joyously, the leader of his pack and just as free in this form as he is in his human one.

“Papa!” Mia yells. “Pa-pa-pa-pa-pa-papa!”

The responding howl echoes all around the beach.

#

When Stiles wakes up the next morning he feels as though he’s brought the sun back with him. He stretches languidly, half-unconsciously reaching over for Derek. The werewolf is always out of bed before him to make coffee and today is no exception, but Stiles sniffs at his pillow happily. He feels as cozy as if he’s just snuggled under a blanket on a cold, lazy morning; as energetically happy as if the first strains of his favorite dance song has started playing.

He can hear Mia in her crib and he yawns before getting up. When he walks in she’s happily babbling to the animals on her mobile but she beams and reaches up when she sees him. “Are you telling your friends about the ocean?” he asks as he carries her over for a diaper change.

She looks so sweet smiling up at him with his dimples and Derek’s eyes and he feels a wave of affection and tenderness towards her. Maybe he and Derek didn’t create her the conventional way, but the girl she’s becoming is a product of their love, and he couldn’t prouder of that. “Look at this widdle tummy,” he coos. “This widdle tummy needs big tummy kisses.” He gives her a kiss right on that round belly, making her shriek, then carries her down for breakfast.

Derek is already there, making coffee with sleepy eyes. “Hi, you,” he murmurs, leaning in to kiss Mia. “And hi, you.” He kisses Stiles’s cheek, then hums appreciatively and nuzzles in closer. “You smell good.”
“Yeah?”

“Mmhm. Really good. Like…like you’re wearing a perfume of your scent on top of your normal smell.”

“Guess I need to shower.” Stiles shrugs and turns to grab Mia’s breakfast, then stops. “Oh,” he says, stunned by the sudden realization. “I think… I must be in heat.”

Derek freezes what he’s doing. “Are you sure?”

“I think it has to be.” An omega’s body stops producing heats for a few months after giving birth to a child—it’s an evolutionary thing, since it’s more important for an omega to be caring for a newborn than conceiving again. Heats usually resume between eight to ten months after giving birth, and Stiles is smack in the middle of that.

Derek’s shock is replaced with concern. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah. I feel… pretty great, actually. Not at all like I did last time.” He feels like he has pure sunlight streaking through his body, and it makes him want to cuddle up close to Derek and let Derek touch him all over.

“How do you want to deal with this? I can take you to the clinic and they can stop it and get you on birth control, if you want.”

He considers it, but… he wants to do this with Derek. He wants to know how it feels to go through a normal heat with his mate. He needs to ride it out with Derek; put himself completely in Derek’s hands and see how they come out on the other side. “I want it,” he says softly. “I want this with you.”

Derek’s eyes are tender as he steps towards Stiles and cups his cheek. “Okay. Then I’m yours.” He gives Stiles a soft kiss, then pulls away. “I’ll go pick us up some supplies. Can your dad take Mia today?”

“I’ll call and see.”

“Good.”

Once Derek leaves Stiles feels a little bereft, so he makes the call to his dad and then just cuddles with Mia in the living room. She’s happy to have so much attention and she talks animatedly to him in her baby language while he nods along. Soon, he knows, her vocabulary will extend far beyond “dada” and “papa,” and she’ll be walking any day now. He’ll have a toddler on his hands instead of a baby.

The thought fills him with longing and he snorts at himself. He knows what this heat is meant for, but no way. He is not getting pregnant again. Mia’s going to be waiting a while for a brother or sister, but someday…

“Dada.” Mia says in exasperation when he clearly isn’t listening to her, swatting at his nose.

“Ow. No, Mia-girl. We don’t hit.”

She considers this, then pokes him instead.

“Let no man say you’re not my daughter.” He takes a deep breath as the front door opens, tasting Derek in the air. The sudden influx of alpha scent hits him hard and he feels a delicious shudder all
through his body as the first rush of slick dampens his cotton briefs.

Derek walks into the living room and looks down at Stiles’s suddenly blown-out pupils. “Is your dad coming?”

“Y-yeah. Twenty minutes.”

Derek nods and breathes shallowly through his mouth. “Why don’t you go into the bedroom and get yourself ready, and I’ll wait out here for him with Mia?” He gives Stiles a CVS bag. “I practically cleared the place out, so we should be covered.”

Stiles peers in and sees all the heat essentials: extra-strength knotting condoms, lube, body cream, peanut butter (for energy, not food porn, but the possibilities are endless), and a plug, which makes his dick swell in his pants excitecly.

“Bye-bye,” he says to Mia. She’s getting better and better at recognizing words— she knows that “beddy-byes” means she has to go in her crib, “no” means she should stop what she’s doing, “open up” means she’s about to get food, and “bye-bye” means she’s not going to see someone for a little while. She smacks a hand against her lips and makes a spitty sound, looking pleased with herself, and Stiles cracks up when he realizes she’s trying to blow him a goodbye kiss.

“Mwah,” he tells him, blowing one back.

“Maaa!”

“You are just crushing this baby thing.” He kisses her on the head then speeds off to the bedroom before Derek’s scent can completely overwhelm him. Even stripping off his own clothes makes his cock throb and he shuts his eyes as the delicious feeling before grabbing the body cream. It’s supposed to make his skin soft and supple and very responsive to touch, and the feeling of it sends his nerve endings ablaze. He has to bite a pillow to keep himself from moaning.

He’s still rational enough to be a little nervous. He doesn’t want to lose control, and he’s worried about what this heat might bring out in him— he’s read plenty of stories about omegas discovering some weird, dark kinks they’d never had before, such desires suddenly the only way they’re able to get off. He doesn’t want to end the night begging Derek to pee on him or something.

That thought, thankfully, is interrupted by the sound of his father’s arrival. “Thanks for coming,” he hears Derek say. “Stiles is up in the bedroom—”

“Nope. I don’t need to know. I don’t want to know. You two just…well. Call when you want me to bring her back over.”

“We packed everything she might need. Just call if I forgot anything. She’s crazy for applesauce right now but we’re trying to get her to eat more greens.”

John snorts. “We fought the same battle with Stiles.”

Stiles groans aloud at how freaking long this is taking. “Will you two hurry it up down there? I’m about to explode in here!”

“WE’RE NOT LISTENING!” John shouts back. “Come on, Mia. Daddy’s being yucky. Let’s cover our ears and sing! LA LA LA LA…”

Mia yodels tunelessly along with him until the door finally shuts out the sound. God, he can practically feel Derek walking up the steps, as if each movement is charging the air with his scent.
“Come on,” he says aloud as the floor by the room’s entrance creaks. “Please.”

The bed dips as Derek sits down. His hand rests heavy and comforting on Stiles’s back. “How are you doing?”

“Good, I think. Not out-of-control.”

“Okay. I just want you to know—at any point, no matter what, all you have to do is say stop and we’ll stop. If you want to go to the clinic, I’ll take you. Don’t get caught up in thinking you have to please me. I promise I won’t be mad or disappointed. Okay?”

Stiles nods. “Same goes for you,” he manages to say. “I have no idea how this is going to go…we don’t even know what kind of stuff I’ll want to do, and I don’t want you to think you have to go out of your comfort zone…”

“I’m not worried about that. We haven’t had a heat like this together, but I know you pretty well. I know what you like.” Derek’s arms come around him and tug him up. “I know you like when I do this.” His lips graze his mating bite, then he sucks into it, teeth scraping the scar tissue. Stiles gasps and jerks in Derek’s eyes. “I know you like it when I tell you how good you are…how perfect for me…I know you like when I hold you this way…” his palm presses into Stiles’s lower belly while his other hand scrambles for the lube.


“Here you go,” Derek says sweetly, giving him another finger. He’s stretching torturously, rubbing inside of Stiles as the slick dampens his fingers.

“More. More.”

Derek grunts in his ear and slides inside of him, pushing in so deep Stiles can feel his balls against his ass. A part of Stiles wants to rip that condom off of him so there’s nothing between them, but he’s got enough of his mind present that he knows he has to resist. This isn’t for breeding; just for satisfaction.

And God, is he satisfied.

Derek doesn’t really thrust in and out, just moves gently inside of him until the knot starts to swell. “Don’t come,” he says, breath tickling Stiles’s ear. “I want to use my mouth on you.”

“Use it now.” His need makes him bold; makes him strong. “Tell me all the things you want to do to me.”

“God, everything, fucking everything, baby. Fuck you in here and then outside. Tie your hands up and then just touch you all over while you beg me for more. Get you in the shower, pressing you against the wall and into the spray so you have to close your eyes, then take you out and fuck you on the floor, still wet, so I have to suck every drop of water off you. Want to play games with you—chase you out in the woods as a wolf, then find you and fuck you as a man. I’ll do it all, God, everything, everything, because you’re mine and I’m yours.”

And Stiles only moans, stretched so deliciously full of Derek but always, always ready for more. He’s still hard when Derek’s knot finally goes down, and Derek tell him how perfect he is as he gets down on his knees and kisses Stiles’s cock.

“You’re going to be so good for me, aren’t you? You’ll let me suck this for as long as I want before
you come.” Derek’s eyes catch Stiles’s, tender and commanding, Alpha and mate, and Stiles nods frantically. He’ll be good. He’ll be perfect. And he’s so grateful to Derek for giving him such a gentle command, something easy to perform so Stiles can feel like he’s pleasing his alpha by doing it.

Derek doesn’t mess around. He swallows Stiles down to the root, and Stiles can feel the head of his cock bumping against Derek’s throat, God. Derek is working his dick with his tongue, enjoying that sweet omega taste. He’s teasing Stiles, just because he can. Stiles can feel his teeth scraping, a parody of the mating bite, and he almost loses it right there.

Derek’s hands come up to cup his balls, squeezing a little, and then he finally nods and Stiles lets go. He can feel the way his dick shudders and twitches still in Derek’s throat, a tight warm heat working him all the way through his orgasm, and when it’s over he falls back on the bed with his eyes wide and sightless.

“Such a good boy,” Derek croaks to him, voice wrecked. “Once you’re up for it I’ll let you swallow my cock and return the favor. Feed you my come to keep your strength up.”

Stiles opens his mouth obediently and Derek chuckles and slips in his thumb. “Just suck that for now, baby. We’ve got hours and hours to go.”

Stiles hums with pleasure around Derek’s thumb, eyes shut, adrenaline still pumping through him.

#

The heat is a perfect blur of sex and snuggling and breaks for food and drink. Derek fucks his mouth, his ass, the gap of his thighs and the arch of his back, marking him all over with come and then dragging him into the shower so he can clean him off and start all over again.

There are moments when Stiles feels himself starting to lose control, when Derek is taking his time preparing him or teasing his mouth with nibbling little kisses, and he wants to beg Derek just to be good to his omega the way his omega is so good to him. He’ll do anything to please his Alpha, no matter how big or small; he just needs to be filled and praised. When those moments come Derek always seems to realize it and gives Stiles exactly what he needs, pulling him close and slotting inside of him, telling him what a perfect mate he is and letting Stiles set the temp of their fucking. Giving him control back.

It’s more than he ever could have dreamed.

When the heat starts to recede he almost cries with the loss of it. He’s sore and exhausted, but he wants to start from the beginning all over again. “Stay,” he whines when he feels Derek’s knot deflate and begin to tug free.

Derek kisses the back of his neck. “You wore me out,” he whispers, a smile in his voice.

Stiles turns and burrows into his mate. Derek lifts him as if he weighs nothing and carries him downstairs. He stops to grab a bottle of Gatorade from the fridge and then walks into the living room, where he throws an afghan over them both and cuddles Stiles against him.

It’s a perfect way to wind things down and Stiles just breathes in and out, reveling in the scent of his alpha. Outside the moon is high, illuminating the trees in a way that’s almost mesmerizing. It’s all theirs. What a concept.

Even when he can tell that he’s almost back to normal he stays nuzzled against Derek, sipping the Gatorade every time Derek holds it to his lips. “I should go on birth control,” he says a little regretfully after a while.
Derek just nods and rubs his cheek against Stiles’s head.

“That was amazing, but…Mia is the only surprise baby I want.”

Derek snorts. “I’m with you there. I agree. Besides, it’s probably bad parenting to exile our own kid every six weeks.”

“Please, she’s living the dream. My dad is spoiling her rotten. She’s probably on her seventh bedtime story right now.” Stiles moves a little so he can hear the calming sound of Derek’s heartbeat under his ear. “I could try the birth control shot where you get a heat three times a year. That would be manageable.”

“It’s up to you.”

“I don’t want to give this up entirely.”

Derek is quiet for a second, but when Stiles looks up at him there’s a huge grin on his face. “What?”

“I just…I can’t believe you would actually consider getting another birth control shot, given what happened last time.”

Stiles takes Derek’s large, calloused hand, and nestles his cheek into the palm. “My decision to get that shot was the best one I ever made,” he says.

“Oh, yeah?”

“Yeah. Thank God I did.” Stiles kisses Derek’s palm and cuddles in even closer. A long, contented silence falls over the house, and the moon shines down on the pair, soon enough sleeping safe in each other’s arms.

Chapter End Notes

Epilogue coming Saturday! See you back here then!
Chapter 22

Chapter Notes

This is the second story I've ended with Derek giving a valedictorian speech. Do I have a very weird, specific valedictorian kink? Hmm.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Seven Years Later

“Lin, I’m not arguing this one with you. If we shut down every event because we have a threat of protestors, we’d never get anything done. I’ll arrange for extra security, but…no, Lin, we won’t reschedule. This is the single most important vote for omegas in Australia to date and I’m not going to back down and give the alpha dicks exactly what they want.” Stiles’s teeth grit as he paces the hallway. “I shouldn’t be dealing with this for you. You’ll have your security, but this sort of wishy-washiness is really not boding well for your future as director.”

Stiles ends the call and looks at his assistant, Mandy. “Did I sound like a bitch?”

She shakes her head. “Lin needs a wake-up call or the Australian office will collapse like Japan did.”

“That’s my concern, but I know Lin has it in her. She just needs to pull it together.” Stiles sticks his phone in his pocket and strides back towards his office. “Okay, arrange for extra security to be at tomorrow’s event; let them know a group of alpha right’s protestors are planning to get rowdy. Call the social media team and tell them to step up the marketing, too, we don’t want attendance down—Mia, what did I say?”

“I’m helping her!” his eldest daughter protests, looking up from the floor of his office with her face bristled in a half-shift.

“Helping,” his three-year-old echoes, eyes wide and guilty as she sticks her thumb in her mouth.

Stiles shakes his head at them, rubbing his temples. He’d stepped out of the office for three minutes so his daughters wouldn’t hear him chewing his employee out, and of course Mia had immediately broken the one and only rule he’d left her with. “Remember what Papa said? Lena will shift when she’s ready. You can’t force it. And we never, ever shift without an adult in the room, right?”

“It was just a half,” Mia tries to protest while Lena tugs at Stiles’s pant leg, begging to be picked up.

“Yeah, and the last time you tried a half shift you broke our end table.” Stiles has a little difficulty getting Lena up into his arms in his current state, but he manages. “Besides, you didn’t have your first shift until you were almost four, and Lena-bean just turned three two months ago.”

“I didn’t have a big sister to help me,” Mia says loftily.

Stiles hides a smile. Of all his seven thousand nicknames for his oldest daughter, Mia-mine is the most accurate. Mia is fiercely protective of the things and people that belong to her, and from the moment Lena was born Mia had attached herself to her little sister like a third parent. He doesn’t ever want to discourage her love for her sister, but he also doesn’t want Mia breaking everything in his office by trying to help Lena with her first shift. “Lena has plenty of time. Don’t you, Lena-bean?
But *we* are going to be late if we don’t leave right now.”

“I’ll finish up here,” Mandy assures him, typing into her blackberry.

“Great, thanks. And thanks again for coming in on a Saturday.” Stiles grabs his briefcase with his free hand and beckons to Mia. He’d wanted this to just be a quick stop-by the office to put out a quick fire, but it had snowballed, as it so often did. That was the job. Sometimes he thought it was kind of weird how much he loved it.

“Okay, ladies. Let’s step on it.”

“Daddy, Stellaluna!”

Stiles stoops and grabs Lena’s beloved stuffed bunny off his desk without even breaking stride. She gives him a wet kiss on the cheek to say thank-you, making him grin. If he hadn’t seen Lena’s lycadone levels he never would have believed she was a werewolf. His three-year-old is the sweetest child he’d ever met and wouldn’t hurt a fly, let alone a rabbit or deer. She’d been that way from the beginning, which was actually a huge relief—her birth had been carefully planned to fall during Derek’s last semester of undergrad, so he could help care for her before he started law school in the fall, but Stiles had still needed to juggle a newborn and his job. Having such a mellow baby had been a godsend; he’d once been in board meeting with her strapped to his chest, quietly trying to play with her toes while he took care of business.

It had been a little sad, not being able to spend every minute with her the way he had Mia at her age, but he just couldn’t leave work for that long. In the past seven years, OWNYourself had grown to rank at No. 4 of the most successful nonprofits in the United States. It had overtaken and absorbed its parent nonprofit five years earlier, surprising everyone, and had spawned branches in England, Korea, Japan, Australia, and Ireland.

It was still primarily focused on helping omega werewolves, but it was successful enough now that there were divisions dedicated to issues unique to human omegas and werewolf alphas and betas. Ever since he’d been elected president of the board two years earlier he’d dedicated himself to making the charity as inclusive as possible, sending resources to any people who might be marginalized.

It was no fucking joke, running a conglomerate like this. But it paid off. Not only was he named Business Omega of the Year last year in *Time*, he has his own Wikipedia page. Sure, the site kept calling it a “blurb,” his real first name is misspelled, and there isn’t a picture, but still. What more could a guy need?

He’d actually felt a little bad that Derek didn’t have one and offered to create one for him, but Derek had given him a look of horror and said he was *perfectly* fine just being an unlinked name under Stiles’s “Personal Life” section.

Mia and Lena, on the other hand, had been annoyingly unimpressed by this new measure of his celebrity. When it came to the internet, if it wasn’t a brightly colored game or a YouTube video involving kittens, they just weren’t interested.

He straps Lena into her carseat and lifts Mia up into the car, trying not to notice the rip she’s already managed to get in her brand-new dress. “Last call for bathroom,” he says.

They shake their heads in tandem.

“Okay. Let’s drive.”
He starts the car, glancing at his girls in the rearview mirror. Mia has grown into a little miniature of Derek, dark hair and eyebrows and all, but Lena looks much more like her Daddy. It sort of makes him excited to see what her wolf is going to look like. Mia’s fur is black, like Derek’s, and Stiles wants to know how he would look, if he were a wolf. Lena had been an early walker and an early crawler; he wouldn’t be surprised if she’s an early shifter too.

Shifting must still be on Mia’s mind as well, because she starts chattering to Lena about it as Stiles pulls onto the interstate. “The first time is probably going to be scary,” she tells her sister knowledgably. “But Papa and me will be right there, and Daddy will be hiding in the woods. Right, Daddy?”

Stiles laughs. “Absolutely.” Derek and Mia had been determined that he join in on the family fun, so when Mia had first started shifting he’d hidden in the woods and waited for her to scent him out. He smiles at the memory of that determined little furball jumping on him the first time she found him and licking his face delightedly.

“And then, once you get fast, you can hunt with me and Papa! It takes a while to get good at it but I caught a squirrel once, and then we ate it!”

Actually, they hadn’t. Derek had carried the poor bloodied carcass home, apologetically explaining to Stiles that Mia’s wolf-instincts practically demanded she eat what she caught. Stiles had forced a smile, patted his tiny rodent-murderess on the head, carried the dead squirrel into the kitchen, and then promptly served pork loin for dinner while lying through his teeth about how delicious Mia’s “catch” was. He loved his daughters more than life itself, but nope. No way. Never.

“I don’t wanna hurt a squirrel,” Lena whimpers, clutching Stellaluna tightly to her chest.

“That’s okay! You can hunt a rabbit, or a deer. Anything!”

“Mia,” Stiles says waringly. She knows full well she can’t hunt anything after she once tore off ahead of Derek in pursuit of a smell that turned out to be a coyote. Derek had had to gallop after her and roar the coyote into submission before it attacked like Mufasa in The Lion King. Stiles was still having heart palpitations about it.

“Almost anything,” she amends dutifully. That would be the lesson she took away from her near-death experience.

“I don’t wanna hunt anything. Daddy? Do I have to hurt a squirrel?” Lena sounds close to tears and Stiles looks heavenward, wondering if any other father has to answer such a weird question from his child.

“No, Lena-bean, of course not. You can have lots of fun playing with Papa and Mia and never have to hunt anything. Usually Papa and Mia just chase our woodland friends up a tree as a game, right, Mia?”

Mia nods eagerly. “Uh-huh! You chase them and then they run up a tree really fast and you sit under it and howl up at them. It’s called…what’s it called, Daddy?”

“Treeing them.”

“Treeing,” Mia tells Lena, and both girls simultaneously break into frenzied giggles at the evident hilarity of that word. Probably because it rhymes with peeing. Sometimes he doesn’t understand his children, and other times he understands them far too well.

“And we can play hide and seek!” Mia says once the giggling has died down. “Papa’s really good at
it. I’m still learning how to track. But once I’m better at it I can teach you.”

“Okay,” Lena says, still clutching her bunny a little nervously. “I guess if you’re there I can do it.”

“Don’t try right now, please,” Stiles says quickly. The last thing he needs is Lena bursting out of her new dress and running around in puppy form today. The first time Mia had shifted it had taken her forever to shift back.

“Daddy,” Mis says, sounding exasperated. Then she whispers to Lena, as if Stiles can’t hear her, “We’ll try tonight, okay?”

Traffic is blessedly light and he makes it to their location with plenty of time to spare. There are red and black balloons set up everywhere and the girls delight in swatting at them as Stiles corrals them into place. There’s a huge section all cordoned off for them— most people only get two seats, which is insane, but Derek had been granted tickets for his entire extended pack. The perks of being a superstar.

There’s only one person already there and Mia squeals excitedly when she sees who it is. “Miss Braedon! Guess what? I got my handstand!”

“Did you?” Braedon Sawyer says without missing a beat, turning to calmly take in the tornado of exuberant childhood coming her way.

“Uh-huh! Look!” Mia immediately leaps onto her hands, completely heedless of the fact that she’s wearing a dress and everyone can now see her underwear.

Stiles face-palms.

“Excellent,” Braedon says when Mia straightens up. “I told you all you had to do was keep working on it, didn’t I?”

Mia nods, eyes wide and adoring as she scrambles into a seat next to the lawyer. Both girls are absolutely obsessed with Braedon, for which Stiles can’t exactly fault them. He’d first met Braedon about a year after the move back to Beacon Hills, when her firm had relocated to Stanford. He’d been amazed first to see that she herself wasn’t a werewolf, and secondly to see that she was an omega.

She explained to them that she’d started fighting for werewolf rights after her sister’s werewolf mate had shifted in public one day after his son had wandered off, so he could better track the boy. The police had been called to the scene, saw a man in wolf form, and shot him without a second thought. They’d been briefly suspended from the force, but quietly let back on after an internal investigation, and Braedon’s fury had quickly spurred her to go to law school and prevent it from happening again.

Braedon’s firm has been serving as OWNYourself’s council for years now, and she continues to work for werewolves’ rights within the legal system. He's constantly amazed by her and very pleased that he will continue to be working closely with her in the years to come.

“How are you doing?” Braedon asks as Stiles takes his own seat, glad to take pressure off his feet.

“I’d give myself a solid A.”

“Your color looks pretty good. Has the heat hit yet?”

Normally he would be embarrassed to discuss something so personal, but this is Braedon. Talking to her is like confessing to a doctor, priest, and best friend, all at the same time. “Not yet, thank
goodness. I’m thinking in a week or two. No soreness in my chest yet or signs of the canal, so we’ve
got time. Can you imagine it hitting right over finals? Derek would have gone nuts.”

As he talks he absent-mindedly traces a heart on his protruding belly. His third pregnancy hadn’t
been quite as regimentally planned as Lena had been—he’d had an infection that required him to go
on antibiotics, which had messed up his birth control, and once he’d realized how screwed-up his
cycle was he’d kind of shrugged to Derek and suggested they just go ahead and have sex anyway. If
he got pregnant then he got pregnant; this wasn’t the most inconvenient time to have their third child,
and how likely was it he’d get pregnant from a few unprotected knottings?

He’d gotten pregnant so fast it was like Derek’s sperm had taken his words as some kind of dare.
He’s right on the cusp of eight months now with their first son and third werewolf. According to new
research performed by Scott and his team over at Stanford Medical, he’s probably only going to have
werewolf children—something about lycadone agents staying dormant in the womb after one
werewolf fetus has already been there.

He doesn’t mind. He’s fine being the family’s only human. He feels more confident every day about
the future of werewolf rights in this country, and he knows his children are going to be just fine.

More people start arriving. Scott and Kira make it surprisingly early considering the military-grade
strategizing it usually takes for them to get their car loaded up. Mia immediately waves over their
eldest daughter, Kathiryn, her very best friend in the entire world. They’d been inseparable since
early childhood, even though Mia is over a year older, and are already finishing each other’s
sentences and making wild, probably insanely dangerous plans together outside of their parents’
hearing.

In short, they’re totally Scott and Stiles 2.0.

Stiles would have been worried about Lena feeling left out over Mia’s close relationship with
Kathiryn, but Lena is so intensely bonded with Scott’s son Will that there’s no room for jealously.
Will is about five months older than her and by the time Lena could babble she and Will seemed to
have a language all their own. Even now she throws her arms around him in a delighted hug and
they snuggle together on one seat, talking softly.

Stiles has a feeling that one day he and Scott will share a grandchild through their middle children.
Early signs point towards Lena presenting as an omega and Will as an alpha, though of course
there’s no way to know for sure.

Scott is carrying his two-year-old, Tarik, and Kira is pushing a stroller with the triplets, born three
months earlier. They’ve been keeping her out-of-commission at OWNYourself, though she’s still
working from home, as she always does after having a child. She’s VP of the board and does nearly
as much as Stiles.

One of the babies is fussing a little and Stiles reaches into the stroller to try and soothe her. “Hi,
Emma-boo,” he coos as the baby grabs his finger tightly.

“How do you stop nicknaming my kids,” Scott says, sprawling into a seat exhaustedly.

“Oh, they love it. Right, Tar-bear?”

Tarik nods and reaches for his Uncle Stiles. Scott willingly passes him over, then reaches into the
stroller for Eden, who’s taken over her sister’s whimpering like they’re trying out some sort of
unhappy relay race. The movement sets of Eve in the back and the sound of three crying children
fills the air.
“That’s my girls,” Scott says with a little sigh as he distributes one baby to Kira and one to Stiles for soothing.

Stiles laughs and rocks the infant gently, Tarik shifted to his other arm. The triplets are a fussy bunch, and the stresses of raising them on top of Scott’s ridiculous med school schedule and Kira’s work pressures has made Scott start to go prematurely gray in the past few months. “Shouldn’t you know some sort if magic medical way to calm them down when they start this?”

“Usually when they’ve been crying for a while for no apparent reason I just say sternly, ‘Honey, I know there’s nothing wrong with you. I’m a doctor,’ but it never works.”

“Probably because they know you’re not really a doctor yet. Babies hate liars.”

“Two more years,” Scott says, staring up longingly at the stage as Eve slowly starts to settle down in his arms.

Everyone else starts to show up in trickles. Boyd and Erica and their toddler, Molly. Jordan and Ethan with Adam and Lucas, just turned three and eight months, respectively. Aidan and Lydia and their adopted son Ryan. Isaac with Angelina, his human mate, and their two surprisingly human children, Ina and Oren. Liam and Mason. Even Jackson and Danny are there, Danny glowing stereotypically as Jackson walks him to a seat with one proud hand over his baby bump.

The Sherriff makes it with two minutes to spare and Lena happily crawls onto his lap. “Is he nervous?” he asks Stiles as he cuddles his granddaughter fondly.

“Nah. He’s good. I think he’s ready to have it over with.”

The music starts up and they all fall silent. The graduates walk in in rows, eyes stiffly straight ahead, but Derek glances over at his pack and winks to Stiles and his daughters.

The dean keeps the ceremony thankfully short; it’s all a lot of introductions and discussions about the beauty of the law and a few inside jokes that absolutely no one except the lawyers get. Finally the dean announces the valedictorian:

“We are very pleased today to announce that one of our students has made history in more ways than one. Today’s valedictorian is the first werewolf student to receive this highest academic honor. Those of us who know Derek Hale are unsurprised at his achievement. In his three years at Stanford law, Mr. Hale has been a leader among his peers, serving as President of the Constitutional Law Society, Werewolves in the Law, Stanford Innocence Project, and editor-in-chief of the Stanford Law Journal.

“As a two-year summer associate with the law firm of Sawyer and Davis, Mr. Hale assisted in the Supreme Court case of Obagoshi v. Scott, which famously overturned Rick v. Halpert in determining that werewolves are a protected class entitled to equal protection under the law.

“The effects of this ruling have been long-reaching. With attacks on werewolves now considered hate crimes and punished with severe penalties, attacks on werewolves by vigilante “hunter” groups have significantly dropped. Werewolves are no longer kept from civil service positions, and new opportunities open for such citizens every day, thanks to the efforts of Mr. Hale and the associates at Sawyer and Davis.

“Mr. Hale is the first Stanford graduate to receive an offer of employment as a named partner in a law firm. Next week Mr. Hale will start work at the newly-crowned Sawyer, Davis, and Hale, and we look forward to seeing what Mr. Hale does next.”
Derek stands and takes the stage to the audience’s applause. He’s blushing a little at the attention as he takes out his notes and leans towards the microphone. “Good afternoon,” he says. “Thank you all for coming to celebrate with us today.”

Stiles can’t believe that Derek, who had been practically sub-verbal when they’d met, is so comfortable speaking in front of people now, but his speech is confident and assured. He mentions his murdered family as he talks about the dangers of inequality, causing a hush to fall over the crowd, then quickly moves on to talk about hope and justice and the necessity of always moving forward. Stiles has heard this speech in practice more times than he can count over the past few weeks, but he still feels mesmerized by the cadence of Derek’s voice; the expressive movement of his hands.

“It can be easy to fall into complacency, into the rut of believing we cannot change things,” Derek says in his summation. “It can be easy to believe that it is other people, not us, who make the rules. Today we stand proud as the next generation of lawmakers and litigators. We know today that we control the rules that affect our lives and the lives of our loved ones. This is no light responsibility, and we do not take it lightly. We stand for justice and equality, hope and love. These are our lights. We will let no person turn them off.”

Stiles stands with the rest of the crowd in applause. Mia tilts back her head and lets out a howl, immediately picked up by the rest of the pack. She looks so pleased with herself that Stiles laughs and grabs her up in a big hug. He misses the days when she was little enough to sit on his hips or ride on his shoulders, but she’s not so old yet that she doesn’t immediately return his hug, face shining with pride and happiness.

The graduates for a line to receive their diplomas, and then the ceremony is over. Derek starts towards his pack and Lena and Mia take off running to meet him. Lena gets there first— Stiles has a sneaking suspicion Mia let her win— and Derek immediately picks her up, swings her around, and smacks a kiss onto her cheek. Mia barrels into him at full speed and wraps her arms around his waist. “This is my Papa!” she shouts proudly to whoever might be listening.

Stiles is much farther behind with four pounds of baby slowing him down, but he smiles as he watches Derek celebrate with his best girls. “Derek Hale, JD,” he says when he’s finally close enough. “It really seems like should have some sort of title, right? Like, Juris Doctor Hale? Lawyer Hale?”

“You can call me Derek Hale, Esquire,” Derek tells him, putting a hand on his bump in hello.

Stiles snorts. “I will not.”

“I’ll call you Papa, Esquire,” Mia tells Derek seriously. “What’s Esquire?”

Lena tugs at Derek’s gown. “Papa? Can I go to law school now?”

“Lena-bean,” Stiles protests. “I already told you I would miss you too much if you had to spend all those hours studying like Papa!”

Lena nods seriously. “But now Papa doesn’t have to study anymore and he can keep you from being lonely, so I think it’s okay.”

“Maybe in a few years,” Derek tells her. “You want to practice now and throw my cap?”

Her eyes light up and she nods. Derek tugs his cap off and gives it to her. She throws it a few feet into the air, at which point it promptly falls and thunks Stiles in the head.

“Ow.”
“Sorry, Daddy,” Lena says guiltily.

“No problem. Daddy doesn’t mind a little brain damage.” Stiles gives the cap to Mia so she can have a toss, and by then the rest of the pack children have caught up and all want a turn. Lena wriggles to be put down and they all chase after the cap, throwing it up and battering it like some oddly-shaped balloon.

Derek holds out his arms and Stiles goes into the embrace willingly. “Hi,” Derek says.

“Hi.” Stiles rests his head against Derek’s chest. He’s missed his mate in the past few weeks of studying for finals and graduation prep. “You were amazing up there.”

“Thanks.” Derek cradles his belly. “How’s my little guy?”

“Sleeping, I think. But I’m sure he’s very impressed with you too.”

Derek hums and presses a kiss to the side of Stiles’s mouth. They watch all the pack kids, Mia the unquestioned leader and Lena her adoring second-in-command. “You think we can get so lucky a third time?”

Stiles closes his eyes, all the better to enjoy Derek’s embrace. “Honestly, Der? I’m so lucky that at this point I figure I’ve got unlimited quantities.”

He nuzzles in close to his mate, watching his little girls play while his baby slowly stirs inside of him. He’s got some work to finish up tonight, and an interview tomorrow, but once the kids are asleep he and Derek are going to absolutely go to town on each other. Law school has been a stressful three years. He’s going to show Derek just how proud he is of his werewolf.

“I love you,” Derek says softly, as if he can read Stiles’s thoughts.

“I love you too, Der. Forever.” He closes his eyes again and breathes in the scent of his mate while his children shriek in the background.

And this, this is having it all.

Chapter End Notes

WHOO-HOO!
I had absolutely zero idea that this story would be more than double anything I’ve written before and take ten weeks to finish, but I'm so glad you guys enjoyed it to the end!
As I've mentioned in some of my whinier author notes I spent the past ten weeks working at my 1L job, all alone in a big, hot, occasionally violent city, and it you guys always managed to pull a lousy day around with your lovely support. I'm about to get back in my car and dive back home, and I'll always look back on this summer fondly remembering how much fun I had with this story. At the risk of getting outrageously sappy, I'm lucky to belong to such a supportive, lovely, inclusive fandom. You guys are the best!
Now I have two weeks of vacation before I have to start interviewing for next summer, so I'm off to read a bunch of Sterek stories on here and sleep in. See you around the fandom!
Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!