a mountain to climb

by grimm

Summary

"Don’t do it," he mutters. “Don’t do it, please, don’t do it.”

But there it is, a soft pink line appearing right next to the control. Stiles’ legs give out from under him; he sinks to the bathroom floor, hands shaking, his entire body shaking. It’s hard to breathe, his vision blurring around the edges. There’s a knock on the door behind him and then it opens and Scott sits down next to him.

“I’m fucked,” Stiles gasps, tears prickling at his eyes. “I’m fucked!”

Notes

Endless thanks, as always, to my wonderful friend and beta, Jo, without whom this fic would not have been written. Sometime last year, I mentioned that I wanted to write a really outrageous high school drama involving an accidental pregnancy, and boy oh boy did she encourage me. Thanks bb <333

A heads up that this fic *does* have alternating POVs. I know some people disliked the amount of overlap of scenes in For Science, which also had alternating POVs, so I really limited the overlap in this fic, except in places where it really mattered, and it only happens a couple
Warnings: This fic contains mpreg! I know this isn't everyone's thing, so you've been warned! I don't go into a lot of detail about it; this fic is more about the relationship between characters - this is not an mpreg kink fic. Other warnings are listed in the tags, but include underage sex and drinking, unsafe sex, ABO dynamics, including one heat scene that doesn't involve sex or any attempt at it, but may seem a little dubious. There are a couple vague references to abortion, but there are no abortions in this fic.

About the ABO dynamics of this particular verse: Heat cycles are experienced by alphas, betas, and omegas alike, and are akin in severity to a women's menstrual cycle though, as in women, heats may vary in intensity from one person to the next, and indeed from one heat to the next in an individual. Most people are able to get up and go about their day while in heat.

Related to above, you'll notice that the werewolves in this fic may hold a double rank - alpha beta, beta alpha, etc. This is because they have the inherit ABO tendencies they are born with and cannot change, as well as the societal structural label of pack ranking, which can change. It only comes up in the fic a few times but if you see, for example, Derek being referred to as an alpha-type beta, that means he's a born alpha, and ranked as a beta in the pack.

All right, enough of me babbling - please enjoy the fic! And to the Americans among you, happy Fourth of July!

See the end of the work for more notes.
Derek’s been home from college for almost two months when he meets Stiles Stilinski. It’s the last week of July, the weather hot as summer begins to peak. He’s not usually one for middle-of-the-woods drunken carousing—that’s more Cora’s shtick—but Laura’s back from a month in Kansas and as Laura says, slinging an arm around his shoulders, it’s a nice night, perfect for a bonfire.

Derek’s not sure her idea of a bonfire involved so many people—there are Laura’s friends, Cora’s friends, his old high school friends, people he’s never seen—but they’re all pretty low-key, and they bring their own booze, so he doesn’t care. It’s Laura’s party anyway; he’ll put all the blame on her if things go south. It’s only fair, he reasons to himself as he makes a Jack and Coke with much more Jack than Coke, after all the times she got him in trouble in high school for things he didn’t do.

Derek stands mostly around the edge of things, watching. Cora skips up to him and calls him a creeper; he tries to take away her beer and she socks him in the arm, hard. It hurts; Derek flashes his fangs at her and grabs at her again, but she ducks away through the crowd, laughing. Derek’s just about to chase after her when he gets a hint of a scent that makes his head snap around to find the source.

Nostrils flared, he spots it; there’s a lithe boy working his way through the crowd toward the fire, a flush high on his cheeks and two bottles of beer held loosely in his long fingers. Derek’s not the only one who’s noticed him; he spots other people turning to watch the boy, who doesn’t seem to notice the stares of those around him at all. Derek watches him reach another boy, dark-haired and shorter, and pass him a beer. They’re both vaguely familiar, but they’re closer to Cora’s age than his; he doesn’t know who they are.

Derek shrugs it off, even though the scent of the kid got his heart pumping, and gets caught up in a conversation with a couple old friends from the high school basketball team. He keeps catching himself looking around, eyes seeking the boy who’d smelled so good. Derek watches him reach another boy, dark-haired and shorter, and pass him a beer. They’re both vaguely familiar, but they’re closer to Cora’s age than his; he doesn’t know who they are.

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“Hi,” he says.

“Hi,” Derek replies uncertainly.

“You were watching me,” the boy says, one side of his mouth lifting in an impish grin. There are two moles right by his mouth that move with his smile and Derek wants to taste them, wants to lick at that blush on his cheeks until it covers his whole body.

“I—was not,” Derek argues, his cheeks going hot.

The boy just grins wider, taking a casual sip of beer. Derek swallows, watching the rise and fall of the boy’s adam’s apple.

“You’re Derek,” he says, “Cora’s brother. I’m Stiles,” he adds. The name sounds familiar—maybe Cora’s mentioned him.

“Hi,” Derek repeats quietly, watching Stiles drain the last of his beer. He’s not in heat, but he feels
like he’s on fire, Stiles’ scent making his body burn with want. He's not sure why this seems so daunting tonight; he's hooked up plenty of times at school. This isn't new, but there's something almost intimidating about the way Stiles stands before him, body screaming casual though his heart beats fast. "What are you drinking?" Derek tries, attempting a smile. "Can I get you a refill?"

Stiles' eyes flicker down his body. "Nah," he says, and raises his eyebrows significantly at Derek. "Oh," Derek says, deflating a little. He's never been flat-out rejected like that.

"I mean," Stiles adds. "It's not a drink I want."

"Oh," Derek says, getting it now. He gives Stiles an appraising look, dick twitching in his jeans when Stiles drops his empty beer bottle to the grass and spreads his arms, a sarcastic twist to his lips—he’s enjoying himself. Stiles may be lean, slim in the hips, but his shoulders are broad, and Derek can tell he’s got strength to him. “Yeah,” he breathes, and reaches out, grabbing Stiles by the wrist and towing him through the crowd. Stiles laughs a little breathlessly, trotting to keep up as Derek leads him out of the clearing and through the trees. He’s not sure where he’s going—back to the house, maybe, where they won’t be interrupted—but Stiles pulls back as they reach the edge of the light from the bonfire, the night tinted orange.

Derek turns, wondering if Stiles has changed his mind, but Stiles just leans back against a tree and tugs Derek in for a wet kiss, his lips already slick and warm like he’s been biting at them. Derek can’t help but groan into his mouth; Stiles tastes even better than he smells, his mouth wet and welcoming against Derek’s. This close, he can smell that Stiles is an omega—no wonder he smells so good—and even though he’s weeks off from his heat, the smell of Stiles sets his body on fire. The full moon was just a day ago and he still feels the pull of its power keenly. That, combined with the siren song of Stiles’ scent, makes him fight the frantic urge to shift and claim.

He manages to ask, as they pull apart, chests heaving, “Are you in heat?”

“Couple days past,” Stiles says, shaking his head. His dark eyes glitter in the darkness, reflecting the faroff firelight. He’s got his hands fisted in the back of Derek’s shirt and tugs him in closer so he can drag his nose against Derek’s jawline. Whatever he smells seems to please him; he hums, hands tightening in Derek’s shirt. “Alpha, huh?”

Derek’s skin breaks out into goosebumps at the feeling of Stiles’ hot breath ghosting against his skin, barely managing a strangled, “Yeah.”

Stiles slumps back against the tree, watching him with sharp eyes, lips parted and flushed from kissing. Derek can smell the heat rising to the surface of his skin; it’s making his entire body pulse with want.

“What are you waiting for?” Stiles asks.

That’s all Derek needs; he surges forward, meeting Stiles in a hungry kiss, digging his fingers into Stiles’ hips. Stiles opens his mouth to Derek eagerly, making a low, satisfied noise that sends Derek’s heart racing even faster. He makes the noise again when Derek tilts his head and digs his teeth into the soft skin under his jaw, just below his ear.

“Fuck,” Stiles breathes, hands flying up to grip at Derek’s shoulders. “Fuck, just let me—” He hooks a thigh over Derek’s, grinding up against him impatiently.

Derek groans into Stiles’ throat; he’s been hard for what feels like hours now, and Stiles’ move rubs up against him in not quite the right way. He gets a hand under Stiles’ thigh and yanks him up
further, aligning him so they can rut against each other, Stiles panting in his ear as Derek sucks a
bruise into the hollow above his collarbone. Stiles is starting to sweat, his scent going enticingly
spicy. If they had the time, Derek would hold him down and shove his face into his armpits, would
scent him all over—but as it is, he’s growing impatient, eager to get off.

Stiles is becoming restless, grinding hard against Derek, his long fingers digging into Derek’s
shoulder blades. Derek, still holding Stiles’ thigh up in one hand, moves the other behind him,
finding the waist of Stiles’ jeans and slipping into his underwear. Stiles makes another low noise
when Derek squeezes his ass, digging his teeth into Derek’s shoulder to keep from making too much
noise. Derek has to muffle his own groan when he presses a finger against Stiles’s hole and Stiles
gives easily against him, his skin slick and burning hot.

“Fuck,” Derek mutters. “You’re still—"

“Yeah,” Stiles pants. “It—takes a few days to go away—“ He breaks off with a sharp noise, back
arching as Derek presses a finger inside him. Derek’s lips part at the easy way he’s let in, fangs
itching against his gums. Stiles’ scent only grows more delicious, tinged with the lingering smell of
his heat and the slickness gathering between his legs. Derek pulls his finger out and presses back in
with two with no difficulty at all, exhaling harshly when Stiles makes another low noise, pressing his
forehead against Derek’s neck, his hips hitching upward. “Please,” Stiles groans. “Are you gonna—"

Derek pulls his hand out of Stiles’ pants. “Turn around,” he says quietly, and Stiles scrambles to
obey, yanking down his pants and underwear. Derek begins to unbutton his own pants but freezes,
mouth watering as he watches a drop of wetness roll slowly down Stiles’ thigh. He wants—Derek’s
eyes flicker in the direction of the clearing, where the bonfire roars and the party’s as loud as ever.
There’s time, he thinks, to indulge a little, so he says, “Spread your legs,” and sinks to his knees.

Stiles glances over his shoulder at Derek, eyes widening when he sees Derek kneeling behind him,
and hurries to obey, though he can only go so far with his pants around his knees. Derek doesn’t
mind; he bites at one of the soft swells of Stiles’ asscheeks, eliciting a sharp gasp from him, before
spreading him open and pressing his mouth to the wet ring of heat between his legs. Derek’s eyes
nearly roll up inside his head at the taste of Stiles; he loves eating people out, and it’s rare he gets to
go down on an omega so close to their heat. He licks and sucks at Stiles until there’s spit and slick
dripping off his chin, Stiles growing wetter by the second, and his thighs are shaking from trying to
keep himself upright.

“Derek, please,” Stiles begs, reaching behind him to fist his hand in Derek’s hair. He doesn’t seem
sure whether to push him away or pull him in closer. “Fuck me, c’mon, please!”

Derek caves reluctantly, rubbing his hand over the bulge in his pants. When he stands he reels
slightly, feeling drunker than before—drunk on Stiles and his intoxicating taste. It takes him two
fumbling tries to get the button on his pants open and then he shoves his pants down to his thighs,
freeing his dick. Stiles moans lowly at the sight of him and turns to the tree, pressing his forehead
against the bark. Derek breathes in deep and puts one hand on Stiles’ hip, using the other to slowly
guide himself inside. He tosses back his head at the feeling of Stiles, so tight and warm around him,
and inhales through his nose, his heart beating frantically in his ears.

“Oh, fuck,” Stiles is groaning, biting down on his lip. “Fuck, fuck—"

Derek makes himself stop once he’s pushed in all the way, makes himself breathe in and out for a
long moment, makes his claws retract into blunt human fingernails. Stiles’ breath hitches; he sounds
angry when he says, “Are you going to fuck me or what?” Derek snarls low in his throat and Stiles
smirks. “Come on, alpha,” he teases. “Show me what you can do.”
“Fine,” Derek growls, and fucks into him hard, driving Stiles up onto his toes. Derek hauls him back, hands on his hips, and thrusts into him over and over, hard and relentless. His blood is on fire, body strung tight as a wire, heart pounding with the overwhelming combination of the night air and the close proximity of other people and everything about Stiles. He’s not going to last long, too keyed up from eating Stiles out, the taste of him still strong on his tongue. Stiles isn’t either; he’s got a hand on his dick, jerking himself off frantically, and Derek leans into him so he can help, setting his teeth to Stiles’ shoulder as he wraps a hand around Stiles’ dick. Stiles whines when he comes, his whole body shaking.

Derek breathes frantically through his nose, inhaling the scent of Stiles’ release, his sweat, his slick, flexing his hips as he seeks his own orgasm. It hits like a freight train and he bites down without meaning to; Stiles yelps in pain.

“Sorry,” Derek mumbles, groaning through his teeth as he spills inside Stiles. It's a long moment before he can get his thoughts coherent enough to open his jaw and let go of Stiles, pulling out of him in an uncomfortably wet slide. *No condom*, he thinks ruefully, though it's too late now. His mom would have smacked him upside the head if she knew he'd been so stupid.

Stiles presses his forehead to the tree bark for a long moment before he pulls at his pants, hitching them back up his narrow waist. Derek watches Stiles' pale ass disappear behind his jeans, sad to see it go; it's a nice ass, as asses go. Stiles turns around, tugging at his shirt collar in an attempt to see where Derek bit him. "Am I bleeding?"

Derek leans in to see. "No," he says, though there's going to be an impressive bruise there later. Mom wouldn't have approved of that, either. "Sorry."

"'S all right," Stiles says, shrugging nonchalantly. He gives Derek another crooked grin. "That was fun."

Derek returns Stiles' grin with a faint smile of his own. "Yeah."

Stiles jerks his head toward the clearing. "I'm gonna head back. You?"

"I'll be along," Derek says, and Stiles nods, a quick dip of his head, and saunters back toward the clearing. Derek doesn't miss the way Stiles winces a little as he walks, and smiles to himself, deeply satisfied.

He doesn't end up going back to the party, but turns and heads for the house, walking the casual pace of the well-fucked and extremely content.

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Cora scowls at him when she comes into the kitchen the next morning to find he's made breakfast—blueberry pancakes and bacon. "Why did you make breakfast?" she asks suspiciously. "Why do you look so happy?"

"That," says Laura, who is halfway through her own stack of pancakes, "is a Derek you might not be familiar with, and by that I mean that the Derek who stands before you has gotten laid, and if you play your cards right, there might be pancakes for breakfast all week if you don't ruin it."

Derek can't even find it in himself to be annoyed; he just smirks lazily and flicks a blueberry at Laura. Cora scowls deeper, even as she piles a plate with food. "Gross," she says, heaving herself down at the table. "Who was it?"

"I'd like to know that too," Laura says, giving Derek her best *I'm the alpha* look.
"I don't kiss and tell," Derek says, with great dignity.

Cora gives him an even more suspicious look. "Was it one of my friends? I'll kill you if you fucked Lydia."

"It wasn't Lydia," he says truthfully. He's not even sure Cora and Stiles know each other—Cora would have mentioned him before if they were friends.

"It probably was," Laura tells Cora cheerfully, her mouth full of pancakes. "He worked his way through all my friends; now it's your turn."

No one gets any more breakfast after that; Laura hits the ground with a very un-alpha-like squawk after Derek tackles her across the table. Cora joins in happily; she's on the wrestling team at school and has a mean chokehold. The whole tray of blueberry pancakes gets upended in the chaos, but they're all laughing too hard to notice.

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Derek doesn't see Stiles for nearly a week and a half. Now that Laura's home, she becomes aggressive about building the pack bond and forces her siblings on a two-week camping trip to the lower Cascades. It's mostly wet and miserable. Cora tries to get Laura to give up on the trip by putting half a dozen bullfrogs in her sleeping bag and Laura retaliates by shifting into a wolf and rolling all over Cora's clothes, getting long wolf hairs everywhere. Derek mostly ignores both of them and spends three days building a neat lean-to from branches, which Cora, being pursued by a full shift Laura after stealing all her underwear and dumping it into the creek, promptly crashes into the moment Derek steps back to admire his work. Laura finally sends them home after Derek threatens to tie Cora to a tree and let bears eat her.

Once back in Beacon Hills, Laura spends the rest of the summer trying to convince some local omega to join the pack. Cora knows him, and Laura keeps trying to drag Derek to meetings with the boy—"You're the cool factor, Der; you've got a leather jacket!"—and Derek protests that it's only pleather and always manages to slip out of her reach.

He sees Stiles for the first time since the party during the town’s annual arts festival; Laura's dragged them into town for yet another bonding experience, and this time it's watching the fireworks. The whole main street gets blocked off at both ends and turns into a carnival of fast food and tents full of paintings of wildflowers and the ocean. Derek doesn't like it; he's not fond of crowds, nor the smell of hot frying oil, and something like a frisson of relief zips up his spine when he sees Stiles sitting on one of the police barriers at the end of the block, looking bored and surly in ragged jeans and beat-up sneakers. When Derek makes deliberate eye contact with him, though, a bright smile floods his face and he jerks his head to one side in the time-honored gesture for you wanna get out of here?

Derek does, very much.

They fuck in the back of Stiles' car, an ancient sky-blue Jeep, parked on a disused forest road at the edge of town, the bright lights of the fireworks coloring Stiles' pale skin blue and red and green. The bruise on his shoulder is gone but Derek leaves another there, more careful this time, and afterward they go through the McDonald's drive-thru and order twenty dollars worth of Dollar Menu items, which they split between them.

"You want a ride back to your house?" Stiles asks after they've both eaten their fill. Derek shakes his head; he doesn't want Laura or Cora to see and start asking questions. Derek likes his privacy, and he knows that if they find out about Stiles, there will be no end to the inane questions. "Okay," Stiles says easily, and drives them back to Main Street instead, where most of the crowds have dispersed.
"See you around," he says as Derek gets out of the Jeep, and Derek tosses him a wave over his shoulder.

Three days later, Derek's sprawled out on the couch, half asleep as he watches *Back to the Future* with Cora, when his phone buzzes. He plucks it off the coffee table and frowns at the screen and the name displayed there—*Stiles*. Just when did he get Stiles' number? And why is Stiles texting him?

*My dad's working tonight,* the message says when Derek opens it. *You want to come over?*

It's followed a moment later with another message: *yes, I stole your phone while you were stuffing your face with apple pie at mcdonalds. Sue me. Or fuck me. Your choice.*

Derek swallows. He's always up for a fuck, and it's not like being around Stiles is any hardship. *Now?* He texts back.

*Now,* Stiles confirms. Derek swings himself upright, jerking his legs out from underneath Cora, who squawks indignantly.

"Where are you going?"

"Out," Derek says smugly.

"Oh my god," Cora says, staring up at him indignantly. "You just got booty-called, didn't you?"

Derek smirks down at her. "So what if I did?"

Cora makes an attempt to snatch his phone out of his hand, but Derek just holds it above his head and shoves her back onto the couch. "Laura!" Cora bellows. There's a startled crash from the basement, where Laura's doing laundry. "Derek's about to go hook up with his mystery date!"

"It's not a date," Derek says irritably. "We're just going to fuck. He—"

"He?" Laura yells excitedly, from the basement stairs. Derek curses and escapes out the front door before he lets anything else slip.

Stiles texts Derek his address, but Derek, mindful of being caught, parks several blocks over and walks until he reaches the house with Stiles' Jeep parked in the driveway. The porch light isn't on, but there's a light on in the bedroom above, and the window's open, so Derek decides to head in that way. It's an easy jump to the porch roof; he lands lightly and crouches down in front of the window. Stiles is sitting at a desk just past the window, a look of concentration on his face as he stares at his computer.

Before saying anything, Derek takes the opportunity to look around; there are band posters covering the walls, and a narrow twin bed sits against the far wall, clothes strewn across the floor. It smells like sweat and spunk and the inherent smell of Stiles, and Derek breathes in deeply before he leans forward and says, "Hey."

Derek wishes he had a camera ready to record Stiles' reaction; Stiles falls sideways out of his desk chair and it falls on top of him, wheels spinning madly. "*You,*" Stiles wheezes, shoving the chair off himself. "You fucking jerk. What's wrong with using the front door?"

"This seemed more direct," Derek tells him, pulling himself into the room.

"Jesus," Stiles mutters, looking anxiously out the window. "I hope none of the neighbors saw you."
"Why’s that?" Derek asks, a teasing note in his voice. "Am I your dirty little secret?"

Stiles’ cheeks go pink. "No, uh—"

"I don't care if I am," Derek interrupts. His voice drops lower when he says, "Come here."

Stiles' bed is old and creaks with every movement, but that doesn't make anything they do less fun. Derek can tell by the way Stiles moves, and the inexpert blowjob he gives Derek, that he doesn't have a lot of sexual experience, but that's fine—Derek was that guy too, once. He cradles Stiles' head in his hands and tells him what he likes, and Stiles is doing better by the time Derek comes down his throat. Derek's more than happy to return the favor.

It becomes a thing they do; Stiles texts Derek when his dad's not home, and Derek's sisters grow accustomed to him leaving abruptly, usually in the late evening. They try without success to guess who Derek's hooking up with, but they don't try too hard; if they really meant business, they'd just follow Derek to Stiles' house, but they're not that disrespectful of his boundaries.

"You could have him over for dinner, you know," Laura tells him, serious for once.

"No," Derek says bluntly. "We're not dating, Laura. You're not going to meet him."

He and Stiles don't go on dates; they sneak hookups at Stiles' place, and in the back of Stiles' Jeep, and, once, in the dusty stacks in the library basement, and Derek's fine with that. It's not that he and Stiles don't get along—they do, surprisingly well—but he's going to be heading back to college at the end of the summer and there's no point in getting wrapped up in anything serious. If they don't always end the night in sex and just watch a movie or something, well, that's fine, too.

Derek doesn't spend the night; Stiles is very firm about Derek leaving before his dad gets home. Derek gets the feeling that Stiles is keeping him just as secret as Derek's keeping him, which is fine; Derek's also getting the feeling that Stiles is younger than he first suspected and though he's not quite willing to ask just how old, he's also fine with staying out of trouble. Ignorance, as they say, is bliss. He likes fucking Stiles, and getting fucking by Stiles, and going down on Stiles, and any other act they can think of (and for all of Stiles' practical sexual inexperience, he has a lot of ideas).

Still, Derek manages to fall asleep on top of Stiles one night. He's close to his heat and they got a little rowdier than usual; he got Stiles to come three times before Stiles tapped out, groaning about dehydration. Derek really didn't mean to fall asleep there, but it was fucking comfortable and Stiles always smells so good; he gave into temptation—just this once—and shoved his face into Stiles' sweaty neck, falling fast asleep.

Derek wakes to Stiles' hands tapping urgently at his sides. He lifts his head, squinting blearily down at Stiles. "Hm?"

"Get up, get up!" Stiles hisses frantically. "My dad's home!"

"Shit," Derek groans, scrambling out of bed, grabbing at the clothes he's left strewn across the floor. He gets dressed in record time and heads for the window, where he freezes at the sight of the police cruiser sitting in the driveway next to Stiles' Jeep.

"What are you waiting for?" Stiles hisses.

Derek ducks down as a sandy-haired man climbs out of the cruiser, humming quietly to himself. "You didn't tell me your dad was the fucking sheriff," he hisses back.

Stiles blinks, a light flush slowly working its way across his face. "I thought you knew," he says.
"Like hell I did!" Derek whispers fiercely. "I wouldn't have—"

Stiles' expression goes sullen. "Wouldn't have what? Fucked the sheriff's kid? Fucked a teenager?"

"I didn't know *that*, either!" Seeing Stiles' lips go thin, he adds in a mutter, "Wasn't sure, anyway."

Stiles glowers at him and then swings himself out of bed with a sigh as a car door slams outside the window. "I'll distract him," he says. "You make your escape."

"Thanks," Derek murmurs. Stiles just shrugs a shoulder at him as he slips on a pair of boxers and a t-shirt and disappears out the bedroom door. Derek listens to him head down the stairs, and then there comes the faint murmur of conversation. Derek makes his break for freedom then, slipping out the window into the gray light of very early morning.

He feels like he can't be blamed for feeling blindsided by the fact that Stiles is Sheriff Stilinski's son—it's not like Stiles ever *told* him, and if there was any evidence of the fact in Stiles' house, Derek never saw it in the hallway or the bathroom, which is the furthest into the house he's ever gone. He's halfway home before realization hits him like a freight train; he's been fucking the sheriff's *underage* son. Oh, god, he's going to jail—that's if the sheriff doesn't just shoot him outright.

When he gets home, there's a text from Stiles waiting on his phone: *are you mad*

Derek stares up at his bedroom ceiling for a long time before he responds with a question of his own: *how old are you?*

17, Stiles replies, and Derek swears through his teeth. Stiles follows it up with: *does this mean we have to stop*

Derek stares at his phone for a long time before setting it aside. He doesn't reply.

Derek's heat hits two days later and he uses it as an excuse for why he hasn't responded to Stiles. He spends most of it in a grumpy haze on the couch in the den, sweating through a t-shirt and boxers, staggering to the bathroom to jerk off whenever the need arises, knotting his hand over and over.

He tries not to think about Stiles when he does, but it's inevitable; Stiles is his most recent partner, and the sex with him is good. Derek loses himself fantasizing about how amazing Stiles always smells and the way he laughs when Derek drags his nose along his jaw. Derek's body aches with want for him—his heat would be so much better with an omega around, especially Stiles—but he resists the urge to text him; they'll both be better off this way.

"Wouldn't this be easier with your boyfriend?" Cora asks one evening, leaning through the doorway, watching Derek watch old *Gunsmoke* reruns because the only station the TV in the den gets is TV Land.

"He's *not* my boyfriend," Derek snarls.

Cora wrinkles her nose in disgust. "Sorry, jeeze." She disappears into the hallway and then pops back in a moment later. "You need a shower, by the way. You stink."

Derek snarls at her again, angrier, and props himself up like he's going to go after her. Cora yelps and vanishes into the kitchen. She's right, though; he reeks of sweat and jizz and heat-stink. He takes a shower that night and after, when he's feeling mostly human again, checks his phone for the first time since his heat began. There are two messages from Stiles: *dad's gone - you want to come over?* and then a day later, *okay.*
Derek rolls his eyes and texts back *Sorry for being AWOL. I got my heat.*

*Oh, Stiles replies. And then: I could have helped you out.*

Derek bites at his lip because he really would have liked that. *Maybe next time.*

*I’m going to hold you to that. Tonight?*

*No, Derek types back regretfully. I go back to school in a couple days, need to pack.*

*dad’s working a double tomorrow*

Derek hesitates, listening to his sisters laugh in the living room, and then replies, *I’ll be there.*

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“I’m sorry,” Stiles says after Derek pulls out of him and thumps down on the bed next to him.

“For what?” Derek murmurs, mouthing absently at Stiles’ neck.

“For, uh, not telling you about my dad,” Stiles says. He flushes. “And, um, not telling you I’m seventeen.” Derek makes a noncommittal noise and Stiles tenses slightly. “Is that okay?”

Derek snorts. “Do you think I’d be here if it was a problem?” He’s given it some thought; he knows that what they’re doing is illegal, but there’s only a four-year age gap between them, which isn’t *all* that huge. He’s being selfish, probably, but if anyone’s going to get in trouble it’s going to be him, not Stiles, and they’ve done fine so far. Anyway, he likes having sex with Stiles, and even just spending time with him, and he’s not entirely willing to give up on that.

“Okay,” Stiles says. He smells relieved. “Cool.” Derek doesn’t say anything; he senses Stiles is thinking about something, building up the courage to say it, and he’s right; eventually Stiles says, “I really like what we’re doing but, um. Have you thought about moving forward?”

Derek lifts his head, propping himself up on one elbow so he can watch Stiles’ face. “Moving forward?”

“Yes,” Stiles says, his eyes flickering over to Derek before he looks away. “I was just thinking—about becoming official. Dating. You know?”

Derek looks at him for a long, silent second. “I’m going back to college in three days,” he says, and Stiles deflates.

“Right,” he says. “Right. You probably—it was just a stupid thought.”

“I didn’t say no,” Derek says, and Stiles shuts his mouth, his eyes widening. Derek tilts his head, thinking. He hasn’t let himself think about this possibility; through everything, he always had the thought at the back of his mind that this was just a summer fling and it’d end when he went back to school. He’s kept things casual for that very reason, hasn’t let himself get caught up in attachment, and it’s been working; even though there’s an obvious attraction between them—they wouldn’t still be doing this if there wasn’t—they’ve kept things cool. They don’t spend time cuddling, Derek doesn’t spend the night, and ninety percent of their encounters end in sex.

Derek hasn’t dated anyone in a few years, which isn’t to say that he’s against the idea of it—it’s just that none of the people he’s been with in the recent past have been interested in commitment, which was fine with him. Still. He’d be lying if he didn’t admit to himself that the reason he hasn’t let...
himself think about dating Stiles is that he wouldn’t *mind* dating him, but knew it wasn’t in the realm of possibility, and there was no point daydreaming over it. Now, though…

“It’s okay,” Stiles says, fidgeting. He seems unnerved by Derek’s silence. “We can just stick with what we’re doing, it’s fine.”

“No,” Derek says quietly. “I’d like to, but I...think we should wait. Until you’re eighteen.”

“That’s probably a good idea,” Stiles agrees. “I don’t want my dad arresting you. But—” He hesitates for a moment, and then continues, “but we can still do this, right? I know you’re going back to school, but when you’re home—”

“Yeah,” Derek interrupts, smiling faintly. “I’d like that.” Then it’s his turn to hesitate before he says, “Maybe you could come visit.”

Stiles’ eyes light up. “Seriously?”

“It’s only two hours away,” Derek says. His skin’s getting hot just thinking about Stiles in his bed, surrounded by Derek’s scent. They’ve never even fucked in Derek’s car, let alone been anywhere near the house—Derek’s too afraid of one of his sisters catching on to who Stiles is, even though he probably comes home reeking of him. “You could spend the night.”

One side of Stiles’ mouth quirks up. “That turn you on?”

“Shut up,” Derek mutters, cheeks heating up.

Stiles grins. “I’m keeping that in mind.” He shifts around a little, drags his fingertips up Derek’s arm in a gesture that’s oddly intimate. “I wish you could be here for my next heat.”

“Just text me,” Derek tells him, his throat constricting at the thought. “I’ll see what I can do.”

“Cool,” Stiles says quietly. He shifts again, rolling onto his side, and after an expectant moment Derek rolls with him, fitting his chest up against Stiles’ back, curling an arm over his side. He’s not going to fall asleep, he tells himself, but considering what they just talked about, he thinks it’s okay to have this for a little while. Stiles smells pleased, anyway.

After a while, Stiles asks, “Is it hard, being away from your pack for the school year?”

Derek presses his mouth to Stiles’ shoulder for a long moment, thinking before he answers. “Yeah, but my pack is also my family. I don’t know if I miss one part more strongly than the other, because they’re the same thing.”

Stiles makes a thoughtful noise. “Is it hard on full moons?”

“No,” Derek says, shaking his head even though Stiles can’t see him. “My control’s fine, though Laura thinks that being away from home has made it even better.” He thinks, a little guiltily, back to the way he’d bitten Stiles’ shoulder so hard that first time in the woods, and isn’t so sure Laura’s right.

Stiles is quiet for a while before he says, “She’s been trying all summer to get my best friend to join your pack.”

Derek blinks, a little startled. “The omega?” He’s noticed the scent in Stiles’ room, but he’s so accustomed to being surrounded by the scents of other werewolves that he hadn’t thought much of it.
“His name’s Scott,” Stiles says, a little irritated—and right, Derek knew that; Laura’s talked about him enough.

“Laura says he doesn’t want to join us,” Derek says. “Do you know why?”

Stiles makes a noncommittal noise. “I don’t know,” he says, half-shrugging. “He was bitten without consent when he was a kid, so he’s always been kind of opposed to, uh, tradition, I guess.”

Derek frowns at the darkness of the far wall; Laura hadn’t said anything about that. Maybe she doesn’t know.

“Why do you guys want him?” Stiles asks.

“Laura wants him,” Derek says automatically, and then amends, “It’d be good for everyone, I guess. Bigger packs are more stable, and we haven’t been all that stable since—” He cuts himself off, heart aching at the memory of the fire. It’s been five years, but it still hurts, burning deep behind his ribs.


“Oh,” Derek says, not knowing how to feel about that. They’re silent for a long, not entirely comfortable moment before Derek continues, “Anyway, I think Laura just hoped—especially since I’m going to be off at school—to stabilize the pack a little, and be able to defend our territory, if it came down to it.”

“Huh,” Stiles says thoughtfully. “Well. I could say something to Scott, maybe. I don’t—maybe your sister’s not going about it the right way—no offense.”

“None taken,” Derek murmurs. “Laura would appreciate it.”

They fall silent then, breathing quietly in the dark room. It might be the longest conversation they’ve ever had, and certainly the most serious; part of Derek’s keep-things-casual strategy is to avoid exactly the topics he and Stiles just discussed—pack, school, the fire. He feels okay with it now, though. They’ve fucked plenty of times, but they don’t really know each other. He wants to get to know Stiles, and the silence welcomes questions, but he finds himself drifting instead, lulled to sleep by the warm press of Stiles’ body against his, the matching beats of their hearts, mind and body content.

That’s when he knows he needs to get up, or else he’ll fall asleep there and risk getting caught by the sheriff, which is not on his list of things to do. Derek says as much to Stiles, who makes a noise of complaint and twists to glower at Derek over his shoulder. Derek snorts quietly and leans in to mollify him with a kiss, soft and slow and completely unlike their usual frantic rush. Stiles relaxes under him after a moment, breaking the kiss but not pulling away. Derek’s thrown by the twist of his stomach when Stiles brushes their noses together because it feels like it means something.

“I—gotta go,” Derek mumbles against Stiles’ lips, even though every part of him is screaming stay!

“M’kay,” Stiles murmurs. It takes every ounce of Derek’s will to pull himself away and get out of bed, slowly pulling on his clothes. Stiles rolls onto his other side, watching Derek dress and walk to where the window’s still open, a warm breeze rolling in.

Derek hesitates before ducking outside. “When do you turn eighteen, anyway?”

“April,” Stiles says ruefully. “Is that—too far off?”
Derek shakes his head. “No, but...if you meet someone else before then...I won’t be offended if you
don’t want to wait.”

Stiles props himself up on his elbows, a serious expression on his face. “Okay,” he says slowly.
“And—same for you, okay?”

Derek nods shortly. “I’ll see you around,” he says quietly, and pulls himself out the window. There
isn’t going to be anyone else for him, he doesn’t think, and he has no clue why. Stiles is aggressive
and unapologetic and unlike any omega-type Derek has ever met and yet. And yet, all summer, he’s
found himself drawn to Stiles again and again like a moth to a flame. This is it for him.
Stiles

Stiles doesn’t even want to go to the party. He’s just come off his heat, still a little dazed and wet between his legs. He isn’t feeling all that social; the only reason he’s even come over to Scott’s is because his dad isn’t home and the way his room reeks of his own pheromones is making him nauseous. Scott’s always cool about letting him come over after his heats, but Stiles makes sure to take a shower before going over anyway, because he feels gross and uncomfortable.

They’re wrapped up in Bioshock when Scott gets a text and, upon reading the message, makes a face.

“What’s up?” Stiles asks absently, fingers tapping away at the controllers.

“Laura Hale’s throwing a party and she wants me to come,” Scott replies, wrinkling his nose.

“Weird,” Stiles says. “She still trying to get you to join her pack?”

“Mnhm.” Scott flops down onto his bed next to Stiles, crossing his arms under his chin. “She came over the other day and talked to me and my mom.”

Stiles pauses the game and sets down his controller. “And? Are you gonna do it?”

Scott shrugs. “Mom thinks it’d be good for me, but I don’t know. I’ve been doing fine so far, haven’t it?”

Stiles grins. “You haven’t mauled anyone, anyway. Yet.”

Scott scowls and shoves at Stiles’ shoulder. Stiles laughs. “Are you going to go?”

“To what?”

Stiles rolls his eyes. “To the party, dumbass.”

Scott grins at him. “Only if you come.”

“No,” Stiles says immediately. He isn’t ready for other people yet; he’s in sweatpants, for fuck’s sake. “I wasn’t invited, dude. That’s super rude.”

“Like you care about being polite,” Scott says accusingly, and Stiles can’t help grinning. “Come on, man. Laura Hale’s old; she’s like thirty. If you don’t go, I’m not going to know anyone there.”

“No way, dude,” Stiles protests. “I still smell like a fucking whorehouse. I don’t want people staring at me.”

“You smell fine,” Scott says placatingly. He pauses for a moment, then uses his trump card: “What if Derek’s there?”


“This could be your chance,” Scott wheedles. “Put on some of your sick dance moves. Get his attention.”

“I do have sick moves,” Stiles grumbles, then glares at him. “You don’t even know if he’s going to be there for certain. You’re gonna have to try harder than that, McCall. I’m gonna need a bribe.”
“Okay,” Scott says, furrowing his brow thoughtfully. “Fifty bucks?”

“You do not have fifty bucks,” Stiles scoffs.

“I do too!” Scott protests. “Dr. Deaton just paid me!”

“I was just kidding,” Stiles sighs. He feels guilty; he knows Scott helps his mom pay the bills. He can’t take their money. “I’ll go with you.”

“Yes!” Scott pumps his fist in the air.

“Yeah, yeah, whatever,” Stiles grumbles. “Can I borrow some pants?”

The party isn’t as bad as Scott had made it out to be; there are people there from their high school that Cora must have invited—Stiles spots her when they first arrive, laughing with some guys from the wrestling team. Laura Hale looms up out of nowhere in front of them, smiling widely.

“Scott!” she says warmly. “Glad you could make it.” Laura turns her pale eyes on Stiles, who backs into Scott. He doesn’t really know Laura, but she’s come to the house a couple times to talk to his dad about issues with the town, and he finds her intimidating. “And you’re...Stiles, right? The sheriff’s son?”

“That’s me,” Stiles says uneasily.

“I invited him,” Scott says defensively. “That’s okay, right?”

Laura stares at the both of them for a long moment before shrugging, a smile flashing across her features. “Sure. Have fun. Don’t hurt yourselves.”

She disappears off into the crowded clearing, and Stiles exhales loudly. “I need a drink,” he says to Scott. “You want one?”

Scott nods and Stiles looks around until he spots the drink station—a couple of coolers underneath a tree. “Be right back,” he says, and ducks through the crowd toward them. He can feel eyes on him as he goes and he flushes, irritated and embarrassed. If there’s anything he hates more than being an omega, it’s his heats and the way they linger, clinging to his body when all he wants is a clear head. He hates that other people can smell him, and the way they look at him like they’ve got a right to him. It makes his skin crawl.

He makes it back to Scott with two beers in hand, one of which is laced with wolfsbane—a local brew with a bad cartoon drawing of a werewolf on it, called *Full Moon Fever Ale*. Scott takes it with a nod of thanks and murmurs around the bottle’s mouth, “Your dude’s at ten o’clock.”

“Huh?” Stiles hisses, swinging around. He freezes when he spots Derek Hale standing with a couple of college-age guys a couple yards away. His back’s to Stiles, but Stiles would recognize that profile anywhere; he spent most of ninth grade staring at it in their shared fourth period study hall—not that Derek ever noticed. Not that Stiles would have known what to do with himself if Derek had. He swings back to look at Scott. “He’s here!”

“Yeah,” Scott says patiently. “I just pointed that out.”

“Shit,” Stiles grumbles, combing his fingers through his hair. He wasn’t prepared for this at all. “Do I ___”
“You look fine,” Scott says. “Are you going to talk to him?”

“Am I—” Stiles sneaks another glance at Derek. “I don’t—what would I say? He doesn’t know who I am. We’ve never even talked!” That’s not true, strictly speaking, but Stiles doesn’t think that one time Derek dropped his pen and said, “Thanks,” when Stiles handed it back to him really counts. He downs half his beer in one frantic gulp, heart banging in his chest just thinking about it.

Scott rolls his eyes. “Then you’re a cool, mysterious stranger.”

Stiles makes a strangled noise of despair.

“All right,” Scott concedes. “Maybe you’re not so cool.” He laughs when Stiles aims a punch at his arm. “I don’t know! Just be yourself.” He turns his head and sighs a little. “Laura’s waving at me—I think she wants to talk. Are you going to be okay?”

“Right as rain,” Stiles says tightly, bouncing on the balls of his feet. Scott works his way through the crowd. Stiles gives Derek’s back another anxious look before he gulps down the rest of his beer and veers off through the party. The night is young, he tells himself, and wanders around until he finds Lydia who seems happy to talk to him.

It’s not until a while later that he goes to get another beer—this is number four by now, or maybe five, he’s not sure—that he straightens and glances up to find Derek staring at him. Derek looks away quickly, and Stiles has got to be imagining the flush on his cheeks...right?

He cracks open his beer and takes a fortifying gulp and then makes his way through the press of people until he’s standing behind Derek, so close he can see Derek’s shoulder blades shifting as he breathes. He’s just standing there, staring, when Derek turns around and his eyebrows rise in surprise.

“Hi,” Stiles says, a little breathlessly.

“Hi,” Derek says.

Stiles isn’t sure how he does it. He hears himself speaking, way more confident than he’s ever been, and then somehow he’s in the woods with Derek, and the place where Derek holds him by the wrist feels as though it’s on fire, heat licking up his arm. He can smell Derek, sweet wheat and basil and the strong smell of alpha—like Scott, but not at all like Scott. His entire body’s thrumming with excitement and then they’re kissing. Stiles has kissed people before, a grand total of three—Lydia once, in sixth grade, at a sleepover playing Spin the Bottle; Jackson, at the same sleepover, on a dare; and Malia, when they dated in tenth grade, before her dad moved her to a private school. Maybe it’s the last vestiges of his heat clinging to his bones, but Derek tastes amazing. He’s forgotten what it feels like, the press of another body against his.

And then they’re past kissing, grinding up against each other, and Derek shoves his hand down the back of Stiles’ pants and crooks a finger inside him and god oh god Stiles wants him, needs him inside, needs to be fucked. For the first time ever he’s glad he’s an omega, because he doesn’t need to worry about lube—Derek can just press right inside him. It doesn’t matter to Stiles that he’s a virgin—the closest he and Malia ever got to sex was him fingering her—he just wants to get off, preferably with Derek’s dick inside him.

It’s so hard to keep quiet when Derek rims him; he has to bite down on his fist, legs trembling. He’s never felt anything like it before, Derek’s mouth so fucking hot against him. It’s a torturous delight; Stiles can’t tell if he wants Derek to stop and fuck him or keep doing it forever, but eventually Derek gets to his feet and begins pressing inside him, his hand burning at Stiles’ hip, and it’s over for him.
He loses all sense of space and time, barely able to choke off his noises of pleasure, eyes rolling up in his head as Derek pounds into him. The most he can do is get his hand on his dick and Derek helps him out there, curling a hand over his and helping him jerk off. When he comes, well, he’s never felt a rush so good in his life, not even during his heat.

He’s still coming down from it when Derek comes and bites him hard on the shoulder. It startles him more than it hurts, and Derek apologizes immediately. Stiles presses his head to the rough bark of the tree in front of him as Derek pulls out, trying to catch his breath. He feels weirdly empty now, even more so when Derek steps back and Stiles can’t feel the heat of his body anymore. He pulls his pants back up, not knowing what else to do, even though he’s soaking down the backs of his thighs. It’s only now that he realizes Derek didn’t wear a condom. Stiles isn’t in heat, so it’s not like he’s in danger of getting pregnant, but it is kind of gross; he can feel Derek’s come starting to leak out of him, adding to the mess of spit and his own slick between his legs.

“That was fun,” he says, once they’ve established that Derek’s bite hasn’t left him bleeding, and he’s gratified to see Derek smile faintly.

“Yeah,” he agrees softly.

“I’m gonna head back,” Stiles says, jerking his head toward the bonfire and the party raging around it. He’s not sure what else to do; is there some kind of protocol for this? “You?”

“I’ll be along,” Derek says, and Stiles nods.

His body kind of aches as he walks back through the trees, especially his ass. It makes sense, he supposes; there wasn’t really a ton of prep, and Derek had been pretty, uh, enthusiastic. It’d been fun, though, thrilling in a new and slightly frightening way. He pulls idly at his shirt collar as he walks along, absentmindedly prodding at the place where Derek had bitten him. It’s hot to the touch, skin slightly swollen. It’ll probably bruise later; Stiles is startled to discover that he doesn’t really mind if it does. He’s pretty sure he’s grinning like an idiot.

Scott meets him at the edge of the clearing. “Where have you been?” he asks, looking worried. “You just—“ He cuts off, his eyes going wide. “You didn’t,” he says, half grinning, half accusing.

“I did,” Stiles says proudly. “Punched my v-card, man.”

“You reek,” Scott says, sounding almost fond. Then he frowns. “Aw, c’mon, dude. Did you forget those are my pants?”

Stiles looks down guiltily. “Casualty of war, Scotty. You should just be happy this didn’t cost you fifty bucks.”

“Asshole,” Scott says, shoving at his shoulder. “Let’s get out of here before people notice how bad you stink.”

Stiles cannot believe the cards he has been dealt; somehow, incredibly, he gets to have sex with Derek not once, not twice, but all fucking summer. He’s not sure what Derek sees in him, but he’s sure as hell not about to question it, not when he gets to have his brains fucked out of him on a regular basis. He learns a lot about sex that summer; he learns he really likes giving head—would rather give it than receive it, if he’s being honest. Derek seems disappointed at this—Stiles has picked up that he’s got something of an oral kink, but luckily for them, Stiles has also discovered that he likes being rimmed almost as much as he likes being fucked, and Derek loves making him come
from being eaten out alone.

The only thing that sucks about the whole thing is the way they keep sneaking around. Stiles knows that Derek hasn't told anyone about them, and it's not like Stiles has either; he's underage, and he doesn't want Derek getting in trouble, especially not with his dad. The only thing Scott says about it, in the early weeks of August, is, "You're sure this is a good idea?"

Stiles gives him an offended look. "What do you mean by that?"

"You kind of get attached to people," Scott says hesitantly, like he's afraid of hurting Stiles' feelings. "I mean, you've had a crush on him forever. Are you sure you can do this casual thing?"

"It's a bit late for that, isn't it?" Stiles snorts. "It's fine, dude." He nudges his shoulder against Scott's. "You shouldn't have invited me along to that party if you didn't want me and Derek hooking up."

Scott winces. "I didn't know that would happen."

"Neither did I," Stiles replies, throwing his arms open wide. "Can't control everything, man. It's going to be fine, dude, I promise. Derek's going back to college in a couple weeks, and then it'll be over."

Scott gives him a relieved look. "You sure?"

Stiles nods firmly. "Over and done."

Stiles thinks he's done a pretty good job hiding what's going on between him and Derek. He always leaves the window open, both giving Derek easy access to come and go, and letting the room air out after they've spent time together. Derek never spends the night, and he parks his car a couple blocks away so that even if Stiles' dad does come home, he won't catch Derek leaving, and none of the neighbors can report anything suspicious.

There's that terrifying night where Derek *does* fall asleep on him and Stiles just happens to wake up to the sound of his dad pulling into the driveway. Derek makes it out fine, though, and Stiles thinks they're in the clear until a couple days later, when they're eating dinner and his dad says out of the blue, "So, am I ever going to meet this person you're seeing?"

Stiles nearly drops his fork. "What?"

His dad gives him that mild, all-seeing look Stiles has seen him aim at suspects way too many times. "Your boyfriend. Am I ever going to meet him, or are you going to keep sneaking him in here when I'm not home?"

"How—"

His dad reaches across the table and flicks at the bruise on Stiles' shoulder, the one Derek always marks him up with before he leaves. "Got to be a little more careful than that, son."

Stiles gives him an outraged look; he thought he always covered it up. "We're—we're not dating, Dad."

"Hm," his father says, looking unimpressed. "I hope you're being safe, at least."

"Dad," Stiles chokes. His father levels him with a steady stare, waiting for his response. Stiles sighs.
"Yeah, okay?"

"Hm," his dad says again. Stiles looks down at his plate, the back of his neck going hot. Okay, so, that's a lie; he doesn't think he and Derek have ever used a condom, but so what? Derek's a werewolf so he can't receive or pass on any diseases, he's not in heat so he can't get pregnant, and it's super rare for omegas to get pregnant anyway. "Just be careful," his dad says eventually, and that—to Stiles' surprise—is the end of that.

He doesn't hear from Derek for a couple days, which worries him a little. Derek had seemed pissed to find out that Stiles was only seventeen and that the sheriff was his dad. Stiles had honestly thought he knew; it was probably his fault for assuming that everyone in town knew who he was—Laura and Cora knew him, and he had shared that study period with Derek, but. His fault for not making sure.

It's a relief when Derek finally texts him back, though Stiles is disappointed to find that the radio silence was because Derek had gone through a heat. He'd thought, the last time they were together, that Derek seemed close, and he'd be lying if he didn't admit he'd been hoping Derek would ask him to be his heat partner. That was probably a stupid wish, considering their relationship was a secret, and there was no where they could spend the heat together without raising suspicion; they certainly couldn't do it at either of their houses, and it wasn't like they could park a car in the preserve for four days.

Stiles can't stop thinking about the way his dad had said your boyfriend. He knows they're not dating, obviously, but what if they were? He likes Derek a lot; the attraction's not all physical. Derek can be quiet, and kind of a snarky asshole sometimes, but then, that's Stiles all the time, and Derek still puts up with him. He's never been mean to Stiles, never said or done anything that made him feel unwanted or unsafe. Stiles would totally be down with dating Derek, but he's not sure Derek would want to date him.

There are a lot of physical exchanges between them, but Derek's never really done anything affectionate which, due to the nature of their relationship, makes sense. Stiles can't help but wonder, though, what he'd be like if they were dating; would he be the same, or would he be more open? They spoon sometimes when they watch movies, but what would it be like to have Derek sleep next to him like that every night? What would it be like to hug him, hold hands with him on the street, make out with him just to make out, not because it's leading to sex? Stiles wants to know.

The last night Derek comes over, Stiles decides to ask. There's no harm in trying; if Derek says yes, he'll have a boyfriend, and if Derek says no, they can keep on doing what they're doing—and if Derek says no and wants to stop what they're doing, that's fine too; he's going back to college in a couple days, so they would have stopped anyway.

He doesn't expect Derek to agree to it, not really. He doesn't even care that Derek says they should wait until he turns eighteen, because what's another six months when he's been crushing on Derek for four years? They lay in his bed and they talk about real things and it feels—it doesn't feel like a dream any more, the way the entire summer's been, like he's going to wake up in the middle of math class and he's just going to have imagined the summer with Derek.

Now he's got Derek's arm looped around his stomach, and his warm breath up against the back of his neck, and eventually he leaves like he always does, but before he goes, Derek kisses him and it's not like any kiss Derek's ever given him. There's intention in it, a softness that's never been there before, present in the way his fingers brush against Stiles' cheek, the way he doesn't go too far when they break apart. He makes a soft sound when Stiles brushes their noses together and it feels...it feels like something's happening, something good and exciting.
He’s got this unfamiliar warmth spreading through his chest; he wants to pull Derek back in when he gets up, but forces himself to let him go, to watch him walk to the window and pause.

“When do you turn eighteen, anyway?” Derek asks quietly.

“April,” Stiles tells him, wincing a little. “Is that—too far off?” He’s scared, suddenly, that Derek’s going to call it off; that’s not a long time for him, but Derek—

“No,” Derek says after a pause. “But...if you meet someone else before then...I won’t be offended if you don’t want to wait.”

Stiles swallows, sitting up on his elbows. “Okay,” he says, his heart hammering in his chest. “And—same for you, okay?” He doesn’t mean it, not really, but he doesn’t want Derek to feel trapped. Like Stiles is being selfish. He is selfish, but he can pretend not to be.

“I’ll see you around,” Derek nods, and then he’s gone, dropping off the porch roof into the night.

Stiles slumps back against his bed, heart still beating fast in his chest.

“Yeah,” he tells the ceiling casually. “Derek Hale and I, we’re dating.” He grins. He can’t fucking wait ’til April.

School starts back up with a vengeance.

“I thought senior year was supposed to be easy,” Stiles grumbles, thumping his books down at the lunch table. “AP Chemistry, AP History, AP Calc—what else?”

“AP English,” Scott says helpfully. “AP Bio, AP French—”

“Oh god, not me, merci beaucoup,” Stiles sighed. “I dropped French last year.”

“Lucky,” Scott laughs. “Mom’s already starting to talk about college visits. She wants me to make a list.”

“Oh no,” Stiles groans, putting his hands over his ears. “I don’t even want to think about that yet.”

Scott laughs again. “You gonna eat?”

Stiles shakes his head; he’s not feeling stellar today. He threw up that morning before school, which was weird—and unpleasant—but it’s probably just a symptom of his oncoming heat, which will probably hit him over the weekend.

“Come on,” Scott says, waving an enticing hand over his lunch tray. “There are tater tots. You love tater tots!”

“I’m not Napoleon Dynamite,” Stiles mutters. Just looking at them makes his stomach feel worse.

“Fine,” Scott sniffs. “You’re missing out.”

“I’m really not,” Stiles says scornfully.

He spends the whole first week back at school feeling kind of...off, but he doesn’t say anything, not wanting to make a big deal out of a low-grade sickness. He powers through it instead, pukes every morning like clockwork, joins the track team because he has to be on it if he wants to play lacrosse in
the spring.

His heat doesn’t hit that weekend, but the sick feeling’s gone by the next week, which he counts as a bonus, and then it’s just nose to the grindstone as his schoolwork kicks into high gear. He has meetings with his guidance counselor at school about the future, and comes away with the same college list assignment that Melissa gave Scott. College brochures started coming in over the summer and Stiles spreads them all out over his bed, their glossy covers reflecting the afternoon light. He’s still not entirely sure what he’s going to major in—anthropology, maybe, or computer science, or something else entirely—but it’s exciting and a little terrifying to flip through all the pamphlets.

He picks up one for Humboldt State and remembers with a jolt that that’s where Derek goes. He grins slyly, remembering what Derek had said about him coming for a visit. It’s not too far away; Stiles is sure he could convince his dad that he doesn’t need a parental escort. He adds it to the list, but puts it fourth, so it doesn’t seem too obvious that he’s just going there to visit his illegal, not-quite boyfriend.

Stiles gets so caught up in college searching, classwork, and track practice that he gets to the third week of September before he realizes he hasn’t had his heat yet. He might not have even noticed for a while yet, but Scott texts him one morning to let him know that he’ll be out of school for a couple days for his own heat and Stiles—Stiles doesn’t panic. It doesn’t even occur to him to panic at first; he’s still young, and his body’s still adjusting to all the hormonal changes it’s going through. There was a six month difference between his first heat and his next one, and even now, two years later, it’s not unusual for his heat to come a week early or a week late. But not two weeks late, a small, treacherous part of his mind whispers.

It certainly doesn’t help that he’s been feeling weird lately. That weird washed-out feeling from the first week of school hasn’t come back, but he’s thrown up quite a few times since then, and that alone is worrisome enough. He keeps getting these weird pulses of heat; he’ll be sitting in class and suddenly be sweating. It’s unsettling and it’s stressing him out.

Stiles thinks about it all day at school, anxiously flipping through his AP Bio textbook for any enlightenment, but it doesn’t help him. He wants to call Scott, but he’s not really an option right now. He thinks about Derek and his stomach flip-flops nervously. This isn’t his problem.

A week passes, and he makes it another week after that before telling Scott, waking up from a feverish dream where he lived alone with a hundred crying children. Stiles scrambles out of bed and, because his dad is home, takes the Derek-route, scrambling out his window and dropping off the porch roof to land on the damp grass with a thump. He doesn’t want his dad to hear the Jeep starting so he takes his bike out of the garage and pedals across town to Scott’s house, his heart banging harder with every cycle of the wheels.

He’s climbed the trellis into Scott’s bedroom a thousand times, but it’s hard tonight, his fingers weak and shaking as he hauls himself up the side of the house. Scott’s already awake—or, more likely, Stiles woke him—and sliding the window open so Stiles can tumble inside.

“You okay?” Scott asks softly as Stiles flops onto his bed, breathing heavily.

“Yes,” Stiles says, and then his eyes start to burn. “No.”

Scott looks worried. “What’s going on?” He sinks down onto the bed next to Stiles, a frown furrowing his brow.

“I—” Stiles has to clench his eyes shut. “I haven’t gotten my heat since the end of July.” It sounds bad when he says it aloud. July was months ago. It sounds really bad.
“Oh,” Scott says softly. Stiles hears him shift around, and then he lays down next to Stiles. “Maybe it’s just late?”

“It’s a month past,” Stiles whispers.

“Oh,” Scott says again. “Maybe it’s really late?”

Stiles forces out a shaky laugh. “I don’t—you think so?”

“I don’t know,” Scott says. He’s silent for a moment and then he says, “Maybe your body’s just adjusting to being back in school and all the stress and everything. Can’t—can’t it change if your exercise habits change? Maybe being on the track team is messing with it.”

“Wouldn’t yours have changed too?”

“Yeah, but I’m way more buff than you.”

Stiles swings at him half-heartedly. “Shut up.”

Scott scoots closer to him, presses in so the sides of their bodies are touching. Stiles shudders a little, calmed by his presence. “It’s—I’m going to get it, right? It’s only two weeks til it should come again.”

“I’m sure it will,” Scott says soothingly. “Here, come on—” He rolls Stiles onto his side and curls up behind him, looping a tight arm across his stomach. Stiles relaxes a little bit more, calmed by his steady heartbeat and his strong alpha scent. “Everything’s gonna be fine.”

They fall into silence, and Stiles lets his eyes settle shut, feeling a little stupid for panicking.

“Stiles?” Scott says after a while, his voice soft. “If it is a—um. Who—”

“Derek,” Stiles whispers into the dark. “It’s—it’s not, though. I’m gonna get my heat.”

Stiles’ heat doesn’t come; the time frame in which it should have started again comes and goes. He takes to standing in front of the mirror on the back of the bathroom door every morning, prodding anxiously at his stomach. Is it bigger than yesterday, or did he have too many tacos for dinner? He can’t tell, and it’s stressing him out.

He’s thrown up every day since the night he went to Scott’s—usually in the morning, when he has to run the shower to cover the noise so his dad doesn’t worry—but he’s had to duck out of class quite a few times, too. He’s sensitive to smells, especially food; pizza day at school is usually the best, but the last time they had it, he had to leave chemistry three times to puke, and Harris had threatened him with detention if he didn’t stop “wasting everyone’s time with disruptions, Mr. Stilinski.”

“You need to like, take a test or something,” Scott hisses over lunch.

“And get one where?” Stiles hisses back. “I can’t just go to CVS, dude—that ladies have been working there forever! They know who I am—they’ll tell my dad!”

Scott purses his lips thoughtfully. “I could ask my mom—”

“That’s even worse!” Stiles yelps.

“Okay…” Scott frowns up at the ceiling. “The school nurse?”
“She’d tell my dad too!”

Scott gives him a wary look. “Not if we steal one.”

Stiles gives him a tired grin. “Scotty, my man, you are in my head.”

- 

Stiles lingers by the nurse’s office and texts Scott once it’s clear of other students and it’s just her, sitting at her desk and working on paperwork. *Go time*, he sends, and a moment later Scott texts back, *Roger.*

Stiles winces, silently thanking Scott for being the best friend he can possibly be, because it’s not easy for werewolves to injure themselves enough to need medical attention, and Scott seems to think that falling down a flight of stairs will do it. Maybe it works because a minute or two after Scott texts him, the nurse’s phone rings and she has a hurried conversation with someone before racing out of the room.

Stiles slips inside and shuts the door, hurrying over to the line of cabinets against the far wall. He paws through their contents roughly, shoving aside bottles of aspirin and packages of bandages until he finds what he’s looking for amongst a pile of pamphlets about safe sex and a couple boxes of condoms.

“Bingo,” Stiles whispers, shoving a couple pregnancy tests in his hoodie pocket and slipping back out of the room.

His dad’s not home that night and Stiles is grateful for it because he’s wearing holes in the floor just trying to build the courage to *take* the fucking test. Scott’s there, but he doesn’t say anything; he watches TV in the living room and gives Stiles the occasional worried glance. He’s suffered no permanent damage from his fall down the stairs, just a broken arm that healed in less than five minutes.

Stiles drinks a liter of soda while he paces and then he takes a deep breath and grabs one of the tests out of his backpack, where he’d shoved them down to the very bottom after returning from the nurse’s office.

“I’m gonna—” He gestures upstairs and Scott nods. Stiles is grateful he doesn’t say anything.

In the upstairs bathroom, Stiles peels open the test with shaking hands and pees on the stick, then carefully zips up his pants and washes his hands and looks at the test approximately every half second.

“Don’t do it,” he mutters. “Don’t do it, *please*, don’t do it.”

But there it is, a soft pink line appearing right next to the control. Stiles’ legs give out from under him; he sinks to the bathroom floor, hands shaking, his entire body shaking. It’s hard to breathe, his vision blurring around the edges. There’s a knock on the door behind him and then it opens and Scott sits down next to him.

“I’m fucked,” Stiles gasps, tears prickling at his eyes. “I’m fucked, Scott. My dad—”

“Hey, no,” Scott says gently, looping an arm around his shoulders. “It’s gonna be okay, dude. We’ll figure it out.”

Stiles makes a wounded noise, turning his face into Scott’s neck and breathing, focusing on Scott’s
slow heartbeat until his hands stop shaking. Scott rubs a hand up and down his back and eventually, when Stiles has his breath back, Scott says, “Come on,” and helps him to his feet, guiding him down the hall to his room and into his bed.

“Stay here,” Scott says solemnly, and leaves the room. Stiles can hear him cleaning up in the bathroom and then he goes downstairs, and when he comes back up, he’s got a glass of orange juice in his hands.

“What’s this for?” Stiles asks miserably. “Vitamins?”

“Yes,” Scott says sheepishly.

Stiles takes the glass from him and sips at it half-heartedly. Scott climbs into bed next to him and watches him drink. “Are you going to tell him?” he asks quietly.

Stiles stiffens. “My dad?” he asks frantically. “No, I can’t—promise me you won’t tell him!”

“I won’t, I won’t,” Scott says soothingly. “I just—I meant Derek.”

Stiles stares at the glass in his hands for a long time. “No,” he says quietly. “This isn’t his problem.”

“Are you sure?” Scott presses. “Maybe he could—”

“He doesn’t need to know!” Stiles snaps. “I’ll figure this out on my own!”

“Oh okay,” Scott says softly.

Stiles keeps his eyes on the glass of juice, misery swelling in harsh waves inside his chest. He’s so stupid; how did this happen? He wasn’t in heat; he thought they were fine! This is going to kill his dad.

“Hey, Stiles, it’s okay,” Scott murmurs, putting an arm around his shoulders. Stiles realizes he’s crying silently, tears dripping down his cheeks.

“You’re the best,” he mumbles to Scott, wiping at his cheeks. “I wish you were my alpha.”

“I’m here for whatever you need me for,” Scott says seriously. Stiles knows he means it. It’s the only reason he’s able to fall asleep that night.

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“Do I smell different?” Stiles whispers. They’re in the library for AP English, and they’re supposed to be working on a practice AP exam essay, but he and Scott are killing time at the very back of the stacks.

Scott gives him a bewildered look. “What do you mean?”

Stiles grimaces. “Because of the—” He gestures violently at his stomach. It’s been less than a week since he found out and he’s terrified Cora’s going to figure it out and tell Derek; she’s in like half his classes and she’s going to notice at some point. What if the baby smells like pack to her?


“Good,” Stiles says, some of the tension going out of his shoulders. He leans against the shelves, fiddling with the spine of a book of nineteenth century poetry.
Scott watches him, his dark eyes worried. “Have you thought about what you’re going to do?”

“Nonstop,” Stiles mutters. Part of the book’s spine peels away in his hands and he drops it in disgust.

“You should probably go see a doctor,” Scott says softly.

“Are you kidding me?” Stiles hisses. “I’m underage—they’ll tell my dad!”

“Stiles, he’s going to find out sometime!” Scott hisses back. “You’re not going to be able to hide it when you start to show!”

“Shut up, shut up!” Stiles says violently, louder than he means to.

A moment later, their English teacher sticks her head around the end of the shelves, her eyebrows raised. “You guys doing all right?” she asks pointedly.

“Fine,” Scott says politely. Stiles looks at his shoes.

“How are your papers going?” she asks, even more pointedly.

“Fine,” Scott says again, his cheeks going red.

“Mhm,” she says, looking unimpressed. “Get to work, please.”

They both nod and she disappears to check on their classmates. Stiles and Scott make their way to a pair of study cubbies against the wall.

“I’m just saying,” Scott says softly as they sit down. “Ignoring it isn’t going to make it go away.”

“I’m aware of that, thanks,” Stiles says testily, hauling his books out of his backpack.

“Okay,” Scott says quietly. “Well, just let me know what you want to do.”

Stiles nods, pressing down so hard on his notebook that the lead of his pencil snaps.

Derek texts him that night. They’ve texted on and off since Derek went back to school, just the occasional hello here and there, sometimes a picture, nothing important. He’s not expecting Derek to say i’m free this weekend—want to come visit? and he’s certainly not expecting the wild rush of emotions he experiences then, flooded with a fierce want for Derek, his body craving the comfort and companionship of his alpha—

Stiles nearly snarls out loud when he realizes what’s going through his head. Derek is not his alpha; Stiles doesn’t need him. Derek doesn’t need him either. He’s at school—he’s probably got a million different people he could pick up for an easy fuck. He doesn’t need Stiles to drive two hours just to see him.

i’m busy, Stiles types back angrily and, for good measure, deletes Derek’s number. There, he thinks. Now he won’t be tempted.

Stiles looks up at a knock on his door and sees his dad standing in the doorway, looking a little concerned. “You all right?” he asks. “I heard you muttering to yourself.”

Stiles forces himself to smile. “Fine,” he lies. “Just working on some math.” He gestures at his school books spread out on the bed around him.
His dad gives him a long look, his brow furrowing slightly. “You handling everything okay? You’ve been looking kind of pale lately.”

“I’m fine,” Stiles protests, even as his dad steps into the room and presses the back of his hand to Stiles’ forehead. “I mean, it’s a lot, with homework and track, but—I’m good, I promise.” His stomach twists uneasily; he hates lying to his dad, but it’s not like he can tell him what’s really wrong.

“All right,” his dad says easily, ruffling a hand through Stiles’ hair. “Just take care of yourself, okay? I know you’ve got a lot going on, and it’s okay to take a break if you need it.”

Stiles gives his dad a strained smile. “I know.”

His dad glances around Stiles’ room, frowning a little. “Did you get your heat recently? I don’t remember you saying—”

“Dad,” Stiles says, mortified, his cheeks going red. This is not something he wants to talk about even when he’s not lying through his teeth. “I’m not—I can handle it. I’m seventeen.”

“Oh, okay,” his dad says, holding his hands up as if to ward Stiles off. “You’re right; you’re old enough to deal with it on your own.” He sounds a little sad when he says it, like he’s sad Stiles is growing up. Hah.

His dad’s halfway out the door when Stiles says, “Dad?” and his father turns. “Do you think we could watch a movie or something this weekend?” Before everything starts going to shit, he adds silently.

His father smiles. “Sure thing.”

“Okay,” Stiles says, forcing another smile onto his face. “Cool.”

-  

A couple days before Halloween, Stiles is texted a photo from an unknown number, but the instant he opens it, he knows it’s Derek. It’s a body shot in a mirror, captured from the chin down, but he knows those wide shoulders, remembers the span of that hand on his hip. Derek’s wearing a tan shirt, brown pants, dark leather jacket. There’s a whip hanging curled at his waist, and Stiles stares at it for a long, confused moment before he realizes this must be Derek’s Halloween costume: Indiana Jones.

what do you think? Derek texts as a follow-up.

Stiles stares down at the photo for a long time, his heart aching. He should tell Derek, he knows. He should tell his dad, he should see a doctor—there are a lot of things he should be doing. He should be working on his college applications, but he’s been ripping up every pamphlet that comes in the mail, his stomach twisting with anger. This is his fault—his problem, no one else’s. He bites down on his lip and types who is this?

Derek, Derek texts back and then, slower, like he’s confused, a second message arrives: this is stiles, right?

Stiles blinks back against a sudden wave of furious tears and drops his phone on his bed. He never responds.

-
There's a track meet a week before Thanksgiving and Stiles makes himself go, even though he throws up every morning of the five days leading up to it. It sucks—and more than that, it reminds him that there's a fucking baby inside of him and he still hasn't told anyone except Scott, or gone to see a doctor. There are probably things he should know, pills or vitamins he should be taking, but he's been trying not to think about it at all, much to Scott's frustration.

"You have to take this seriously," he whispers as they ride the bus to the meet, the rest of their teammates chattering around them. "Mom's told me all kinds of stories—"

"I know," Stiles says tiredly. He threw up just before they left and now he feels washed-out and lifeless. He leans his head against the window, staring out at the houses as they flash past, and feels a little sick again. He shuts his eyes.

"You need to tell your dad," Scott says urgently. "Stiles—"

"I know," Stiles says more forcefully. "I'm just—waiting for the right moment."

"When do you think the right moment is?" Scott hisses. "When you give birth?"

"Shut up," Stiles says angrily, looking around hurriedly, in case anyone overheard.

"Look, I don't think you should be going to the match," Scott says, worried now.

"Little late for that, don't you think?" Stiles retorts. "You could have said that an hour ago, before we left."

"I'm serious," Scott says. "You haven't been to a doctor. You don't know if something's wrong—"

"Obviously there's something wrong with me," Stiles snaps, smacking his stomach. "In case you hadn't noticed, I've put on a little weight and some exercise wouldn't go amiss!"

"Stiles, please, come on," Scott says, but Stiles turns his face toward the window and resolutely shuts his eyes, refusing to speak to Scott again until they reach the track meet.

It's a regional event, teams from all over the county gathered at one of the area high schools. Technically, Stiles is only there to fulfill the requirements of several scholarships he's applying for, which need an extracurricular sport. He's not good enough to compete at a state or even regional level—Coach has communicated this to him very clearly, especially as his running times have only gotten worse over the past few weeks, but Stiles doesn't care. All he has to do is run a few laps, then he can sit down for the rest of the day, and then go home. Easy.

Scott tries to catch his arm before Coach Finstock splits them off into their events, but Stiles shakes him off determinedly. He's not in this to win, he reminds himself, following, joining the line at the track. Glancing around, Stiles spots his dad sitting in the stands next to Scott's mom and grins, returning his wave. Maybe he isn't the all-American sports star his dad was in high school, but Stiles can still make him proud.

The signal goes off and Stiles’ group starts to move. Stiles has no idea why Finstock stuck him in track, except for the fact that he'd almost impaled someone with a javelin, which eliminated him from throwing, and he can't jump to save his life. He can't run to save his life, either, but there are only a limited number of spots for jumpers, and Finstock seems to value those more than runners, so here he is. He's surprised to find he isn't doing all that poorly, either, managing to stick to the middle of the group until at least the second lap, when his steps begin to falter.

Breathe, Stiles tells himself, and sucks in an obedient breath. The next one is a little harder, and the
other after that, harder still. There are little speckles of black starting to burst in his vision, his pace more of a walk now than anything. Maybe someone says his name. He’s not sure. All he knows is that his group of runners seems very distant now, disappearing down a narrow black tunnel. Maybe he should have eaten something after throwing up, he thinks, as he trips over his own feet and heads for the ground. That probably would have been wise.

- 

Stiles wakes up in a bed that’s not his own, in a room that isn’t his either. His dad’s sitting in a chair next to the bed, a cup of coffee in his hands as he stares out a window with a view that definitely doesn’t belong to their house. Based on the sterile white walls and furniture, Stiles is going to take a stab and guess he’s in the hospital.

“Dad?” he says quietly.

His father turns to look at him, his face tired. “Oh, kiddo,” he sighs, “what have you gotten yourself into?”

Stiles knows he knows then, and he’s crying before he realizes what’s happening. His dad sighs again and sets his coffee cup down on the side table before reaching out and taking Stiles’ hand in his. “I’m sorry,” Stiles says raggedly. “I’m sorry, Dad.”

“It’s okay,” his dad says gently, but Stiles can see the disappointment hidden in his eyes. He clenches his own eyes shut so he won’t have to face it, and his dad squeezes his hand.

“How did you—”

“Scott told me after you passed out,” his dad replies. “The doctor ran a blood test and confirmed it.”

Stiles sucks in a deep, raw breath. “What are you going to do?”

“That’s what I should be asking you, shouldn’t I?” his dad says patiently. “How long have you known?”

Stiles opens his eyes, but he can’t meet his father’s gaze. He stares at his hand instead, and how his dad’s palm covers it, his wedding ring glinting in the overhead lights. “A month and a half.”

“Jesus,” his dad says softly. He doesn’t sound angry but it’s worse, somehow, that he’s not. His dad breathes in slowly. “Am I right in guessing that you and your mystery boyfriend from this summer weren’t being as careful as you told me you were?”

“I—he’s not my boyfriend,” Stiles says. “And I wasn’t in heat, I don’t know how—”

“Jesus,” his dad says again, a little impatiently. “Don’t you listen in health class? You don’t need to be in heat to get pregnant.”

“Oh,” Stiles says quietly and his eyes start swimming with tears again. He knows that really. He just thought—never him—he’s so fucking stupid.

His father sighs and squeezes his hand again. “You gonna tell me who it was?”

Stiles shakes his head fiercely. This has nothing to do with Derek; he’s not going to get him in trouble for this.

“Stiles,” his dad says patiently, “you can tell me. You’re not going to get in trouble.”
Stiles shakes his head again, a few stray tears slipping down his face.

His dad’s quiet for a long, long moment, and then he leans forward, his hand tightening over Stiles’. “Stiles,” he says softly, very seriously, “Stiles, was it consensual?”

“Jesus Christ, Dad!” Stiles snaps, yanking his hand out of his father’s.

“I have to ask!” his dad says angrily.

“Yes, okay?” Stiles snaps back. “I wasn’t fucking raped, I was just a stupid teenager who made stupid decisions and now I’m fucking pregnant!”

His father looks hurt, but he doesn’t say anything, waiting for Stiles to slump back against his pillows before he says, “So what do you want to to do? Have you thought about it?”

Stiles turns his head toward the window, his mouth a thin line. He’s been avoiding thinking about all of it, to be honest. School, sports, homework, college. There’s no room for a baby in there.

“Look,” his dad says carefully, “if you don’t want to go through this, you don’t have to.”

Stiles looks at him sharply. “Is that what you want me to do?”

His father holds his hands up as if to say whoa, slow down. “It’s your baby,” he says. “Your decision.”

Your baby. My baby, Stiles thinks, his skin prickling uncomfortably. Scott looked it up the other day and told him it was the size of an avocado, no bigger than his fist. Stiles looks down at his hand, clenches his fist, then unfurls his fingers and touches his stomach tentatively. There’s hardly anything there, just a slight swell that would only stretch the tightest of his t-shirts.

“Well,” his dad says after a while. “You’ve got a little more time to think about it.”

Stiles nods quietly, a weird feeling twisting his stomach.

When the doctor comes in, he tells Stiles he’s slightly anemic, and rattles off a variety of things he can eat to improve his diet—for himself and the baby. And the baby. It’s tacked on to just about every sentence that comes out of the doctor’s mouth. Stiles is getting a headache.

Even when he’s cleared to leave the hospital, he’s not allowed to go quite yet; Stiles’ dad steers him down long, quiet hallways that smell of disinfectant to the prenatal wing, where he gets checked over by a nurse, who sends them along to a technician who has Stiles lay down on a stiff bed and covers his stomach with a warm gel. Stiles stares at the ceiling while the man waves a wand over his stomach, forcing himself to breathe slowly.

“There we are,” says the technician. “There’s the head—and the feet, see?”

“Stiles,” his father says. “Are you going to look?”

“No,” Stiles says, gritting his teeth. His dad sighs.

“Well,” the man says, after a slightly startled pause. “Let me just take some measurements—” He moves around over at his station. Stiles keeps his eyes on the ceiling. There’s a big brown stain where the wall meets the ceiling. It looks like a thumbs up. He glares at it.

“According to my calculations,” the tech says after a long moment, “your baby is around sixteen weeks—four months. Does that sound about right?”
Stiles shuts his eyes, exhaling shakily. Four months. October, September, August, July. A distressed noise slips from his lips when he realizes it must have been that first night they fucked. He wants to laugh. He wants to cry. He lost his virginity and got pregnant in the same fucking night. Of course. Of course it would fucking happen to him.

“Can you give us a minute?” his dad asks the technician. There’s the sound of a door closing a moment later and then Stiles’ dad leans over him, his expression weary. “Stiles, it’s okay. You’re going to be fine.”

“No, no, I’m not.” Stiles mumbles miserably, pressing the heels of his palms into his eyes. “I’m so fucking stupid. I’m sorry, Dad, I’m sorry—” He cuts off with a panicked gasp, fighting to breathe as he begins to slip into a panic attack.

“Hey, hey,” his dad says calmly, putting a hand on the back of Stiles’ neck. He doesn’t squeeze, just holds Stiles steady, like he’s done through the countless panic attacks Stiles has suffered through. “Count down for me, kiddo, okay? Ten. Nine.”

“Ei-eight,” Stiles wheezes.

“Good,” his father says warmly. “Keep going; you’ve got it. Seven.”


“Finish it up,” his dad says patiently and Stiles exhales again.

“Two. One.”

“Better?”

Stiles nods and his dad takes his hand off Stiles’ neck, gently pulling him upright and into a tight hug. Stiles presses his face against his dad’s shoulder and breathes hard, breathes until it doesn’t feel like he’s going to float away.

“Thanks,” Stiles says after a while, pulling away.

“That’s what I’m here for,” his father says with a sad smile, ruffling Stiles’ hair. He steps outside to call the tech back, who returns and goes to clean off Stiles’ stomach, but Stiles stops him before he can.

“Can I—see?”

The technician glances over at Stiles’ dad, who shrugs and nods, so the man picks up his wand and gently moves it over Stiles’ stomach. Stiles swallows as the baby appears on the screen, his baby. My baby, he mouths silently, a weird heat flickering in his chest.

“Can you, um,” he says to the technician, “see the sex?”

The man tilts his head and moves the wand back and forth over Stiles’ stomach, but ends up shaking his head. “The angle’s not right,” he says. “Come back in a couple weeks and we’ll try again.”

“Okay,” Stiles says hoarsely. He sits still as the technician cleans him up, and lets his dad lead him out to the parking garage, one warm hand on his shoulder. His dad stops at CVS on the way home and Stiles sits in the car while he goes inside. When he comes back, he shoves a plastic bag into Stiles’ lap.
“There,” he says. “Vitamins. No more passing out on me, please.”

Stiles looks in the bag as they drive off. There’s a bag of bite-size Reese’s underneath all the bottles. His dad’s watching him out of the corner of his eye; Stiles scrounges up a smile, just for him.

- 

Stiles’ dad drops him off at the house because he’s late for a shift, but Scott’s waiting there on the porch, looking anxious. He meets Stiles halfway down the driveway but stops a foot away from him.

“I’m sorry,” he says. “I told your dad.”

Stiles shakes his head. “It’s not a promise you should have kept, dude, it’s fine. I should have told him when I found out.”

Scott eyes him warily. “Are you feeling okay?”

“Yeah.” Stiles holds his arms out wide, the plastic bag rustling in his hand. “Never better.”

“Oh, good,” Scott says, and rushes forward to wrap him in a tight hug. “That was the creepiest thing I’ve ever seen, man,” he says. “You stopped running and started staggering around like a zombie.”

Stiles grins ruefully as they pull apart and head for the house. “Probably didn’t place, did I?”

“Not quite,” Scott admits, holding the front door open for him. “I thought Finstock was going to pull all his hair out.” Once the door closes behind them, though, Scott goes serious. “What’d your dad say?”

“Not much, really,” Stiles shrugs. “He was being cool about it, but I can tell he’s disappointed in me.” His mouth goes thin. “I never thought I’d be this stupid cliche.”

Scott winces. “You’re not a cliche, man.”

“Yeah, I am,” Stiles says quietly, dropping onto the couch. “Just think about every stupid Lifetime movie you’ve ever seen. Knocked up teenage omega. Fucking stupid.”

Scott makes a face, sinking down onto the couch next to him. “You watch Lifetime movies?”

Stiles scowls at him. “You know what I mean.”

Scott’s quiet for a moment, and then he asks, “Can I touch it?”

Stiles puts his hands on his stomach defensively. “You can’t feel it yet. I can’t feel it yet.”

“Come on,” Scott says, wiggling his fingers. “Lemme.”

Stiles rolls his eyes, but unzips his hoodie so Scott can plant his hands on Stiles’ stomach. “Well?”

“You’re warm,” Scott says thoughtfully, and he sits back. “And your scent’s starting to change now.”

“Oh, now it does?” Stiles says irritably. He sniffs at his clothes. “What’s it like? Is it bad?”

Scott shakes his head. “No. It’s just—kind of sweet.”

“Ugh,” Stiles says, disgusted. “I’m over this. You want to watch a movie?”
Stiles falls asleep halfway through the second Captain America movie, his head cushioned on Scott’s lap. He’ll never be more grateful for Scott’s company than he is now, not just because Scott’s love and support means everything to him, but because he keeps getting these strong instinctual urges that are hard to understand, and a little frightening. They tell him to take shelter, to keep himself and his baby safe, to find his alpha and be protected and cared for. They make him wake up in the middle of the night, panicked because he’s alone and Derek’s not there with him—but Derek’s on the coast a hundred miles away and he has no idea—won’t have any idea—what Stiles is going through. Having Scott around, though, calms him a little, because even if he’s not the alpha who did this to him, he’s an alpha, and that’s good enough.

It’s Scott who’s there the next day when Stiles gets into school and the hall goes silent as people turn to stare at him.

“I didn’t say anything, I swear,” Scott hisses frantically.

“I know,” Stiles murmurs. He spots Cora Hale standing with Lydia and the rest of the popular crowd; he jerks his gaze away and moves forward through the crowded hall, resolutely ignoring the stares of his classmates. “Stuff like this gets out, dude. I didn’t expect it to stay a secret for long.”

He didn’t expect it to be quite so daunting, though; Stiles is stared at everywhere he goes—his classes, the hallway, the lunchroom. People whisper about him, and he knows what they’re wondering: just who the fuck knocked up graceless, spindly Stiles Stilinski?

“You’re the man of the moment,” Scott says during lunch, smiling uneasily.

“Not exactly the person I wanted to be,” Stiles mutters, jabbing a fork into his chicken salad.

It doesn’t stop; the next day, some girl he’s never met before flat-out asks him who it was, and before Stiles can even come up with some kind of sarcastic answer, Scott steps between them with a snarl, his eyes burning gold. The girl disappears with haste, but Stiles just sighs.

“You know what this means, right?” he says to Scott, who gives him a bewildered look. “Everyone’s going to think that you’re my baby daddy.”

Scott blinks. “Oh.”

Stiles sighs again. “Oh well, I guess. I wish it was you.”

“My mom would kill me,” Scott says. “When Ally and I were dating, she was always bringing home bucketloads of condoms from the hospital.” He grins faintly and slings an arm around Stiles’ shoulders as they walk to English class. “Well, I can’t help you out with money, but I can be the best uncle possible!”

Stiles grins. “Wouldn’t want anyone else, man.”

By the next day, it’s pretty clear that everyone thinks that Scott’s the one who got him pregnant. Stiles can understand why; he and Scott are pretty much surgically attached at the hip, and it’s not like they really hang out with other people. Sometimes Stiles misses the days when he was dating Malia and Scott was dating Allison and they were actually popular. Fucking fair-weather friends. At least Lydia isn’t a jerk about it; she sits next to him in AP Chemistry and offers him a small smile, which he returns gladly.
Stiles is sorry that’s Scott gotten involved, though. Stiles is now banned from track and field practice, so he’s clearing out his gym locker after school when Scott catches Garrett muttering something about Stiles under his breath. Scott throws Garrett into a locker. All three of them get called to the office; Garrett gets detention, Scott gets suspended for a week, and the principal doesn’t seem to know what to do with Stiles, who glowers at her until she sighs, exasperated, and tells him to stay home for the rest of the week—which, since it’s Thursday, means he just gets an early start to his Thanksgiving vacation.

Scott refuses to tell him what Garrett said. “It was rude,” he says, as Stiles gives him a ride home.

“Come on,” Stiles presses. “What’d he say?”

“It was really rude,” Scott says stubbornly.

“Well, I appreciate you defending my honor,” Stiles says nobly, “but you don’t have to, honestly. People are going to talk. It is what it is.”

“That doesn’t mean you should have to hear it,” Scott says, frowning out the window. “That’s not fair.”

Stiles swallows. “Yeah, well,” he mutters, “there are a lot of things that aren’t fair about this.”

Scott’s quiet until Stiles pulls up in front of the McCall house, and then he says, “You need to tell Derek.”

“Will you cut that out?” Stiles says irritably. “This has nothing to do with him!”

Scott makes a frustrated noise. “This has everything to do with him!” he argues. “Did you ever think he might be able to help?”

“Help?” Stiles laughs scornfully. “How the fuck is he going to help me?”

“I don’t know,” Scott sighs. “I mean—he’s got money.”

“I’m not going to go hit him up for money,” Stiles scowls. “Look, even if I wanted his help—I deleted his number.”

Scott gives him an exasperated look. “Why?”

“I was mad,” Stiles mutters. “And I panicked.”

Scott sighs again. “Okay. Just—think about it, all right? Over the break. And I can get his number from Laura if you want to contact him.”

“I won’t,” Stiles warns. Scott makes a frustrated face and Stiles concedes, “I’ll think about it.” He hesitates, then asks, “Are you still talking to Laura?”

Scott shrugs as he gathers up his backpack. “Once in a while. She kind of backed off after school started up.”

“I told Derek I’d put in a good word with you,” Stiles says quietly, remembering that last night with Derek and how good it had been.

Scott quickly glances at him and then away. “Maybe I should join the pack.”

“Why?”
“So I can be there, in case—” Scott hesitates, then says, “What if it’s a werewolf?”

Stiles sucks in a sharp breath. He hadn’t even thought about that. “I don’t know,” he says. He looks down at his stomach, prods at it anxiously. “Can they grow claws before they’re born? What if it rips its way out of me?”

“I don’t think that’s going to happen,” Scott says skeptically. “I think they’re just like any other newborn. I’ll ask my mom.”

“Okay,” Stiles breathes, still watching his stomach.

“I’m gonna go,” Scott says slowly, popping open his door. “Think about what I said, okay?”


“I’ll talk to you later.”

Stiles watches him head inside before he backs down the driveway and onto the street. He shakes his head as he drives off; there’s no way he’s saying anything to Derek.
Derek lives alone in a quiet neighborhood a couple blocks from campus. He spent the requisite first year in the dorms and then got out as soon as he could, unable to stand the sound and smell of so many people living in such a tiny space. His apartment is small, but he doesn’t need much space; it’s cozy and comfortable and familiar, and after a summer living with his sisters, he’s ready to go back.

This year, though, it seems too quiet. Derek has friends on campus, people he’s close enough with to invite over once in a while, but even having them around doesn’t really do anything to alleviate the quiet. He knows—and it takes a while to actually admit it to himself—that he misses Stiles. It’s stupid; he’s only known Stiles for little more than a month, and most of their meetings were clandestine operations, but that doesn’t stop Derek’s chest from going tight when he thinks about Stiles.

They text off and on, and Derek lets Stiles initiate most of their conversations—not because he doesn’t want to talk with him, but, well, because Stiles is young, and Derek’s not sure how long his attraction’s going to last when they’re not seeing each other every day. It’s not like Derek’s all that much older than him, but. He’s old enough to know some things, and young hearts can be fickle. He thinks about what he’d said as he left that last night, about not having to wait if Stiles found someone else. He hadn’t wanted Stiles to feel pinned down or trapped, but now he wishes they’d never come to that agreement.

He tells Laura at least some of this over the phone a couple weeks into the semester, heavily editing the story so there’s no mention of Stiles’ age at all, and she sighs. “You barely know this guy,” she says quietly. “You’re not usually like this with people, are you?”

“No,” Derek admits. “It’s just—I don’t know. He raised the possibility of us dating, and now I can’t stop thinking about it.” Even now, warmth flares in his chest as his thoughts drift, thinking about waking up next to Stiles, always smelling that delicious sweet smell of his.

“Well, try to stop,” Laura says. “You’re just setting yourself up for disappointment if it doesn’t work out.”

“I know,” Derek sighs.

“Take care of yourself, baby brother,” Laura says, sounding sad.

Cora’s less sympathetic. Laura must have said something to her because she texts Derek the following morning, saying i think its super sweet ur missing ur fuck buddy and Derek nearly snaps his phone in half in anger, a snarl curling his lips. He hates the term fuck buddy; even if it’s technically accurate, he hates how callous and cold it sounds. He doesn’t dignify Cora with an answer—though he proceeds to, in fact, reinforce the term by texting Stiles a couple weeks later: i’m free this weekend – want to come visit?

i’m busy, Stiles replies, and Derek thinks nothing of it.

His heat hits that week anyway and fully distracts him by being one of the worst he’s had in years. Usually he can get through the day all right—some minor sweating and uncomfortable arousal aside—but he actually has to take two days off class to deal with it. He knots his hand over and over with growing frustration as his fever doesn’t break, until he has to go digging through his desk to find his fleshlight, breathing shallowly through his mouth as he slicks up with the really expensive lube that contains omega pheromones. It’s not quite right—it’s not Stiles, he thinks grimly—but he gets a
sliver of relief when he knots the stupid toy, and his fever finally breaks after the fourth time he knots it, body shaking from coming so much.

Midterms come right after that, and it’s getting close to Halloween before Derek realizes that he hasn’t heard from Stiles since Derek had texted him two weeks prior. It’s unusual; he and Stiles certainly don’t talk all the time, but it’s never more than a day or two between messages.

All the components for Derek’s Halloween costume—Indiana Jones this year; it was Cora’s idea, and she was extremely proud of herself for thinking of it—have arrived. Derek hasn’t gone to any parties since coming back to campus, apart from a couple small gatherings of friends, but there’s a group of them planning on going out to celebrate, and Derek’s always liked dressing up for the holiday.

He dresses in his costume and takes a picture in the bathroom mirror. Derek sends it to Stiles, following it up with what do you think?

He waits for a reply, an odd, anxious feeling twisting his stomach. He’s being stupid again, he thinks; Stiles is in his senior year. He’s probably busy, distracted by schoolwork and college searches.

It feels like ages before Stiles responds, though it’s only a couple minutes, and when he does, it feels like a bucket of ice water’s been dumped over Derek’s head. who is this?

Derek has a moment of panic where he thinks maybe he sent the picture to the wrong person, but then he scrolls upward and sees his invitation to Stiles to come visit, and Stiles’ declination. Above that, there’s a stupid conversation they’d been having about junk food.

Derek, he texts back, a sinking feeling in his stomach. Why wouldn’t Stiles recognize him? Even if Stiles had lost his number for some reason, Derek thinks it’s pretty obvious who he is in the picture, even if his face isn’t in it. Which means—Derek swallows. He knows a snub when he sees it, but he gives it one last try, just in case he’s wrong. this is stiles, right?

Stiles never replies; two days pass and Derek doesn’t hear from him. He knows then that, for whatever reason, Stiles doesn’t want him anymore. He doesn’t understand why—was it something he did? He wishes he could ask Cora how Stiles seems at school (is he dating anyone?), but he can’t, not without giving everything away. It was bound to happen; he knows this, and he tried to prepare himself for the eventuality, but he’s still startled by how much it hurts. That’s what he gets for hoping, he supposes.

Derek doesn’t tell anyone about it. Cora would probably make fun of him, and Laura would just sigh in that I told you so way, and... He’s starting to feel increasingly guilty. He fucked a teenager and sure, maybe he didn’t know that, but he suspected. He could have, should have asked, but he was so wrapped up in the pleasure of getting his dick wet that he wasn’t thinking. And to make matters worse, his underage hookup was the fucking sheriff’s son. Derek doesn’t know why Stiles doesn’t want to talk to him any more, but if Stiles tells anyone what they were up to over summer, he’s screwed. He’s never felt like a bigger idiot in his life.

Derek goes out on Halloween, not particularly because he wants to enjoy himself, but he thinks that maybe if he gets drunk enough, he can stop thinking about Stiles for one miserable night, forget about the bewildering feeling of emptiness that claws at his chest. It was only a month, Derek tells himself over and over. He shouldn’t be feeling this way.

Derek wears his costume with a feeling of grim satisfaction, wears the stupid hat and the stupid whip, and smiles weakly every time someone recognizes him. He gets very very drunk and runs into a guy
he’s hooked up with a couple of times, and when he asks if he wants to get out of there, he agrees without even thinking about it. They walk to his apartment—Derek never does hookups at his place, has to keep the space his own and smelling like him—and it’s fine, he tells himself. Anything, he reasons, anything to make him stop feeling so strange, so lost, so disappointed. But when they get inside and the guy ducks into the bathroom, Derek inexplicably panics and leaves before he comes back.

He wakes up the next morning with his tan shirt half unbuttoned, his hat missing, a raging headache, and a cold, hollow feeling in his chest. He miserably wonders what’s wrong with him; why has Stiles broken him?

Derek goes home for Thanksgiving break feeling tired, still suffering from the weird, empty longing sensation. He’s been struggling to ignore it all month in order to focus on schoolwork, and he’s been mostly successful, but...it feels like there’s something wrong. A couple weeks back, he’d woken in a blind panic in the middle of the night, so certain something was wrong—that the house was on fire again, that someone was hurt, something—that he’d called Laura, and she’d had to bewilderedly talk him down from his frightened ledge. Now she knows something’s up; Derek had told her that it was just a dream that had scared him, but he doesn’t think she believed him.

Apparently he’s right, because she’s concerned enough to be waiting on the porch when he pulls into the driveway and Derek swears under his breath. Laura meets him at his car as he steps out, immediately wrapping him up in a hug and Derek relaxes into her embrace, something in his chest unknotting in the presence of his alpha.

“Why aren’t you at work?” he mutters into her shoulder.

“Work can wait,” she replies, rubbing her cheek against his. “You look like shit.”

“Thanks,” Derek says dryly.

“I’m not trying to be funny,” Laura says, pulling back to look at him, worry creasing her brow. “What’s wrong?”

Derek sighs, pulling away from her to grab his bag out of the trunk. “I don’t know,” he says tiredly. “I’ve felt like shit all month. I don’t know what’s going on.”

“Well, it didn’t work,” Laura says, following him up the path to the house. “I’ve been worrying since that night you called up all freaked out. That wasn’t a dream, was it?”

“I don’t know what it was,” Derek says. “Just—weird.”

“Don’t let it go on too long,” Laura warns.

“I don’t exactly intend to,” Derek grumbles, pushing open the front door.

Cora’s halfway down the stairs; she grins when he steps inside, speeding down the rest of the way to slam into him, wrapping him up in a bear hug. Derek sighs, rubbing his cheek against the top of her head. He already feels better being here, distracted from his own thoughts.
They have a good Thanksgiving; Laura warms up a store-bought lasagna because none of them feel like doing any actual cooking, but they set the table and have a real family meal. Laura and Cora ask him a lot of delicate questions about school, picking around the weird gloom that’s still hanging over his shoulders. Derek asks Laura about work—she started a charity with some of the insurance money after the fire, establishing a network of care for werewolf children whose packs had been disturbed or eliminated by tragedy. Laura says it’s going fine; they placed an orphaned set of twins in a pack near Grand Rapids, and they seem to be adjusting well.

Derek’s never asked her why, when she does all this work making sure other orphaned wolves find new packs, she never tried to find a new pack for them when their own pack perished. He doesn’t need to ask; this land is theirs, bound to the Hale pack for generations. He knows that Laura will never leave, just like he knows Humboldt is only a temporary stop-over until he comes back to stay.

As the conversation turns to Cora and the wrestling team, Derek meets Laura’s eyes across the table and offers her a small smile, which she returns gladly. Of all his siblings, he’s always been closest with Laura, and he’s missed her more then he realized. They’re only a year apart; when they were growing up, people always—and still do—mistook them for twins. She carries herself with the same calm assuredness their mother carried, a confidence Derek’s always been a little jealous of.

He’s not really paying attention to Cora, who’s delved into high school gossip, but he’s broken from his daydreams when he hears her say Stiles’ name. Derek lifts his head. “What did you say?”

Cora smirks at him. “You’re never going to believe this,” she says, looking absolutely gleeful. “The sheriff’s kid is pregnant.”

“Oh, I heard about that,” Laura says, and to Derek it’s like his ears have been stuffed with cotton, her voice far-off and muted. Her voice is slowly replaced by the sound of Derek’s heartbeat, steady but louder and louder until it’s all he can hear, deafening him. He should have known, He should have known it was just a summer fling, that Stiles would move on as soon Derek went back to school. He should have known, but he’d never expected to come back to Stiles pregnant.

“Who?” he asks roughly, talking over Laura, who gives him a startled look. Cora looks at him too, bewildered, and Derek clears his throat awkwardly. “Uh. Who’s the father?”

Cora shrugs. “He won’t tell anyone. Everyone thinks it’s Scott McCall, but I can tell they’re not boning. I’m thinking it’s a Virgin Mary sort of thing; everyone knows he’s never been fucked.”

“Hey, language at the dinner table, please,” Laura says mildly, like Cora’s ten. Cora rolls her eyes.

Derek gets to his feet, forcing himself to breathe slowly and evenly, not wanting to attract any undue attention. “Pie,” he says calmly, and quick-walks into the kitchen, where he leans against the counter and shuts his eyes. Now he’s got two questions banging around in his head. One, was Stiles a fucking virgin when they met? He didn’t—Derek wasn’t even all that nice about it that first time. Stiles had acted so confident, he’d just assumed—

But secondly, and more importantly, who’s the father? Just how far along is Stiles? He must have had—Derek counts the weeks on his fingers—at least two heats since Derek left for school, and he could have—it could have been anyone. Or it could have been Derek.

Derek presses a hand to his forehead, forcing himself to remain calm.

“Derek!” Laura hollers. “Where’s the pie?”

“Coming!” Derek yells back, voice a little strangled, and grabs the pumpkin pie off the counter and
the whipped cream from the fridge. He dumps it on the table and accepts the slice Cora cuts for him because it'll be strange if he doesn’t—pumpkin’s his favorite pie flavor, and both his sisters know that. When his sisters head for the living room, though, Derek says, “I’ve got to work on some homework,” which is technically true, but mostly he needs space to think.

“But we’re watching *The Wizard of Oz,*” Cora grumps, punching him on the arm. “It’s tradition, asshole.”

They both look pleadingly at Laura, who folds her arms across her chest. “You have to stay until the Emerald City,” she decides. “Then you can go upstairs.”

Cora laughs in triumph, and Derek’s doesn’t argue because he doesn’t want to draw their suspicion. He’s forced to sit sandwiched between the two of them on the couch, unable to focus on the movie in the slightest, his mind two miles away at Stiles’ house, wondering. Worrying.

“Okay, you big baby, go do your homework,” Laura says, patting him on the knee. “You’re stinking up the room with your anxiety.”

Derek gets up guiltily; they hadn’t even gotten to the Tin Man yet. He heads upstairs willingly though, and as he treads softly up the steps, he hears Cora whisper to Laura, “He’s acting weird.”

“He’s got a lot on his mind,” Laura replies. “College will do that do you. You can’t just skate by like *some people* are doing in high school.”

“Hey, I’m trying!” Cora protests, and then Derek gets to his room and shuts the door behind him with a sigh.

His room here is sparse, mostly undecorated. He was in eleventh grade when the fire happened, and he lost most of the things most precious to him in it. A year and a half later he went to college; as a result, his place on campus looks a lot more like home than this room does, but it’s enough for when he comes back to Beacon Hills.

Derek settles on his bed, pulling out his computer and his books so it looks like he’s working on the final paper for *Development of Economic Principles,* and then thumps backward against his pillows, his mind racing.

Stiles is pregnant and it may or may not be his kid. Derek has so many questions: what if it is? What if it isn’t? Is Stiles going to keep it? Does he want to keep it? Does *Derek* want him to keep it? He squeezes his eyes shut, trying to imagine himself with a baby, and his mind goes terrifyingly blank. He likes kids; he always did well with his younger cousins when they were still alive, but his own?

He exhales harshly and picks up his phone. For one dumb minute he thinks about calling Stiles, but he knows Stiles isn’t going to pick up for him. Instead, he opens up the internet browser and googles “stages of pregnancy” and stares at progressive charts of swelling stomachs until his eyes start to water and he sets his phone down. He can’t do this.

Derek gets to his feet and stomps down the stairs, pulling on his jacket as he does. In the living room, where the sound of the movie is still playing, Laura calls out, “Where are you going?”

“Fresh air,” Derek mumbles, and walks out of the house.

He gets into his car and drives. He’s not sure where he’s going, but he needs to move, needs to get away. He doesn’t even realize how fast he’s going until he’s blazing down a county road and blue lights flare on behind him. Derek curses, quickly slowing and pulling to the hard shoulder. This is all he needs tonight—but no, it gets better, because the deputy who ambles up to his window isn’t a
deputy; it’s fucking Sheriff Stilinski.

Derek can recall meeting the sheriff exactly three times in his life. Once, when he was in elementary school, the sheriff—who, at that time, was only a deputy—had come in to talk to Derek’s class about police work, and all the other kids had been jealous of Derek because the K9 the sheriff brought in with him wouldn’t leave his side.

The second time had been less enjoyable; he and Paige had been caught making out in her car when they were sixteen, and the sheriff had made them drive home, following them all the way to Paige’s house to watch them apologize to her parents.

The third time had been after the fire, when Derek was still in the hospital, and the sheriff had been kind then, his face soft with sympathy. And now he’s leaning against the side of the car, the father of the underage teenager Derek may or may not have impregnated, shining a flashlight through the window on Derek’s face. This is not optimal.

“You were going pretty fast there, son,” the sheriff says, not unkindly. “In a hurry to get somewhere?”

Derek shakes his head. “No,” he mutters, unable to look the sheriff in the eye. “Just—caught up in my own thoughts.”

The sheriff watches him for a long moment. “Everything all right? You look like you need a good night’s sleep.”

“I do,” Derek agrees quietly.

“Is it family?” the sheriff asks. “I swear, something about this time of year makes people a little too tightly wound up. I can’t tell you how many Thanksgiving dinner brawls we break up. I think it’s something in the turkey.”

He’s making a joke, but Derek doesn’t laugh; he can’t pretend he’s enjoying this.

The sheriff shifts, something in his scent sharpening. “You want to step out of your car for a moment, son?”

Derek glances up at him sharply, his pulse quickening. “Why?” he asks. “Am I in trouble?” He’s terrified the sheriff knows; that he’s about to be spun around and slammed against the car, arrested for sleeping with the man’s son.

“No,” the sheriff says gently. There’s no lie in his voice, but he’s been on the job for years; Derek’s not sure he can trust his heartbeat. “I just want to get a look at you.”

Derek hesitates, then unbuckles his seatbelt. “You don’t want my license?” he asks, unfolding himself from the car.

“No, son, I know who you are,” the sheriff says, taking a step back to give him room. “You on break from college?”

Derek slumps against the side of his car, staring at his shoes. “Yes.”

The sheriff puts his hands on his utility belt. Derek watches him nervously from under his eyelashes, not liking how close his hand is to his gun. “Are you on something?”

Derek looks up at him, startled. “No!”
“You sure?” the sheriff presses. His tone’s not threatening, but Derek feels threatened. He wishes he hadn’t gotten out of the car. “Is there a reason you don’t want to make eye contact with me?”

“No,” Derek mutters.

The sheriff doesn’t seem satisfied by his answer, but eventually he says, “I’m going to write you a ticket for speeding, and then I want you to go home—slowly. All right, Mr. Hale?”

“Fine,” Derek says. He gets back into the car and watches the sheriff fill out a ticket, which he then hands over solemnly. Derek doesn’t care about the fine; anything to get out of there, away from the sheriff, away before he can say something stupid like I fucked your son. Does the sheriff even know Stiles is pregnant? He must, if Cora and Laura both knew about it. That’s the sort of news that spreads through a small town like wildfire.

“Go slow,” the sheriff reminds him sternly, and when Derek drives off, the sheriff follows him in his cruiser all the way to where the road splits off to the preserve and the private road where the Hale house sits. Derek doesn’t return to the house, though, too keyed up and lost in thought. He drives instead to the end of the access road, where it peters out into a dirt trail. He parks there and then puts his hands over his face. He doesn’t even know if the baby is his, doesn’t know Stiles’ plans, but he’s—he’s terrified. He’s twenty-one years old; he’s not ready for a baby. And if he’s not ready, Stiles—

Derek’s stomach twists. He needs to talk to Stiles; maybe they can work all this out. Derek may be scared, but he can only imagine Stiles feels worse, and he’s not going to let him do this alone. It wouldn’t be fair to Stiles; it’s just as much Derek’s fault that he never suggested using a condom. He just hopes that Stiles will be willing to talk to him at all.

Derek spends most of the next day at home, working on homework as he tries to build the courage to go over to Stiles’ house. When he goes downstairs to see if Laura wants any help with dinner, he finds her standing in front of the open fridge, a pensive look on her face. When she spots him, she says hopefully, “You want leftover lasagna?”

“I had some for lunch,” Derek tells her.

“Yeah,” Laura says, looking defeated. “Me too.” She makes a face, plucking at her sweatpants. “I don’t want to go to the store, but there’s nothing to eat.”

“I’ll go if you make me a list,” Derek says. “Cora around?”

Laura shakes her head as she grabs a pad of paper off the counter and begins jotting stuff down. “She’s out Black Friday shopping with Lydia. Good sales at Nordstrom, I guess.”

Derek snorts. “You give her too much pocket money.”

Laura smiles faintly as she hands him the completed list. “Whatever; she’s a good kid. Are you jealous? I might have a twenty in my wallet for a good boy.”

“Keep your money,” Derek says scornfully, heading for the door. “I don’t need a sugar mama.”

He can hear Laura laughing as he closes the front door and manages his own smile. He’s feeling better than he did yesterday and comes to a decision as he drives to the store: he’s going to go to Stiles’ house tomorrow and try to talk to him. Whatever happens, at least he’ll have tried.

The grocery store is quiet; Derek thinks that most people are probably still at home, recovering from
their Thanksgiving feasts. He takes his time, wandering up and down every aisle, grabbing things
Laura hadn’t put on the list but that he’d noticed were missing.

He’s in the cereal aisle, trying to find the off-brand Froot Loops Cora likes so much when he catches
a scent so incredible it sends his skin breaking out in goosebumps, his fangs prickling at his gums
before he even realizes it’s happening. He spins around, trying to find the source as he breathes in
deeply, frantically inhaling as much as he can. He’s alone in the aisle, but the source has to be
somewhere in the store.

Derek walks down the aisles quickly, the scent growing stronger the closer he gets to the back of the
store. It’s making him hot all over, his skin tingling, easing that hollow spot that’s been sitting in his
chest for a month. He’s walking so fast, so focused on tracking down the source of the scent, that he
almost walks right past the aisle he needs to turn down. He manages to make the turn, though, and
then freezes.

Stiles is halfway down the aisle, staring absently at the shelf in front of him. With a jolt, Derek
realizes they’re in the aisle with all the baby stuff in it; Stiles’ eyes are on the rows of canned baby
food, though it’s obvious Stiles’ thoughts are elsewhere. Derek’s eyes snap to Stiles’ stomach—he
can’t help it—but if the baby’s starting to show, it’s hidden under a bulky sweatshirt. He’s the
source, though, of the amazing smell. Derek wants to roll in it, wants it to permeate every pore,
wants to rub his face against Stiles’ body until Stiles’ pale skin goes pink from the roughness of
Derek’s stubble.

Derek’s moving before he even realizes, walking quietly down the aisle toward Stiles. Stiles looks
exhausted, dark circles under his eyes, and Derek wishes he could soothe him, maybe curl up in bed
with him and get the rest they both so obviously need. He stops a couple feet away, turns his body
toward the cat food display on the opposite side of the aisle, but watches Stiles over his shoulder.
What does he say here? He’d had a plan for tomorrow, rehearsed it out in his head, but now, here,
seeing and smelling Stiles, his mind’s gone blank.

“Stiles,” he says softly, deciding to just go for it, and Stiles jumps, the items in his basket rattling
around.

Stiles turns and his eyes go wide, a flurry of emotions flashing over his face. They land on something
like fear, and that hurts Derek.

“Stiles,” he says again. “Wh—”

“What are you doing here?” Stiles hisses. The knuckles on the hand holding his basket are white.

“I’m—grocery shopping,” Derek says, lifting his own basket like it’s not obvious.

Stiles bares his teeth in an unamused grimace, eyes darting around like he’s looking for an escape.
Derek can feel the hurt building in his chest, clawing away at the temporary relief he’d felt upon
catching Stiles’ scent. “Yeah, and? Did you come to gawk at me like everyone else?"

Derek’s eyes flicker down to Stiles’ stomach, then back to his face. “So it’s true?”

“Yep,” Stiles says tightly, his body tense with anger. “I’m having a fucking baby.”

Derek takes a step toward him and Stiles jerks backward, his shoulders hitting the shelves behind
him, making the tiny glass jars rattle. “Stiles,” he says quietly, a little desperately. “Is it mine?”

Stiles laughs, harsh and too-loud in the quiet store. “Of course it is,” he scoffs. “Who else would
want to fuck me?”
Derek stares at him open-mouthed, shock flooding his system. All the mental preparation in the world couldn’t prepare him for this moment, not truly. It all makes sense now; his body must have known, even if he didn’t. That hollow ache in his chest is the pain of being separated from the omega he’s mated with, unable to protect or comfort him.

He takes another step forward, a low, hurt noise slipping through his teeth. “Why did you stop talking to me?” he asks, reaching out. “Stiles, please—”

Stiles ducks away from him. “Don’t fucking touch me,” he snarls. “This is my problem, Derek. Mine. Fuck off.”

“I can help you,” Derek says, following him. “I can pay—”

“I don’t want your money!” Stiles spits. “It was a stupid mistake. I don’t need you hanging around and making things worse. Just leave me alone.” And with that, he wrenches himself around and stalks off down the aisle, shoulders stiff and angry.

Derek doesn’t follow him, as much as he wants to; they’ve caused enough of a scene, and he doesn’t want to get kicked out of the store. He makes himself finish Laura’s grocery list, moving robotically, and by the time he gets to the registers Stiles is nowhere to be seen.

There’s a buzzing noise between Derek’s ears as he drives home. By the time he’s a mile from the store, his hands are shaking so badly he has to pull to the side of the road before he gets into an accident. The buzzing in his head grows louder, the sound of his heartbeat drumming loudly on top of it, intensifying to such a volume that he can’t hear anything else. There’s a panicked, sharp-edged feeling of loss expanding in his chest, clutching at his lungs until he’s clawing at his ribs, frantic and scared. It hurts; it hurts so bad he doesn’t know what else to do but tilt back his head and howl.

Time goes strange after that. It could be minutes or it could be hours before Laura’s car comes barrelling up the road, headlights flashing in his eyes as she pulls off in front of him and comes scrambling out of the car, her eyes blazing red.

“What is it?” she pants, ripping his car door open. “What is it, Derek, what happened?”

Derek’s a mess, wide-eyed and panting, his shirt clawed to shreds, the skin beneath it unmarred but smeared with drying blood. “Laura,” he says weakly, and maybe just that one word says enough, because Laura throws her arms around him, enveloping him in her scent, steady and reassuring. It’s a long, long time before Derek starts feeling somewhat normal, like his chest isn’t going to explode.

Laura rubs her cheek against the top of his head. “What’s going on, baby brother?” she asks gently. “You’re scaring me.”

Derek, his forehead pressed to her collarbone, squeezes his eyes shut, breathing in deeply before he says, “I fucked the sheriff’s kid.”

Laura pulls back so she can look at him, her eyes wide in surprise. She cups his face in her hands, her thumbs pressing against his cheekbones. “Derek Samuel Hale,” she whispers, sounding everything and nothing like their mom. “Did you—he’s—”

“It’s mine,” Derek says, and sucks in a sharp breath at the shock of saying it out loud. “I—what do I do, Laura? What do I do?”

Laura doesn’t say anything for a long time, rubs her thumbs absently against Derek’s cheeks. “You okay to drive?” she asks eventually. Derek nods, and she lets go of his face. “Let’s go back to the house.”
Cora’s still not back when they get home, and Derek’s grateful for that; he can only face one sister at a time tonight, he thinks. Laura guides him down on the couch and then sits next to him and takes both of her hands in his.

They sit in silence for a while before Derek says, “I saw him at the grocery store.” Laura looks at him but doesn’t say anything, and after a moment, Derek continues, “I had no idea—until Cora said last night—I didn’t know.”

“Where’d you go last night?” Laura asks quietly, her eyes steady on his face.

“Drove around,” Derek says. “His dad pulled me over. He—he doesn’t know. Not yet. He gave me a ticket.”

“Hm,” Laura says softly. She squeezes Derek’s hands. “Did you talk to Stiles at the store?”

Derek’s breath hisses out of him. “Yeah,” he mumbles. “He doesn’t want anything to do with me. Stopped talking to me a month ago.”

“Is this why you haven’t been sleeping?”

Derek nods. “That was—before I knew, though. I just—it hurts. Here.” He pulls one of his hands out of Laura’s to tap at his chest. “Like he’s missing.”

Laura’s face goes soft and sympathetic. “Your wolf knows,” she says. “Our instincts regarding young are...very strong.” Laura lets go of his hand and runs her hands through her hair, distracted. “God, Derek,” she sighs.

“I know I fucked up,” Derek mutters. “But I want to help him.”

“You have to,” Laura says firmly. “And you have rights too, especially as a werewolf.”

“Laura, I don’t even know if he’s going to keep it!”

“Find out,” Laura snaps. “We need that baby.”

Derek shudders at her words. “He doesn’t want my help.”

“He will,” Laura says firmly. “And you have rights too, especially as a werewolf.”

“We’ll get through it,” Derek promises. “But we’re not stealing Stiles’ baby just to increase our strength.”

“It’s your baby too,” Laura points out, but she doesn’t argue any further.

They’re quiet for a long time, heads bowed toward each other, when Derek says, “I wonder what Mom would think.”

“Oh, she’d be pissed,” Laura says. She bumps her forehead against Derek’s. “Too stupid to use a condom?”
Derek flushes dully. “He wasn’t in heat.” It sounds stupid saying it out loud, especially remembering how slick Stiles had been. Derek had been drunk and caught up in Stiles’ scent, but that was no excuse.


“Shit,” Derek mutters.

“Shit’s right,” Laura says. “You’ve probably got half a dozen babies running around.”

“I don’t think so,” Derek says, misery rising in his chest. “I would have felt—“ He makes a quiet noise of distress. “It hurts, Lo. I just—want him.”

“I know,” Laura says softly. She straightens, patting her hand against her thighs. “Come on, lie down.”

Derek shifts around willingly, lying on his back along the couch and placing his head in Laura’s lap. She smiles sadly down at him, running her fingers through his hair. “It’ll all work out,” she says gently.

Derek squeezes his eyes shut, not at all sure she’s right.

He’s mostly asleep by the time Cora comes home, Laura’s hand still petting through his hair. He doesn’t open his eyes when Cora steps in, but he hears her pause in the doorway to the living room.

“What’s going on?” Cora asks uncertainly. “Is Derek okay? Why’s his shirt all ripped?”

“Derek’s had a rough day,” Laura says softly. “I think we’re going to need to have a family meeting in the morning.”

“Did something bad happen?” Cora presses, sounding worried now.

“No,” Laura says firmly. “Not bad. But things are going to change.”

Laura makes waffles and bacon the next morning, but none of them really eat much. Cora’s quiet for a long time after Laura tells her what’s going on, stabbing her fork into a waffle over and over.

“I’m sorry,” she says suddenly, looking at Derek. “For what I said about Stiles the other night. For insinuating he was unfuckable.”

Derek laughs harshly. “That’s what you get out of all of this?”

Cora scowls at him. “Fuck you. I’m still trying to process this.”

“Cut it out,” Laura says to both of them. “This is a weird thing for all of us to wrap our heads around.”

“It’s not like you’re becoming a parent,” Derek snarls at her. His head hurts; he slept like shit. Laura raises her eyebrows at him, doesn’t say anything. After a moment, Derek ducks his head. “Sorry.”

Laura watches him for another long moment before she says, “I want you to go over to his house today.”
Derek stiffens. “Why?”

Laura sighs. “We talked about this last night. We need him on our side.”

Derek frowns at her. “He already said he didn’t want my help.”

“And now he’s had a night to think about it—and so have you,” Laura says patiently. “I want you to go talk to him.”

Derek’s look darkens. “And if I don’t want to?”

Laura brings her head up, the corners of her mouth turning downward. “You will,” she says firmly, eyes burning red around the edges. “I’ll hold your fucking hand if I have to.”

Derek glowers at her until he breaks eye contact, unable to defy his alpha. “Fine,” he mumbles. “But if the sheriff’s there and he arrests me—”

“I’ll bail you out,” Laura says sweetly, “and it’ll serve you right.”

That’s how Derek finds himself pulling up in front of the Stilinski house a couple hours later, his stomach twisted into nervous knots. The house looks different in the light of day. He’s never stood on the porch. At least the sheriff’s cruiser isn’t in the driveway. That’s the only positive Derek can see right now.

He stands outside for a long time, steeling himself. He thinks about leaving, about going home and telling Laura that no one was there, but she’ll know he was lying. She always does. Derek makes himself lift his hand and knock on the front door, three heavy thumps.

Silence stretches on for what seems like forever. He hopes that maybe Stiles isn’t there after all, even though his Jeep’s sitting in the driveway. But then there’s the sound of feet hammering down the stairs, Stiles calling, “Hold on a sec!” and Derek braces for the worst.

The door swings open, a flood of scents rushing out, heavy and foremost the scent of Stiles, sweet and heady. Stiles’ expression is anything but; the moment he sets eyes on Derek, his face goes flat and angry. Derek doesn’t notice; he’s staring at Stiles’ stomach. Stiles only has a thin t-shirt on today, not hidden under a sweatshirt, and the swell of his stomach’s obvious like this, a gentle curve that stretches the cotton.

“What the fuck,” Stiles says icily, and Derek’s eyes snap up to his face. “What the fuck do you think you’re doing here?”

“I—came to talk to you,” Derek says hesitantly.

“Yeah?” Stiles sneers. “Well, I don’t fucking want to talk to you. Bye.”

He moves to shut the door and Derek flings his arm out desperately, stopping him short. Stiles jerks at the doorknob but the door doesn’t budge, and he turns his eyes to Derek, glaring furiously.

“Stiles, I’m sorry,” Derek says. “I never meant—”

“It’s a little late for that,” Stiles says coldly, still tugging at the doorknob. “Fuck, Derek—just get out of here.”

“Why?” Derek asks. He takes a step in closer, can’t help inhaling deeply, a shudder running through him at Stiles’ scent. Stiles’ eyes go wide, his cheeks growing pink. “Please let me help you.”
“I don’t want your help,” Stiles says, but he doesn’t sound as angry as he did a moment ago. “Look, I know you didn’t mean for this to happen, so don’t worry about it. I can handle it myself.”

“You don’t have to,” Derek insists. He drops his hand from the door and touches Stiles’ cheek hesitantly. Stiles stiffens, but he doesn’t move away. “Please.”

Stiles shuts his eyes and, for a moment, leans into Derek’s touch. Derek’s heart leaps, thinking he’s done it—Stiles is accepting him and his help—and then Stiles’ eyes fly open and he shoves Derek away. “Shit,” Stiles says. “You—you gotta go.”

“Stiles—”

But Stiles isn’t looking at him—he’s looking past Derek, to the street. Derek turns to follow his gaze and freezes, the bottom of his stomach dropping away. The sheriff’s driving up the road, just about to turn into the driveway.

“Fuck,” Stiles says. “You fucking dumbass—I wasn’t ever gonna tell him—” He shuts his mouth as the cruiser rolls to a halt, the engine turning off.

Derek takes a nervous step backward as the sheriff gets out of the car, his eyes flickering toward Derek’s car. He could run, he thinks, but what happens after that? There’s nothing like running from the cops to declare your guilt; Derek’s not that stupid. If he’s polite, maybe he’ll get out of this alive.

“Hey Dad,” Stiles says casually, as his father comes up the porch steps. “What are you doing home?”

“Got a call from one of the neighbors about someone lurking on the porch,” the sheriff says, his pale blue eyes fixed firmly on Derek. “I guess they were talking about you, Mr. Hale.”

Derek shifts uncomfortably. “I guess so, sir.”

“Derek just came by to, uh, drop off a book he borrowed,” Stiles says.

“You sure about that?” the sheriff asks, his eyes still on Derek. His expression hasn’t changed, but Derek already knows it’s a lost cause. “I wasn’t aware you and Mr. Hale were acquainted with each other.”

“Well,” Stiles says, a little desperately, “you know Laura’s been trying to get Scott to join the pack and—”

“Stop,” the sheriff says, and Stiles shuts his mouth, his eyes sliding to Derek. The sheriff’s still looking at Derek, his face expressionless. Derek can smell the anger building on him though, and it cows him, makes him feel three feet tall. He hunches his shoulders, ready for the explosion. “I think I can hazard a guess as to why he’s here.”

“Dad, he—”

“I’ll deal with you later, Stiles,” the sheriff says grimly. “And as for you, Derek—I want you off my property. Now.”

“Yes, sir,” Derek mumbles, eyes snapping to Stiles and away before he steps off the porch.

“Oh, and son?” the sheriff calls after him. Derek tenses, looking over his shoulder at him. “You might want to sign yourself up for a math class, since you don’t seem to know the difference between seventeen and eighteen.”
Derek flinches, his cheeks red with shame, and crosses the lawn as fast as he can without breaking into a jog.

Laura’s waiting when he gets home, leaning against one of the porch supports. “Well?” she asks.

Derek shakes his head. “Nothing. His dad knows now, though, so thanks.”

“Blame me if you want,” Laura says, following him into the house. “But this stupidity is one hundred percent yours.”

Derek whips around with a snarl. Laura snarls right back, her eyes burning red as she slams him into the stair railing. Something cracks and for a moment, Derek thinks he’s broken something, but it’s just one of the bannisters. His anger ebbs away as quickly as it’d come on; he laughs weakly instead, reaching around behind him to wave the broken bannister around. Laura barks out a startled laugh, her face softening.

“Sorry,” she says, helping him to his feet.

“It’s okay,” Derek says, leaning the broken piece of wood against the wall. “I’ll fix that during Christmas break.”

Laura draws him in for a quick hug as Cora comes clomping down the stairs. “What’d you guys break this time?” she asks.

“The house,” Laura says, and starts laughing helplessly. Derek joins in, leaving Cora to stare down at them disapprovingly.

“You’re both freaks,” she says, and disappears back upstairs.

Derek drives back to school the next day, with an empty space still in his chest, and nothing resolved about Stiles. He thinks the entire drive back to Arcata, thinks about the baby—his baby. His thoughts drift; he finds himself wondering what it’ll look like. A little girl, maybe, with Stiles’ bourbon-brown eyes, or a boy with Derek’s dark hair. A werewolf, maybe, whose eyes flash gold when it’s scared, who pops soft little claws too blunt to hurt anyone. Derek thinks about little hands curling around his, a baby’s laughter, that tiny weight in his arms, and the further he gets from Beacon Hills, the more he knows he can’t leave.

On Monday morning, Derek’s waiting when the front doors of the administration building are unlocked. He walks up to the secretary, draws in a deep breath, and says, “I want to transfer out.”
Stiles

Stiles hates Derek Hale.

He was doing absolutely fine before Derek decided to show up at the grocery store. Sure, his dad looks at him like Stiles has killed someone, and everyone else in town stares like they’ve never seen a pregnant person before, but he was handling it. The last thing he needed was Derek coming up to him looking all sad and pitying, smelling so fucking good, pretending like he wants to be with Stiles. That’s not fair. That’s not fucking fair at all.

And now his dad knows it was Derek. Stiles wasn’t lying when he told Derek he was never going to tell; as pissed off as Stiles is about everything, he’s not planning on ruining Derek’s life by getting him arrested. He fully expects some kind of explosion from his dad, but his dad’s ominously silent for the next few days and Stiles hates it, hates the silence and the disappointed way his dad looks at him.

But worst of all, it’s like seeing Derek’s switched something on inside him—the hated omega part of him that he tries so hard to fight against. He’s got this itch, this burning need for Derek; his instincts cry out that he needs his mate, that his baby needs a protector. Stiles hates it, and he hates Derek for making him feel so fucking weak. Stiles is not weak; he can and will do this on his own, and fuck Derek for thinking he has any right to be involved. Stiles grits his teeth as he stands in front of the mirror in his bedroom, resolutely not remembering the way Derek’s hand had felt against his cheek.

He curls his hands over his stomach and tells his baby, “We can do this on our own.”

His dad finally implodes Monday night, when he comes home and catches Stiles ripping up college brochures and stuffing them into the trash can. Stiles freezes with a catalog from Stanford half torn in his hands, while his dad leans against the kitchen wall and says, “What were you thinking?”

Stiles swallows hard. His dad’s the scariest when he’s not yelling; Stiles had been terrified when he’d shown up on Saturday when Derek was here, because he hadn’t yelled then, either, and he’d had his gun then too. He’s not wearing his utility belt now, which is a small mercy, but it still takes Stiles a while to scrounge up the courage to say, “I wasn’t.”

“You’re seventeen, Stiles,” his father hisses. “Do you know what that means? That means every time you two had sex, he committed a felony!”

Stiles winces. “He didn’t know, Dad. I never told him—”

“Stiles,” his father snaps. “How could you?”

“I’m sorry!” Stiles yells. “I know I fucked up, all right? I’d take it all back if I could!”

His father sighs, rubbing a hand over his eyes. “Shit. I didn’t mean to—I’m sorry. What’s done is done, Stiles. You’ve got my support in whatever you do.”

Stiles blinks fiercely, his eyes stinging. “But you wish this hadn’t happened, right?”

His dad reels him in for a hug, rubbing his cheek against Stiles’ hair. “I’m not going to pretend I didn’t have a different future all dreamed out for you. Grandkids didn’t come into it until at least your late twenties.”

“I’m sorry,” Stiles mumbles.
His father presses a kiss to his temple before letting him go. “What are you doing with that?” he asks softly, nodding at the torn college brochure Stiles is still holding in one hand.

Stiles flushes unhappily, shoving it in the trash can. “Like you said,” he mutters. “A different future.”

His dad gives him a long look. “It doesn’t have to be,” he says gently. “I don’t want you discounting college quite yet.”

“But—” Stiles presses a hand over his stomach. “You think I could?”

“I think we can figure something out,” his father replies firmly. “I thought we could do some visits over Christmas break.”

Stiles’ face breaks into a hesitant smile. “Really? I can find my list.”

“Okay,” his dad agrees, smiling faintly. “Let’s make a plan.”

-

School’s worse after vacation because Scott’s suspended until Friday, and people won’t stop looking at him. Stiles goes to class and eats lunch alone, hunching his shoulders as if to ward himself from the stares of his classmates. He hasn’t felt this alone since that time Scott’s dad showed up and insisted on taking him to Hawaii for two weeks, but at least that was during summer vacation, when he could squirrel himself away indoors and play video games all day. There’s no escaping school; as much as Stiles is tempted to just skip class and go home, he’s determined to get his diploma, dumbass baby or not.

“Not that you’re a dumbass,” Stiles mutters to his stomach, then looks around in embarrassment, wondering if anyone heard him. He’s at the back of the library in one of the study cubbies, working on AP History homework, and there doesn’t seem to be anyone else around. He snorts a little at his own stupidity, rubbing a comforting hand over his stomach before bending his head back to his books.

Stiles nearly jumps out of his skin some time later when someone says, “Hey,” in his ear. He twists around to see Cora Hale bending down to look at him, her eyebrows raised.

“What,” Stiles says flatly. He’s not exactly thrilled to see her.

Cora rolls her eyes in a perfect impression of Derek, dropping down into the cubby next him. “Nice to see you too,” she says sarcastically.

“What do you want, Cora?” Stiles asks icily.

Her sarcastic expression softens slightly. “Are you okay?”

“Peachy,” Stiles says stiffly, turning back to his books. “Thanks. See you later.”

Cora sighs. “Look,” she says, voice dropping to a whisper, “Derek told me and Laura it was him, okay?”

“And?” Stiles says, not looking up from his books. “I’d really appreciate it if you didn’t go spreading that around the school.”

“Of course not,” Cora says, sounding startled. “I’m not—look, I just wanted to make sure you’re okay.”
“What do you care?” Stiles asks angrily. He jerks his head up to glare at her. “You’ve never given a shit about me before; you don’t have to start now.”

Cora blinks, but she doesn’t get annoyed like he expects her to—he’s heard of her temper; it’s kind of legendary. “You’re pack,” she says, sounding startled. “You and the baby—you’re pack now. That’s what pack does; we look out for each other.”

Stiles laughs harshly. “I’m not part of your fucking pack, Cora. I’m not one of your sister’s charity cases.”

“Okay,” Cora says dubiously. She gets to her feet, but before she disappears off amongst the shelves she says, “You can be as stubborn as you want, but we’ll be here for you, if you ever need us. McCall has Laura’s number.” And with that, she stalks off down the shelves of books, looking like a softer version of Derek in her dark jeans and leather jacket. Stiles sniffs angrily and turns back to his books with a scowl; he doesn’t need anyone’s help.

Wednesday afternoon, Stiles gets called out of AP English and is sent to the guidance office.

“I don’t need this,” he complains to the secretary who pulls him out of class.

“Not my call,” she says, giving his stomach a judgemental look.

Stiles glowers and crosses his arms over his stomach as she ushers him into the guidance office waiting room. He’s surprised to see Lydia sitting in one of the chairs, looking just as mutinous as he feels. Stiles glances around; the rest of the room’s deserted, so he drops down next to Lydia. “Hey.”

“Hi,” she says quietly, eyeing him. “Why are you in here?”

“Guess,” Stiles says moodily, patting his stomach. “What about you?”

Lydia rolls her eyes. “My grades slipped a tenth of a GPA point this semester and my mom’s worried I’m stressed. She’s more anxious about college than I am.”

“You’re not stressed?”

“This much,” Lydia says, holding her thumb and her pointer finger about a centimeter apart. “I know I’ll get in somewhere; that doesn’t worry me. Where you go for undergrad doesn’t matter, anyway.”

“Oh,” Stiles says thoughtfully.

She pins him with a considering look. “And you?”

Stiles shrugs. “It’s all kind of up in the air right now.”

“Hm,” Lydia says, a disapproving note to her voice. Stiles gets the feeling she’s frowning at his current ambivalence to college, not the fact that he’s pregnant, and he finds that oddly assuring.

“I miss talking to you,” he says, and her face softens, the corners of her mouth curving up.

“Me too,” she says softly. “You should come over sometime. We can watch a movie and not talk about dating.”

Stiles grins. “I’d like that.”
Lydia smiles at him, settling back in her seat and smoothing her hands over her skirt. Stiles watches her for a long moment. He can feel the question in the air between them; Lydia wants to know about the baby. Has Cora already told her? Stiles may be pack to Cora now, or whatever, but she and Lydia have been best friends since elementary school; his request to Cora not to spread the news around the school surely didn’t apply to Lydia, right?

He finds himself wanting to tell her; Scott knows, but he’s on Stiles’ side always, and Cora’s on Derek’s. Lydia’s something of a wild card—he knows she won’t tell anyone, but he doesn’t know how she’ll react. He shifts in his seat, looking carefully at the empty room around them, and then leans in to say, soft as he can, “It was Derek Hale.”

Lydia looks at him sharply, her eyes widening. Stiles can tell Cora hasn’t told her, and that surprises him a little; maybe he should have given her more credit. “Are you sure?” she asks softly.

Stiles nods, his throat aching a little, that familiar and unwanted longing for Derek jolting through him. “Wasn’t anyone else,” he says.

Lydia bites at her lip before reaching out, placing her hand over Stiles’. “Are you keeping it?”

Stiles nods again. He’s thought through it a thousand times, and as much as the thought of having and raising a child terrifies him, he doesn’t think that, at this point, he could get rid of it. As much as he tried to ignore it at first, he can feel the bond growing between them. His dad hasn’t brought it up again since finding out at the hospital, but Stiles thinks he knows it too.

Lydia gives him an encouraging smile. “You’re going to do really well,” she says. “And if you need anything, Mom kept everything from when we were kids. Maybe you could look through it when you come over.”

“Really?” Stiles says, because that’s another thing he’s been trying not to think about: how much babies cost, and how little money his dad makes as it is. He’s not going to take any money from the Hales, but he’s not too proud to accept a little help from people who actually care about him.

“Really,” Lydia smiles. One of the guidance counselors pokes her head into the waiting room and says, “Lydia?” Lydia rolls her eyes at Stiles. “Gotta go pour my heart out. I’ll text you later.”

“Okay,” Stiles says, and watches her follow the guidance counselor to her office. He waits for another ten minutes before he gets called into Ms. Morrell’s office.

She gives him a faint smile as he comes in, gesturing at him to sit in the chair across from her desk. He does, grudgingly, and they watch each other for a long moment before Ms. Morrell tilts her head to one side and says, “Stiles. How are you?”

“Pregnant,” Stiles says bluntly, anger licking at his bones. “That’s why I’m here, isn’t it?” He doesn’t like Ms. Morrell all that much; there’s something about her that’s always made him uneasy. Maybe it’s the way she almost never blinks. It’s unsettling.

“Mm,” she says enigmatically, watching him placidly. “I talked to your father before I called you in here. I’m glad to hear you’ve seen a doctor.”

“Uh huh,” Stiles says angrily. “And that’s your business how?”

“My job is to keep abreast of your wellbeing,” Ms. Morrell says calmly. “That’s why you’re here.”

Stiles spreads his arms wide. “Okay, well, I’m here, I’m fine—can I go?”
“There’s nothing you want to talk about?”

“Not with you,” Stiles says coldly.

Ms. Morrell’s expression doesn’t change. “Your father told me you haven’t told him who the father is yet. Why is that?”

Stiles blinks, trying not to let the confusion show on his face. But Dad does know. What is he—is he protecting Derek? Why would he do that?

“That’s none of his business, either,” he bluffs, hoping Ms. Morrell will take the hint and let him leave. She does not.

“That’s not a healthy attitude,” she says. “It’s important to have a support system, Stiles—always, but especially right now.”

Stiles decides not to deign this with a reply and levels her with a glare instead. She returns his look with a calm stare, unblinking.

“If you don’t feel like you can confide in your father, is there someone else you can put any trust in?” Ms. Morrell asks him. “An adult, I mean, not one of your friends.”

“You?” Stiles retorts sourly.

She gives him an unamused smile. “If you could find it in yourself to trust me, which doesn’t seem likely.”

“No,” Stiles agrees. He leans back in his chair, startled to find himself wondering if she’s got a point—not that his dad’s not on his side, but he’s kind of biased, being Stiles’ parent and all. He thinks briefly, wistfully and angrily, about Derek, and then he thinks about Laura—pack, theoretically. But no. He’s fine. He’s got his dad and Scott. That’s enough.

Ms. Morrell watches him for a long moment before she opens a drawer in her desk and pulls out a stack of pamphlets. “There are a variety of support programs available to you, if you want to take advantage of them. I suggest you do.”

Stiles takes the stack of pamphlets from her, the corners of his mouth turning down when he sees the one on top is a GED program designed for pregnant teenagers. “I’m finishing high school,” he says sullenly. “I don’t need this.”

“If you want to take advantage of them,” Ms. Morrell reminds him, her voice softening. “I’m here to help you.”

Stiles looks at the pile of paper in his hands, then up at her, and then away quickly. “Thanks,” he mutters.

She smiles at him, and it actually seems genuine. “Stiles,” she says gently, “do you know what’s happening to your body? Have you talked to your doctor? Done any research?”

Stiles chews on his lip before he admits, “Not really.” Up until last week, he was trying to pretend it wasn’t really happening.

Ms. Morrell nods slowly, gesturing toward the stack of pamphlets in his lap. “There’s some information in there, but if you have any questions, you can come to me. I’d encourage you to do some research of your own, though; this won’t seem so daunting when you understand what’s going
on inside you.”

Stiles looks down at his stomach, where his t-shirt stretches taut over his torso. “Thanks,” he says again. “I will.” He looks up at her again, feeling hot under his skin, itchy. “Can I go now?”

Ms. Morrell nods, and Stiles escapes her office with great relief, the wad of glossy pamphlets clutched to his chest. He’s startled to see Lydia just leaving the other counselor’s office, wiping at her eyes.

“Hey,” he says worriedly. “You okay?”

She gives him a watery smile. “Guess I was stressed,” she admits. “How’d your meeting go?”

Stiles waves the pack of papers around. “Got an entire tree’s worth of advice.”

“That’s good,” Lydia says. She sniffs and adds, “Walk me back to French?”

“Mon plaisir, mon ami,” Stiles says gallantly, offering her his arm. Lydia laughs, looping her arm around his as they head off down the hallway.

Final bell’s already rang by the time he gets back to his English classroom to grab his backpack. Ms. Blake’s the only one in there and she looks up with a smile as he comes into the room.

“Everything all right?” she asks, as he heads for his desk.

“Yeah,” Stiles says, shoving his assortment of pamphlets into his backpack and swinging it up over his shoulder. “Just—” He gestures at his stomach. “You know.”

Ms. Blake gives him a sympathetic smile. “If you need help with anything,” she says, “just let me know.”

Stiles blinks at her, momentarily startled, and then he says, “Thanks? Uh, I’ve got to go.”

Ms. Blake nods, sending him off with a wave, and Stiles leaves the school. He doesn’t drive home, but heads to the sheriff’s station instead. He was caught off guard when Ms. Morrell had said his dad didn’t know who the father of the baby was—and he wants to know why his dad said that. Too impatient to wait for him to come home, Stiles heads straight for his office.

He’s on the phone, but he waves Stiles into a seat. Stiles is happy to throw himself down into a chair and breathe in the smell of his dad’s office, familiar and comforting, almost as much of a home to him as their house. He’s spent countless hours here, long nights when his dad couldn’t find a babysitter. All the deputies and staff are like family to him.

Stiles’ eyes roam around the office, sweeping over the collected ephemera of his dad’s years in office; newspaper clippings pinned to the walls amidst pictures of their family and drawings Stiles did when he was a kid. He eyeballs his dad’s desk, having long-ago perfected the art of reading upside down, and his eyes narrow when he spots a file labeled Hale Pack. He’s squinting at it, trying to read the bit of paper peeking out the edge, when his dad slaps a hand over the file and shoves it under a pile of other papers.

“Hello, Stiles,” he says dryly, hanging up the phone.

“Hi, Dad,” Stiles says innocently.

His father gives him a knowing look. “What do you want?”
“Why do you always assume I want something?” Stiles complains. His father just raises an eyebrow at him, and Stiles sighs. “Fine. I had a meeting with the guidance counselor today.”

“I know,” his dad says evenly. “She gave me a call earlier.”

“I know,” Stiles says. He gives his father an uncertain look and lowers his voice when he asks, “Why did you pretend not to know who the dad is?”

His father sighs quietly, and lifts his head to watch the deputies out on the station floor for a moment before he replies. “You know I’m not happy about it,” he says, and Stiles nods silently. “But I also acknowledge the fact that you said he didn’t know how old you are, and while I have trouble believing that you kept him in the dark the entire summer—” Stiles winces, “—I’m also going to take you at your word that he didn’t mean anything malicious. I was young once too; I remember what it’s like to get caught up in the moment. I don’t think either of you meant for this to happen, did you?”

Stiles shakes his head, looks down at his hands.

“Well,” his dad says gently, “that’s why I didn’t say anything.”

“So you’re not going to arrest him?” Stiles asks quietly.

“No,” his father says, shaking his head. “I’m not going to ruin his life just because the two of you were young and stupid.”

“Thanks, Dad,” Stiles whispers.

“That doesn’t mean I want you seeing him anytime soon,” his dad adds, a warning note to his voice.

Stiles laughs shakily. “Don’t worry about that,” he says. “I don’t plan on seeing him ever again.”

Lydia invites him to sit with her and her friends for lunch the next day. People still stare at him, but it’s easier to ignore them when he’s got other people to talk with; none of Lydia’s friends ask him a single question about the baby. He wonders if Lydia said something to them. Cora doesn’t say a word to him, which he’s grateful for, though she spares him a brief smile as he joins the table.

Scott’s back at school the next day, and Stiles couldn’t be more relieved. He hasn’t seen Scott since over Thanksgiving break—he’s been busy with his part-time job at the vet’s office. Stiles is so glad to see him he has to stop himself from rubbing up against Scott’s side, catching himself right before he does it, his cheeks flooding with color. Scott gives him a weird look and Stiles tries to save face by looping an arm around his shoulders instead. Some of the tension he hadn’t even been aware he’d been holding in his shoulders bleeds away when Scott laughs.

“You’re not really doing much to dispel the rumor that I’m your baby daddy,” Scott says, the corners of his eyes crinkling up as he laughs.

“Don’t care,” Stiles says cheerfully, simultaneously pressing a loud kiss to Scott’s cheek and flipping off a gaggle of freshmen boys staring at them. “You’re a lot better than the real one.”

The inevitable question comes during lunch. Stiles waves off Lydia’s invitational look—to Scott’s apparent bewilderment—so that he and Scott can regroup after not seeing each other for a week.
Stiles is just biting into his first hamburger—the lunch lady had given his stomach a sharp look and then piled two extra burgers on his plate, and who’s he to turn down extra food?—when Scott says, “Did you think about it?”

The food in Stiles’ mouth suddenly tastes like ash. “Yeah,” he says, because he did, in all honestly, spend a lot of time thinking about Derek over the break. “I don’t want to talk to him.”

Scott frowns at him. “You sure?”

“Yes,” Stiles says irritably. “I’d appreciate if you’d stop asking, all right?”

Scott hesitates before he asks, “Did something happen?”

Stiles sets his burger down with a sigh. “He knows it’s his,” he admits quietly. “My dad knows it’s his. It’s been kind of a shitshow.”

Scott’s eyes go wide. “What happened?”

“He showed up at the house, I told him to fuck off, Dad came home,” Stiles says.

Scott winces. “Was your dad mad?”

“You could say that.” Stiles sighs. “He’s not going to arrest him, though.” His eyes flicker to Lydia’s table, where Cora’s laughing with her friends, but it doesn’t look like she’s heard him.

“Oh,” Scott says softly.

Stiles looks down at his lunch tray, his appetite gone. “Look,” he says. “I know you think you’re trying to help, and I really appreciate it, but can you not mention him again? He’s out of here, all right, and I just—I want to move on. I’ve got you and I’ve got my dad, and that’s all I need.”

“Yeah, dude,” Scott says, his dark eyes soft. “Of course.” He clears his throat roughly. “You want to come over tonight? I don’t have to work.”

Stiles shakes his head, one side of his mouth quirking up in a grin. “Dad and I have plans.”

They do: his dad’s home when Stiles gets back from school, and they order the biggest, greasiest pizza the local pizzeria offers, and watch bad monster movies on SyFy until his dad falls asleep, head tipped back and snoring. It’s a good Friday; Stiles always likes spending time with his dad, but they don’t get time together nearly often enough, and it hasn’t escaped Stiles’ notice that his dad’s been working more lately. Stiles knows it’s because of the baby. His dad makes a little less than fifty thousand a year, and while it’s never been a struggle and they’ve always lived comfortably, it’s not like they have a lot of extra cash lying around. With a third person added to the household, things are going to get tight.

With a guilty wrench of his heart, Stiles slinks away upstairs and, after sitting on his bed for a minute, pulls from his backpack the stack of pamphlets Ms. Morrell gave him. He shuffles through them slowly, heart heavy as he takes everything in; the GED program for teenage mothers, support groups, free counseling, free day care, parenting classes. Stiles has to shut his eyes for a moment, overwhelmed, before he can continue.

There’s one booklet toward the bottom of the pile he pauses over: *Navigating Pregnancy: Omega Male Edition*. Stiles’ eyes flicker toward the hall but the house is silent, his father still asleep downstairs. He puts the other pamphlets aside and gets under his comforter, making himself comfortable before he opens the slim booklet. He reads silently, eyes flickering over the diagrams of
growing fetuses. He looks at his own stomach, carefully pulling up his shirt and rubbing a gentle hand over the growing bump on his stomach. The most he’s done to prepare himself is download an app to his phone that gives him a weekly fetus size comparison to a vegetable; this week, it’s a sweet potato.

On the back of the booklet is a brief section called *Omega Pregnancy Without Alpha Support*, and Stiles’ stomach drops as he reads:

> If possible, an effort should be made to maintain a positive connection between omega and siring alpha. The chemical bond between omega, alpha, and offspring is incredibly strong, particularly amongst werewolves, who bear the additional bond of the pack connection. The lack of the alpha’s presence in a pregnant omega’s life can cause emotional and physical distress and, in some extreme cases, may even endanger the life of the offspring.

> If the omega is unable to maintain a positive connection with their siring alpha, the above side effects may be alleviated through the presence of another alpha who shares a strong, pre-established bond—platonic, familial, or otherwise—with the omega. Doctors may also prescribe suppressants similar to those used to stifle heat symptoms, which scramble the chemical signals between alpha and omega, and suppress inborn instincts related to mating and child-rearing.

That’s all it has to say about the matter. Stiles hangs his arm over the side of his bed, letting the booklet fall to the floor, an uneasy feeling clutching at his stomach. He wants to scoff at the stupidity of it, but...it kind of makes sense, probably explains why he had to fight the urge to rub up against Scott yesterday. He’s got this itching in his bones he’s been trying to ignore for weeks, this craving for Derek he just can’t seem to shake. He tries not to remember how Derek’s hand had felt against his cheek, the first time they’d touched since Derek left for school, but in that split second he’d felt right for the first time in weeks.

Stiles slowly reaches for his phone, thumbing it open and pulling up his text messages. He deleted Derek’s number weeks ago, yes, but he hasn’t deleted the brief conversation they had the month before, the picture of Derek’s Halloween costume and Stiles pretending he didn’t know who Derek was. His thumb hovers over the screen, fighting a battle inside his head as his body tries to give in to what he so desperately wants. Because that’s the thing: despite everything, despite having a baby growing inside him, he still wants Derek. It’s not all instinct, either; he doesn’t just want a protector—that’s what his instincts want. Stiles still wants Derek as a person, wants to date, wants to cuddle, wants to share secrets and stupid jokes.

His mind wins: Stiles’ fingers uncurl and his phone goes clattering to the floor. He flips onto his other side, eyes burning.

He hates Derek Hale.

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Stiles goes out that weekend, drives into town and makes his way to Barnes and Noble, where he steels himself at the bottom of the escalator before heading upstairs to find the books on pregnancy. He’s prepared; he did his homework and made a list of all the bestsellers on Amazon, but he still gets lost there for over an hour, flipping through book after book. At some point, he starts to get a headache, feeling a little overwhelmed; there’s so much more to this than he realized.

A woman comes down the aisle as he stands there, her eyes moving over the shelves on fitness across from him, though she pauses when she sees him. Stiles doesn’t notice her until she reaches around him and plucks a slim volume off the shelf in front of him. He jerks backward, startled, confused when she holds the book out to him.
“This was my favorite,” she tells him, her voice warm.

“Oh,” Stiles says, taking the book. “Um. Thank you.”


“Oh,” Stiles says again. He blinks. “You think?”

“I know,” the woman says, winking. She pats him on the shoulder as she moves past him. “Congratulations.”

Stiles stares after her, his lips parting. Congratulations. No one else has said that to him. Everyone else, including him—they’ve all been treating it like a fatal illness, offering comfort and assistance like he’s dying, and they want to make his last days as comfortable as possible. Stiles breathes in deeply, straightening his spine as he looks down at his stomach.

“You’re not a mistake,” he says firmly, and snatches his pile of books up off a shelf, new determination flooding him.

He ends up down in the cafe, sipping a hot chocolate—because he’s not supposed to have coffee; he knows that much—and flipping through one of the books he’d bought. He’s just about to turn to the section on the relationship between alpha and omega parents, anxious and a little scared to learn more, when he realizes someone’s standing next to his table, and he looks up to see Ms. Blake, his English teacher, standing there.

“Oh,” Stiles says, surprised to see her. “Hi.”

“Sorry,” she says. “I didn’t mean to startle you.”

“No, uh, it’s fine,” Stiles says.

Ms. Blake smiles at him. “Find some good reading material?”

“Oh,” Stiles says, his cheeks coloring as she picks up one of the books in his stack. “Just, um. Research. You know.”

“Oh, I’m sorry,” Ms. Blake says hurriedly, setting the book back down. “I didn’t mean to pry.”

“It’s all right,” Stiles sighs. “Seems like I’ve been getting that nonstop lately.”

Ms. Blake makes an apologetic noise and says, “Well, I was just going to get a drink, so I’ll leave you be.”

“Nah,” Stiles says. “I mean, you can sit if you want. It’s kind of crowded in here.” He’s not really sure why he says it; he only knows Ms. Blake from school, never even spent a free period in her classroom or anything, but maybe he thinks about what Ms. Morrell said about finding someone who wasn’t his dad or his best friend to trust. Maybe it’s because she’s an omega too, and he doesn’t meet a lot of them. And whatever—he’s just being polite; the cafe is crowded, and the employees don’t like it when people take drinks into the store.

Ms. Blake smiles at him. “If you don’t mind,” she says. Stiles nods, and he watches her set her bag in the chair opposite him, then walk off through the cafe to order. He pulls out his phone and fiddles with it, checking the time and Facebook, but there’s nothing new. He flips over to his message app, which is still open to the month-old conversation—if it could even be called that—between him and Derek. He stares dejectedly at the picture Derek had sent him, acutely missing the intimacy of
Then, as he’s staring at the screen, Stiles is startled to see a new text balloon pop up, the grey ellipsis indicating Derek’s typing something. Stiles stares at the notification intently, his heart beating loud in his chest. He doesn’t know what to expect Derek to say—doesn’t know what he wants Derek to say. The bubble sits there for what seems like years, never changing to an actual message.

“Come on,” he mumbles, gripping his phone so hard his hand gets sweaty.

“Everything okay?”

Stiles looks up quickly, his cheeks flushing again when he sees Ms. Blake sitting down across from him. Stiles smiles, though it’s more of a grimace, and shoves his phone in his pocket with the notification bubble still showing nothing. “Fine;” he mumbles.

Ms. Blake watches him for a moment, and then pulls a book from her bag, flipping it open to a spot marked with a slip of paper. Stiles, relieved, takes the cue and picks up his own book, gratefully submerging himself back into the world of overwhelming information about childbirth. He can’t help but check his phone, though, a couple minutes after Ms. Blake returns, and he’s disappointed to see there’s nothing: no text, no thought bubble indicating something’s coming. Whatever Derek was writing, he didn’t send it.

Stiles isn’t sure why he’s so disappointed by this; he’s the one, after all, who told Derek to leave him alone, and Derek’s respected that. It doesn’t lessen his want for Derek, though, and he hates that he can’t seem to let him go. Stiles sighs, shoving his phone back into his pocket, and picks up his book again.

“Was he your boyfriend?”

Stiles looks up again. Ms. Blake is watching him, taking a sip of her latte. “No,” he says dully. “We—we weren’t like that.”

“Are you excited?” Stiles gives her a confused look and she clarifies, “for the baby.”

“Oh.” Stiles looks down at his stomach involuntarily. “I, uh, I don’t know. I’m still trying to process it, to be honest.”

Ms. Blake smiles sympathetically. “It’s a lot to take in,” she says. “You’re keeping it, though? Or have you thought about adoption?”

“I haven’t been thinking about anything,” Stiles confesses. “I’m still—I don’t know.”

Ms. Blake takes another sip of her latte and adds, “I’m looking forward to my baby.”

“Oh, you’re—” Stiles’ eyes dart to her flat stomach, but she shakes her head, still smiling.

“I’m using a surrogate,” she says warmly. “I think our timing’s just about lined up with yours.”

“Oh,” Stiles says again. “Um. Congratulations?”

“Thank you,” Ms. Blake says with a smile. “And congratulations to you, too.”

Two congratulations in one day. Stiles scrounges up a weak smile and gathers his stack of books to his chest, saying, “I should head out.”

“Of course,” Ms. Blake says kindly. “I’ll see you on Monday, Stiles.”

Stiles checks his phone so many times that night that his dad threatens to take it away during dinner, but Derek never texts him. He doesn’t know whether to be relieved or disappointed.

He starts feeling...weird two weeks before Christmas. Since getting knocked up, Stiles hasn’t jerked off like, at all, which is odd for him; he was always good for multiple rounds with Derek, and jerked off a couple times a day without fail. But with everything that’s been going on, he hasn’t had the urge to touch himself in weeks which, according to all the books he got, is perfectly normal. This particular week, though, he starts getting that itch, and the first time he gets his hands on his dick and jerks off, it feels like heaven. Soon he’s back to doing it every day, multiple times a day if he can manage it.

It gets weirder, though; more than needing to jerk off, he’s got this craving for companionship. That itch for Derek is always there, but it’s getting worse, harder to ignore. Staying close to Scott helps immensely, but Scott’s not always around, and after a couple of days, even being away from him for a class period is rough. People have stopped paying as much attention to him over the past couple of weeks—though he still gets plenty of judgmental looks—but now they’re starting to look at him again, and some of them look...hungry.

"What the fuck is going on?" Stiles mutters during biology, where he’s basically pressed up against Scott's side. At the table across from them, Isaac Lahey’s so distracted staring at Stiles that their teacher has to call his name four times before he notices.

The tips of Scott's ears are pink when he whispers back, "You, um, kind of smell like you're in heat."

"What?" Stiles yelps. "But I can't be!" He really can't be; just like girls don't get their periods when they're pregnant, omegas don't go into heat. That's the point; they're already pregnant, so there's no biological need to attract a heat partner. It's been almost five months since Stiles has had a heat at this point, but Scott's words make everything snap into place because everything that's been happening to him, from the craving for companionship, to the itchy warmth under his skin, has always been an indicator of an oncoming heat in the past. It just doesn't make sense.

"Maybe you should go home," Scott says uneasily.

Stiles groans, burying his head in his hands. "This is not happening."

It's gotten worse by the next morning; Stiles is so dizzy he can barely stand, and his dad won't let him go to school, despite Stiles' protests. Stiles is mortified; he hasn't had to stay home because of a heat in over a year, and it shouldn't be happening. He yells this after his dad shuts Stiles' bedroom door behind him after dropping off a case of water, and his dad yells back that he's calling the damn doctor so will Stiles please just relax. Stiles does, only grudgingly, glaring out the window as his vision swims.

His dad comes back half an hour later with a solemn look on his face, bearing a plate of food for Stiles, which he hands off before sitting on the edge of his bed.

"I talked to your doctor," he says gently, and Stiles glares down at his lap, horrified by the way even his dad's alpha scent calms him. "Apparently this is what they call a pseudo-heat, and it happens sometimes to pregnant omegas who don't have an alpha. Your instincts want an alpha to take care of
you and the baby, and this is your body's way of trying to draw one in."

Stiles' vision starts to swim again, his eyes burning. "I hate this," he hisses. "I don't want this."

"I know, buddy," his dad sighs. "It'll pass in a couple days, but it's going to be rough."

Stiles blinks, a tear slipping down his cheek. "I hate him," he says, and they both know who he is.

"I know," his dad says again, squeezing his shoulder. "After this passes, we can put you on suppressants so it doesn't happen again."

That doesn't help the now, though. Stiles lay in bed with his head getting foggier and foggier, his dick hard and aching against his stomach because he refuses to touch it. He hates being an omega, always has, hates the way his heats make him feel so weak and useless. He cried his entire first heat, when it became clear he was an omega and not an alpha like his parents. He's never fit the omega stereotype; he's not quiet or demure or willing to stick his ass in the air and let himself be fucked. He's not some fucking rare delicacy, not an alpha's fuckhole. He misses Malia; she was an omega too and, just like him, she refused to let nature tell her what to do. And yet, now he's the picture of omega cliches, knocked up and burning for an alpha. He hates it, hates Derek for doing this to him.

The pseudo-heat gets worse. His thighs are dripping with slick, his whole body aching. When he finally gives in and touches himself, it only takes two pulls of his hand before he comes. The relief's only temporary; he gets a few minutes of clear thought, long enough to make himself eat a banana and chug a bottle of water, before it comes back with a vengeance, worse than before. His dad stays away; he's somewhere in the house, just in case something goes wrong—goes worse—but the heat's so strong that Stiles can't differentiate between alpha-family and alpha-mate, and neither of them want to make that horrifying bond.

Scott comes over the next day, when Stiles is almost incoherent, and his presence makes Stiles more lucid, but also drives his instincts haywire. It's a struggle to balance what's going on in his body; Scott mostly sits over by the window while they watch a couple of movies, and the distance is enough to leave Stiles somewhat soothed, but not cross any boundaries. When he has to give in and jerk off, he has enough strength to shuffle off down the hall and do it in the bathroom, even managing to take a shower at some point.

The heat should start to taper off the next day but, if anything, it grows worse. Even Scott's presence does little to soothe him then; by the late afternoon, it feels like he can barely breathe, shaking through wave after wave of heat. All he can think about, all he wants, is Derek, but he can’t—he won't say anything. The last thing he sees, before the heat consumes him completely, is his dad leaning around his bedroom door to talk to Scott, his face etched deep with worry.
The day of Derek’s last final exam, Laura shows up with a U-Haul trailer attached to the back of her SUV. Derek’s spent the last two weeks packing, and they have the apartment cleared out in a matter of hours. Derek follows Laura back to Beacon Hills, and when they get to the house, Laura gives him a hug that goes on for a long time.

He spends the next week alone at the house, not really sure what to do with himself. Cora’s off at school, and Laura says he’s welcome to come to work with her, but he’s not sure he can sit in an office all day. He goes for runs in the woods instead, and hangs out at the library and tries not to remember the time he and Stiles fucked in the basement. He’s managed to compress the ache in his chest to just a dull pin prick; he never would have gotten through his finals otherwise. It’s hard now that he’s back in town, though, knowing Stiles is so close and yet has no desire to see him.

Derek knows he should stay away from Stiles and he does, for the most part, even though it pains him to do so. The night of the full moon hits him hard, though, and he slips out of the house after Laura and Cora have gone to bed, running the long miles to the Stilinski house. He climbs onto the roof—from the direction of the woods, not from the road—and settles onto the slope above Stiles’ room. He closes his eyes and listens to the sound of Stiles’ heart beating steadily beneath him—and below it, very faint and much faster, the sound of their baby’s heartbeat. Derek’s own heart skips a beat when he hears it and recognizes it for what it is. It takes everything in him to stay where he is, knowing that Stiles will never want him back if he breaks into the house to see him. He’s broken enough boundaries as it is.

Still. He wonders if Stiles knows the sex yet, if he’s seen the baby on an ultrasound. Maybe there’s a picture of it stuck on their fridge. He thinks about texting Stiles sometimes, goes so far as entering text a couple times—stupid stuff like is everything going all right and how’s school—but he doesn’t send it. He knows Stiles doesn’t want to hear from him, and he’s going to have to learn to deal with it.

Derek’s been home for two weeks when Laura comes into his room late one evening, a frown furrowing her brow. Derek looks up from his computer irritably. “Can’t you knock?”

“Is there any reason why Scott McCall would be asking me for your number?” she says, instead of answering Derek’s question.

Derek stares at her blankly. “Who?”

“Scott McCall,” Laura repeats. She’s holding her phone in her hand and shakes it at him. “The omega werewolf in town? Stiles’ best friend?”

Derek’s mouth drops open. “No, I don’t—unless there’s something wrong with Stiles—”

Laura’s face softens. “That’s what I wondered,” she says, unlocking her phone and swiftly tapping out a message. “There, he—”

Derek’s phone lights up almost immediately, buzzing with an incoming phone call. It’s an unknown number, but the area code’s local. “Scott?” Derek says to Laura, who leans in to see. She nods sharply and Derek picks up his phone, tapping the answer call button. “Hello?”

“Hi,” says a voice on the other line—male, uncertain and hushed, like he’s whispering. “Derek?”
“This is Derek,” Derek says, frowning up at Laura. “Scott?”

“Yeah,” Scott whispers. “Um. He’d kill me if he knew I was calling you, but Stiles, uh—”

“What?” Derek says sharply. “What’s wrong?”

“Well,” Scott says hesitantly. “He’s, um. In heat.”

Derek stares blankly at Laura, who gives him a bewildered look. “How?” Derek asks, perplexed.

“It’s not, uh, a real heat, I guess?” Scott sounds confused himself. “But it should have broken by now and it hasn’t. His dad’s going to take him to the hospital if it hasn’t broken by tomorrow morning.”

“And?” Derek presses slowly, his mouth dry. “Why are you calling me?”

Scott hesitates for a long moment, then says grudgingly, “Because it’s really hurting him, and I think you might be the only person who can make him better.”

Derek looks at Laura, who nods and mouths Go. He swallows as he gets to his feet. “I’m on my way.”

“Okay,” Scott says. “And—come through his window, okay? His dad doesn’t know I’m calling you.”

“Okay,” Derek says, and hangs up. He looks at Laura, his heart beginning to race. “Is this a good idea?”

Laura bites her lip. “Probably not,” she admits, “but if he’s in trouble, you’ve got to do something. Just—be careful.”

Derek exhales slowly. “I will. I—I’ll see you.”

Laura nods. Derek speeds out of the house, but he’s careful to stick to the speed limit as he drives toward the Stilinski’s neighborhood, not wanting to get pulled over again. He parks in the usual place a couple blocks away and sprints through the trees to the house, scrambling up onto the roof as quietly as he can. The window’s open and Derek almost reels; he can smell Stiles from where he is, his scent burning with the smell of his heat. The McCall kid’s standing by the window—Derek recognizes him from the bonfire, and from pictures scattered around Stiles’ room. He’s waiting for Derek, a frown on his face, but Derek’s looking past him to the bed, where Stiles—Stiles is on his stomach, stripped down to his boxers, hips grinding mindlessly against the bed. Derek can hear him panting, hear his heart pounding, and it sets Derek on fire, instincts flooding him—the need to care for him, to protect and look after him.

He’s scrambling through the window before he realizes it, attention fixed on Stiles, but then Scott steps in front of him and Derek can’t help it—Scott’s an alpha-type like him, a beta werewolf like him—a threat, a rival. He snarls furiously, the noise ripping out of his chest, and Scott shoves him backward, his eyes flaring gold.

“Shut up,” Scott growls. “Do you want Stiles’ dad to hear you?”

Derek glares at him, but doesn’t say anything, eyes flickering to Stiles, fangs pressing at his gums.

“I want you to understand,” Scott says, his voice low and angry. “You’re here because you fucked up, okay? This wouldn’t be happening if it wasn’t for you.”
Derek bites back another snarl. “You think I don’t know that?” he hisses. He tries to move around Scott but Scott blocks him again.

“You don’t get it,” Scott says furiously. “The way people look at him like he’s an idiot. Like he’s some kind of freak. The way people talk about him—he pretends it’s okay, but it’s crushing him. He liked you for so long and—” Scott cuts himself off, his cheeks going pink. Derek stares at him, open-mouthed. Stiles liked him before all this? Before they’d even hooked up? “Don’t ever tell him I told you that,” Scott says fiercely.

“It doesn’t matter,” Derek says sullenly. “He doesn’t want me now. He pushed me away.”

“What else do you expect?” Scott retorts. “He’s seventeen and pregnant. What would you do if people took one look at you and judged you for a mistake?”

“I tried,” Derek snaps. “I told him I’d help him and he said he didn’t want my help!”

Scott blinks at him, surprise flooding his features. “He never said that.”

Derek’s shoulders slump wearily. “He’s stubborn. You probably know that better than I do.” He sighs. “I know I made a mistake, but I want to make up for it and he won’t let me—so just let me do this, please.”

Scott hesitates, then steps aside, head turning to watch Stiles with worry. “Okay,” he says. “Just—nothing below the waistband.”

Derek nods. He wouldn’t anyway, even without Scott there, even as much as he wants to, because Stiles can’t consent like this. He approaches the bed carefully, breathing in greedy lungfuls of Stiles’ heat-lush scent, and sinks down on the edge of the bed. Stiles is pressed flat to the mattress, face mashed into his pillow, hair damp with sweat. His legs are spread, hips rutting into the mattress, the seat of his underwear almost translucent from the slick leaking out of him; it’s shining on the backs of his thighs, soaking the sheets beneath him.

Derek swallows tightly, jerking his eyes away from Stiles’ ass, and collects himself before reaching out slowly, touching the tips of his fingers to the taut stretch of skin between Stiles’ shoulder blades. His skin’s slick with sweat and feels like it’s on fire, but he jerks when Derek touches him, a whine slipping between his gritted teeth.

Derek leans in, aware of Scott still standing by the window, watching them, and murmurs, “Stiles?”

He gets a pained noise in response, Stiles shaking under his hand. Derek moves his hand to Stiles’ shoulder and gently rolls him onto his back. He has to grit his own teeth, fighting the flood of instincts that rush through him, his brain howling that his mate’s in distress. But Stiles is not his mate; Derek has no claim to him. All he can do is comfort Stiles as best as he can—and without touching him in any way that’s remotely sexual, which is a lot harder now that Stiles is on his back and Derek can see how hard he is, tenting the front of his boxers. The swell of his stomach is obvious like this, and Derek has to swallow hard before he can jerk his eyes away, focusing on Stiles’ face.

Stiles’ eyes are open, but he doesn’t seem to see Derek, his gaze unfocused. There’s sweat beading on his upper lip, his hair clinging to his forehead, mouth open as he pants, struggling to breathe. Derek bites down on his lip and reaches out slowly, brushing the damp hair off Stiles’ forehead.

“Stiles,” he repeats quietly, cupping Stiles’ cheek in his palm. “Hey.” He feels self-conscious, knowing Scott’s watching and listening, but Stiles’ wellbeing is more important than Derek’s pride. “I’m here.”
Stiles exclaims with a shudder, eyes settling half-shut as he presses his cheek into Derek’s hand. Derek takes a deep breath and leans forward to press their foreheads together, ignoring a warning growl from Scott. Gradually, Stiles stops shifting around underneath him, his hips slowing their restless hunt for release.

“I’ve got you,” Derek murmurs, and Stiles makes an odd crooning noise, lifting his arms and curling them around Derek’s shoulders. Derek’s breath hitches; he’s not sure Stiles knows what he’s doing but Derek doesn’t dare—greedily doesn’t want—to break the embrace. He’s careful not to push it, to not drop on top of Stiles like he wants to, shove his face against his neck. He’s hard and uncomfortable in his jeans, but he makes no effort to ease his discomfort, all his attention focused on Stiles and the way his body’s slowly going lax. After a few long minutes, Derek carefully sits up, but keeps a hand pressed to Stiles’ cheek and begins to pull at Stiles’ pain, grimacing as dark lines begin to flow up his arms like veins.

“Wh—” Scott takes a startled half-step forward. “What are you doing?”

Derek glances at him in surprise. “Taking his pain. You don’t know how?”

Scott looks a little embarrassed. “No one ever taught me.”

Derek says, “Laura will teach you, if you ask,” and turns his attention back to Stiles.

Pulling the pain has helped; Stiles’ breathing has already started to ease, some of the tension leaving him. Derek looks around until he spots a half-empty case of water sitting on the floor; he leans over and grabs a bottle, twisting it open. Stiles makes a wounded noise at the loss of Derek’s touch, but Derek’s back within seconds, carefully lifting his head and pressing the bottle to Stiles’ lips. Stiles drinks eagerly, pulling in long gulps, emptying the bottle in seconds. Derek tosses it aside, but he doesn’t break contact with Stiles, running his hand through Stiles’ sweaty hair, a thrill going up his spine at the quiet noise Stiles makes. He tells himself it doesn’t mean anything—Stiles doesn’t even know he’s here—but still, something tight inside his chest eases. It feels right to be here, taking care of him.

He sighs quietly and shifts to a more comfortable position on the bed, his hip just touching Stiles’. Derek wishes he could lie with him, curl himself around Stiles, put his hand on Stiles’ stomach and listen to their baby. He knows that would be going too far, though—it’s bad enough that he’s even here when Stiles doesn’t want him around—but now that he’s here, surrounded by Stiles’ scent and feeling the heat of his body, he craves it. And what of what Scott had just said, about Stiles liking him for so long? How long was so long? Months? Years? Why hadn’t Stiles said anything?

It’s a couple hours before Stiles seems to fall into sleep without ever registering that it’s Derek who’s sitting with him, though he reaches out to touch Derek occasionally, his fingers brushing against Derek’s wrist. By the time he falls asleep, his breathing’s steady and the worst of his heat seems to have broken. Scott’s settled into Stiles’ computer chair, dozing quietly. Derek knows he should leave out to touch Derek occasionally, his fingers brushing against Derek’s wrist. By the time he falls asleep, his breathing’s steady and the worst of his heat seems to have broken. Scott’s settled into Stiles’ computer chair, dozing quietly. Derek knows he should leave now that Stiles doesn’t want him around—but now that he’s here, surrounded by Stiles’ scent and feeling the heat of his body, he craves it. And what of what Scott had just said, about Stiles liking him for so long? How long was so long? Months? Years? Why hadn’t Stiles said anything?

Eventually, though, Derek knows he needs to leave. It’s early in the morning hours, but the sheriff’s moving around downstairs, and Derek knows he’s been lucky that the sheriff hasn’t popped his head in to check on Stiles yet. Derek stands slowly, unbending his stiff knees, watching Stiles carefully to make sure he doesn’t wake with the movement. He takes a step toward the window and then pauses, eyes flickering toward Scott. There’s something he can do, he thinks, to help in the future, even if he
can’t be there.

Derek moves quietly, stripping off his henley. He tugs off the t-shirt underneath, then pulls his henley back on. With another cautious look at Scott, Derek tucks his t-shirt under Stiles’ pillow, careful not to wake him. It might help if Stiles ever needs his scent. At the back of his mind, a greedy part of Derek hopes Stiles does—hopes Stiles wakes up craving him, wanting him. He wants to take one of Stiles’ shirts in exchange, press it to his nose and soothe that empty hole in his chest, but that’s taking it too far.

He leaves before he makes a mistake, silently pulling himself through the window and out into the cold morning air—air that smells like winter, and nothing like Stiles.

*It’s for the best,* he tells himself, and disappears into the darkness.

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Derek doesn’t hear from Scott again, which he hopes means that Stiles recovered from his heat just fine. Derek also doesn’t hear from Stiles after that night, which means he probably has no idea Derek ever came over to his house, and that’s—it’s a little disappointing, if Derek’s being honest with himself, but it’s probably for the best. Or if he does remember, he’s not saying anything, and that says enough in itself.

It’s not a good couple of weeks. Christmas is never a good time in the Hale household; the fire occurred two days before the holiday, and none of them like celebrating it any more. Besides that, Cora and Lydia have some kind of argument that ends in Cora hanging around the house, brooding so hard there’s an almost tangible storm cloud hovering over her shoulders. Laura loses a case she’s been working on for months, a struggling pack retaining custody of an omega orphan despite allegations of abuse, and the storm cloud in the house grows bigger. Derek doesn’t talk much to either of them, and he doesn’t talk about Stiles.

He does sneak out of the house several times to creep around outside the Stilinski house at night, hating himself for every moment he can’t stay away. Laura gives him dark looks in the mornings after, but Derek can’t seem to stop himself.

He slips on the roof one cold and rainy night a week before Christmas and nearly goes plummeting off the edge, barely catching himself on the gutter. He winces at the noise he’s made, and winces again when he hears the sheriff stir somewhere inside. Derek drops off the roof and disappears into the woods before any lights come on inside, but two days later he’s driving into town when the sheriff pulls him over. Derek watches him approach the car with an odd, zen-like calm as he thinks, *This is how I die.*

He hasn’t seen the sheriff since that day over Thanksgiving break when he’d gone to see Stiles at his house, and he’s scared. Derek’s parents raised him with a healthy respect for the law, and he knows—and the sheriff knows—that he’s committed a crime—multiple crimes, really—and the sheriff has every right to arrest him.

“Mr. Hale,” the sheriff says conversationally, leaning against the car door. “Pleasure seeing you. You know why I pulled you over?”

“No, sir,” Derek says, his mouth dry. That’s half lie, half truth; technically, he didn’t commit any traffic violations. Technically, he knocked up the sheriff’s underage son. He stares at his hands, folded in his lap.

“No?” the sheriff says. His friendly tone disappears when he says, “I heard you up on the roof, son. I
don’t care what you are, or what you aren’t to Stiles, but you do not get to stalk him. Understand?"

“Yes, sir,” Derek says quietly.

“I hope you do,” the sheriff says sharply. “I keep wolfsbane bullets in the house— remember that.”

Derek nods, keeping his eyes downcast.

“Good,” the sheriff says, rapping his knuckles against the roof of the car. “You have a good day.”

Derek jerks his head up to look at Stilinski, startled he’s not getting anything more than a stern talking-to, but the sheriff’s already walking back to his cruiser, shoulders hunched in the cold. Derek’s absolutely bewildered—he didn’t even get a ticket this time—but he’s not going to push his luck. Far from it; he’s careful to stay exactly at the speed limit the rest of the way into town, using his blinker at every turn.

It’s probably a sense of guilt, and gratitude toward the sheriff that makes him do what he does next; he goes to CVS and buys a nice card—non-denominational, because he’s got this vague feeling Stiles might have mentioned being Jewish—and then he goes to the bank and withdraws two thousand dollars in one hundred dollar bills. He sits in the bank parking lot for a while, the card open on his knees, while he tries to figure out what to write. I want to help, is what he settles on, and he shoves the money inside the card and into the envelope.

The Stilinski house appears to be empty when Derek drives up; there’s no sign of the cruiser or Stiles’ jeep, which is something of a relief. He leaves the envelope tucked between the screen door and the storm door and drives away feeling a little better. It’s not much, but it’s a start.

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Two days before Christmas, Derek and his sisters go to the cemetery, each holding a bouquet of flowers. Laura puts hers on their mother’s grave, Derek’s on their father’s, and Cora places hers on their uncle Peter’s. They stand there together for a long time, Laura in the middle with her arms around their shoulders. It’s been five very long years.

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Christmas is low-key. They don’t get each other gifts, but they pile onto the couch in their sweatpants and watch It’s a Wonderful Life, which always makes Laura cry. She tries to be inconspicuous about it, subtly wiping the tears away on the sleeve of her sweatshirt, but it’s hard to be subtle in a room full of werewolves, and Derek and Cora tease her mercilessly about it.

It’s Derek’s birthday too, but he likes celebrating it just about as much as he likes celebrating Christmas, which is to say not at all. Still, he smiles when Laura pulls a store-bought cake from the pantry. It’s pretty good for a store-bought one, and he doesn’t even like cake all that much.

Derek’s in the kitchen with Laura in the early afternoon, making sandwiches for their post-cake lunch, when Laura lifts her head, frowning. “Someone’s coming down the road,” she says.

Derek looks toward the front door and hears it a moment later, the rumble of an engine, shocks creaking as a car bumps over the potholes in the driveway.

“I’ll check it out,” he says, leaving Laura in the kitchen. He has no idea who’s coming to see them on Christmas day. A nervous shock runs through him as he pulls open the front door; what if it’s the sheriff, come to arrest him? But it’s not the sheriff; Derek opens the front door to see a familiar blue Jeep barrelling up the driveway. His mouth falls open in surprise as he steps out onto the porch, just
as the Jeep skids to a halt behind Cora’s car.

Stiles has never come to the house—Derek’s not even sure how he knows where it is—and for a moment his heart soars because Stiles has come to him. The illusion’s shattered the moment Stiles tumbles out of his jeep and Derek sees the furious set of his mouth and the anger in his stride. Derek stops at the bottom of the porch steps, confused, his shoulders hunching up defensively as Stiles bears down on him.

“What the fuck,” Stiles says angrily, “is wrong with you?”

“What?” Derek says blankly, but Stiles is already reaching into the pockets of his jacket, pulling out handfuls of crumpled hundred dollar bills, which he throws furiously at Derek.

“I told you I don’t want your fucking money!” Stiles spits. “I don’t want your fucking pity, either!”

Derek blinks. “But I—”

“I’m not a charity case!” Stiles yells. “You don’t get to feel all fatherly just because you stuck your dick in me! It could have been anyone!”

Derek has to bite back a hurt snarl, the sound of his blood rushing in his ears at the thought of Stiles fucking someone else.

“Just get out of here,” Stiles says, and his voice wavers on the last word. “Go back to your stupid school and get your stupid degree. I was—I was fine before you came back.”

Derek takes half a step toward him, anger and hurt and want all spiraling inside him like a hurricane. “Shouldn’t you be better than fine?”

Stiles looks at him in shock, his big eyes wet, speechless for the first time since Derek’s known him.

Derek takes another step toward him. “Stiles, please,” he says softly. “I want you.”

Stiles reels like he’s been slapped, his eyebrows drawing together. He steps backward, away from Derek. “I don’t ever want to talk to you again,” he says, and Derek hears the skip of a lie in his heartbeat.

“Don’t go,” Derek says miserably. “Stiles—“

“I have to,” Stiles mumbles, and his heart stutters again. Stiles spins and half-runs back to his Jeep, hauling himself inside like he’s afraid Derek’s going to hunt him down. Derek doesn’t move, though; he watches Stiles drive off down the driveway, the hole in his chest growing deeper with every yard that separates them.

Laura’s standing in the hallway when Derek finally comes inside, numb with cold and misery. Cora’s next to her, and they step forward as one, wrapping Derek in a sympathetic embrace. Derek buries his face against Laura’s shoulder and closes his eyes. Yet another shitty birthday to add to the list.

-“I’m moving out,” Derek announces at dinner the following night.

Cora nods, unperturbed, and keeps eating, but Laura sets her fork down, a dangerous look coming
over her face. “Why?”

Derek shrugs. “I’d like my own space.”

“You were fine living here over the summer,” Laura points out.

“I knew that was temporary,” Derek replies. Laura’s getting angry, but he doesn’t understand why.

“I thought I’d move into Peter’s old loft at the apartment building—it’s still unoccupied.”

“You’ve been thinking about this,” Laura says coldly.

“Yeah,” Derek says, trying to keep his tone even. He’s not sure why she’s upset at him.

Laura stares at him for a long moment before she says, “You think if you have a place of your own, Stiles will want to move in with you?”

Cora drops her fork, her eyes going wide as she stares at first Laura, then Derek. Derek glares at Laura, his cheeks heating with embarrassment and anger. Maybe he’d been thinking—hoping—something along those lines, but fuck her for trying to use it against him.

“He’s not going to, Der,” Laura says, sounding patronizing and reasonable. “I heard what he said to you—”

“So fucking what?” Derek spits. “You’re the one who said I have rights. Maybe I want to make a space for my fucking baby.”

“And why can’t that space be here?” Laura challenges, her eyes flickering red.

“Because I want to be alone!” Derek snaps, frustrated. “What the hell is wrong with you lately? You made this huge deal about the baby being pack, and now you don’t want me to leave the house—it’s two fucking miles down the road, Laura. What do you think is going to happen?”

The scarlet in Laura’s eyes fades, only to be replaced by dark worry. “I don’t know,” she says, and this is suddenly no longer a fight. “I just—something bad’s going to happen, and I’m scared we’re not strong enough to fight it.”

Derek and Cora look at each other sharply. “What is it?” Cora asks.

Laura shakes her head, pushing away her plate. “I don’t know,” she repeats softly. “But things, out in the woods—they aren’t right. It feels empty out there. Like all the life’s being sucked out of it.”

“Is there something we can do about it?” Derek asks.

Laura shrugs. “I don’t know yet. I need to talk to Deaton.”

They’re quiet for a while, and then Derek says, “I’m still moving out.”

“I know,” Laura sighs. “I’m sorry for getting angry.” She combs her fingers through her hair, looking frustrated. “You want help?”

-Their uncle’s loft occupies the top floor of an apartment building the family owns downtown. It’s run by a management company now, and they have little to do with it, but Peter’s loft has been left unoccupied since the fire, everything inside exactly the way he’d left it that night. Before Derek can move in, they have to go through Peter’s stuff and decide if any of it’s worth keeping, which takes
almost a week. Laura keeps saying she doesn’t know why they haven’t done this sooner, but Derek knows; it’s surprisingly emotional, even five years after the fire, when the wound of their loss has healed over a little. They wouldn’t have been able to get through it earlier. It’s hard when they find a box of photographs full of pictures of family and their childhood; there was nothing salvageable from the house after it burned, no preserved memories like this.

Laura spreads them out over the dining table when they get home that night, and they’re all quiet for a long time, looking. There’s a picture of their parents getting married, a picture of Cora’s third birthday party, a picture of Peter and his boyfriend on the beach in Antigua. Derek stares at this one for a long time; Peter had been his best friend growing up, despite the ten years between them, but he’d grown unfamiliar and increasingly melancholy in the year before the fire, when his boyfriend had been killed in a car accident. Sometimes Derek wonders if the fire was actually an accident, or if Peter’s despair had grown too deep and he’d done something about it, but he’s never said anything to his sisters—it’s a moot point by now, anyway.

It’s worse when they’re cleaning out the closets, boxing up Peter’s clothes to donate, because Cora finds a blanket that smells like their parents—like pack. It hits all of them hard; the photographs are tangible, but this is intangible and fleeting, and it hurts to smell what they’ve missed for so long. They end up curled together on Peter’s couch under the blanket. Cora cries, her face pressed into Laura’s shoulder, while Derek slumps against Laura’s other side and stares up at the ceiling, his throat burning.

The only things Derek keeps are Peter’s books and the dining set, which belonged to their grandparents. Laura takes some stuff to the house, and the rest of it gets donated. Peter probably would have been pissed, Derek thinks. He always hated people getting into his stuff.

Derek spends the next week unpacking and settling in. It’s a good way to distract himself; he won’t be back in school for another week, and he doesn’t get a chance to think about Stiles until he lies down in bed, and then it’s all he can think about. He thinks about how angry Stiles was when he came to the house, and then the uncertainty that flickered over his face. Derek clings to that, hopes that maybe, someday, Stiles won’t look at him with such hatred in his eyes. There are two bedrooms in the loft; Peter used one as a sort of home office, but Derek lies in bed and thinks about repainting the walls, putting a crib in there. He hopes that Stiles will let him see the baby; Laura says he could sue for custody, but Derek doesn’t want to strongarm Stiles like that if he doesn’t have to. Stiles isn’t completely unreasonable, Derek thinks. Stubborn, sure, but he’ll understand that Derek needs to see their baby. He has to.

Since Derek was already living on his own at college, he’s already got most things he needs, but there’s always something missing, so he writes up a list and then puts off going to Target until the very last minute. He hates going there; the whole store reeks of plastic and stale popcorn, and the parking lot’s more akin to a demolition derby, where common sense seems to go out the window. Derek makes it into the store in one piece—despite nearly being t-boned by an ancient woman so petite she can barely see over the dash—and strides quickly through the store, gripping his list tightly.

He’s almost at the back when he gets distracted. He should have expected it, should have kept his eyes on the floor or fixed to the ceiling, but there they are: rows and rows of baby clothes. Derek looks around guiltily before he steps into the area, making sure there’s no one he knows nearby. He walks around in silence, staring at the tiny dresses, the tiny socks, the tiny hats. He stares at everything and wonders if, even though Stiles refuses to take his money, maybe he’d accept clothes, diapers—whatever Derek can buy to help. Or maybe he should bypass Stiles and give things to the sheriff, instead; Derek may not be his favorite person, but he’s more reasonable than Stiles is.
He's got his hand on a baby-blue onesie with tiny sheep all over it, fingering the soft fabric, when someone close by says, "Amazing how small everything is, isn't it?"

Derek jerks his head up and finds a brown-haired young woman standing on the other side of the rack, watching him with warm hazel eyes. "Uh," he says uneasy. "Yeah. I guess."

The woman—she's around his age, maybe a couple years older—smiles at him. "Are you expecting?"

Derek blinks. "No. Uh—no, not me. Just—someone I know."

"Well, congratulations to them," she says.

"I—thanks," Derek says.

"You look a little lost," she says, not unkindly. "Do you need help finding something?"

Derek looks around. "You work here?"

She laughs. "No, sorry. That probably sounded weird, huh? Sorry—I'll let you shop in peace."

"It’s fine," Derek tells her. The way she laughed at herself makes him relax a little. "This whole thing—it’s overwhelming."

"I understand that." She gives him a sympathetic smile, offering her hand over the rack between them. "I’m Jennifer."

"Derek," he says, shaking her hand. "Hi."

Derek doesn’t usually open up to people all that easily, but somehow he finds himself sitting with Jennifer—"Call me Jenn, please," she says with a smile—in the Target food court, sharing a bag of terrible almost-stale popcorn. He’s already learned that Jenn’s twenty-four, just three years older than him, and she teaches English at the high school, so she almost certainly knows who Stiles is. Derek almost asks her, but catches himself just in time, recognizing that it’s probably not in his best interest for her to connect him to Stiles.

"So, is it your partner who’s expecting?" Jenn asks him softly.

"Not…exactly," Derek says slowly. "He, uh—it wasn’t planned. He doesn’t want to see me."

"Oh," Jenn says quietly, understanding in her eyes. "I’m sorry."

Derek shrugs, misery clenching at his heart.

She watches him for a long moment and then says, "Do you want to get dinner sometime?"

Derek looks at her quickly. "You’re not, uh—" His eyes flicker to her left hand, but there’s no ring there.

"No," she says with a smile. "I’m not seeing anyone right now. My baby’s being carried by a surrogate."

Her heart does a funny thing there, stumbling in the sign of a not-quite lie, but Derek doesn’t say anything; it's not any of his business. And anyway, she’s asked him on a date and he—maybe he should accept. Maybe this is what he needs. Stiles clearly has no interest in him; maybe it’s time for
him to move on. It’s just dinner, right?

“Okay,” Derek says, scrounging up a faint smile. “Dinner sounds good.”

“Great,” Jenn says, and they swap phone numbers.

Derek drives home lost in thought. He’s not exactly sure how to feel about what just happened; on one hand, maybe this will be good for him. On the other, though, it feels like he’s betraying Stiles, which he knows is stupid; it’s not like they’re together, and even before all this happened, they made that stupid promise about not having to wait for each other. Derek shakes his head miserably. Stiles doesn’t want him. He’s going to have to move on at some point, and it might as well be now.

It’s not until Derek pulls into his parking spot at the apartment that he realizes he didn’t buy a single thing at Target and he has to go back, cursing colorfully the entire way.

- A week later, Derek’s pretty much settled into the apartment. It’s different living there, not like living at the house at all. The house is new, only five years old, and it still smells like it sometimes, lived in but not, not like the old house was, mellow with decades of life. This places smells like Peter and pack—Derek’s grandparents, his mom’s parents, had lived here when Derek’s great-aunt was alpha and her family lived in the big house. Derek thinks eagerly about bringing the baby here, introducing the scent of new pack. He knows he shouldn’t get his hopes up like that, but it’s hard to stop himself from dreaming.

Three days before he’s supposed to start classes at Beacon Hills Community College, Derek’s heat starts rolling in. It makes him irritable, and he doesn’t particularly want to leave the apartment, but Laura calls him up that morning and offered to buy him lunch if he wants, and Derek wants everything right now—steak, hamburgers, pizza; if it’s greasy and full of carbs, he’ll eat it. He doesn’t go entirely willingly; Laura’s going to roll her eyes when she sees him in sweatpants, but his skin’s starting to feel sensitive and itchy, and he doesn’t want to deal with jeans.

Laura’s office is located in a quiet business plaza, tucked between a lawyer and a doctor’s office. Derek sits in the car with the window down for a while; it’s cold, but it feels good on his skin. He puts off going into Laura’s building until the very last minute, knowing it’s going to be too warm in there, like always; Laura’s office manager is a tiny, old beta from the next county over who’s always complaining about how she can’t feel her toes.

Derek’s halfway down the walkway to Laura’s building when the door to the doctor’s office swings open and Stiles steps out. Derek spots him immediately, his head coming up sharply, nostrils flaring as he tries to catch Stiles’ scent. Stiles doesn’t notice him, his head down as he looks at his phone. Derek stops where he is, awkwardly frozen as he frantically tries to figure out what to do. He could turn around, but Stiles would surely notice the movement. He could put his head down and just walk past him, but he needs to do it fast, because he’s getting more and more of Stiles’ scent with every step he takes toward Derek, and it’s setting him on fire. This is the last thing he needs, already toeing at the edge of his heat.

Derek takes one step forward, ready to fast-walk past Stiles, but the movement’s a mistake; Stiles’ head snaps up, and Derek’s hurt by the anger and alarm that goes flashing across his face.

“Are you stalking me?” Stiles demands.

“No!” Derek says, insulted. “I’m—Laura’s office is right there.”
He points, and Stiles turns to follow his finger, mouth turning down in a scowl when he sees the sign by the door that says Hale Foundation | Orphaned Werewolf Support Network.

“Fine,” Stiles mutters.

“What are you—”

“That’s my doctor’s office,” Stiles says bluntly, hooking his thumb over his shoulder. “Well, I’ve got to—”

“Is everything okay?” Derek asks urgently, his eyes flickering to Stiles’ stomach. Has he gotten bigger? He must have; it’s been almost two weeks since Derek last saw him, but it’s hard to tell because he’s wearing a heavy winter jacket.

“Everything’s fine; it was just a check-up,” Stiles says. Derek sees him hesitate, his eyes flickering around the quiet plaza. He looks back at Derek, teeth digging into his bottom lip before he reaches into the pocket of his coat and pulls out a small piece of paper. He offers it to Derek. “Um. If you want to see—”

Derek takes a couple steps toward him, skin prickling at the nearness of Stiles, and takes the piece of paper. He freezes, staring down at the grainy black and white picture. “Is this—”

“Twenty-two weeks,” Stiles says quietly. Derek looks up at him sharply and doesn’t know how to interpret the expression he sees on Stiles’ face. He looks exhausted and sad and resentful and a whole other slew of emotions Derek can’t pick out. Stiles meets Derek’s eyes and draws in a slow breath before he says, “I found out today. It’s a girl.”

A girl, Derek thinks dazedly, a buzzing noise in his ears. They’re having a girl. He looks down at the picture of the ultrasound in his hand, and then back up at Stiles, his heart aching. He doesn’t know why he even bothers, because Stiles is just going to push him away again, but he reaches for Stiles anyway, fingers trembling, aching for him, missing him.

Stiles looks at his hand and sways and then, to Derek’s surprise, he steps forward, right into Derek’s space. He won’t meet Derek’s eyes now, staring fixedly at Derek’s chest, but his lips part, cheeks flooding with color when Derek tentatively touches his face. Stiles’ breathing’s picking up, but so is Derek’s, his heart hammering in his chest.

There’s warmth building under Derek’s skin, the want he always harbors for Stiles multiplied by a thousand in the face of his oncoming heat. This is dangerous, but Stiles is here, and for once he’s not pulling away, no—he’s got his hands clenched in Derek’s coat. Derek can feel him shaking. The urge to comfort him is so strong, Derek can’t help but lean in and brush his lips along Stiles’ hairline, where he tastes like stress and sweet pheromones. It sends a shudder down Derek’s spine; he wants Stiles so badly, wants to crawl inside of him and stay forever.

Stiles makes a low, miserable noise at his touch, his hands tightening in Derek’s coat, and that’s all the warning Derek gets before Stiles tips his chin up and kisses him. For one long moment, it’s perfect, Stiles’ mouth hot and wet and open against his, their noses knocking together in Stiles’ rush to kiss him. For one long moment, Derek gets to hold Stiles and feel wanted, one hand still cupping Stiles’ warm cheek. For one long moment, the ache in his chest disappears, the hole filled.

And then Stiles’ hands flatten against his chest, pushing him away. Stiles takes a step back, his eyes wide with horror, wiping at his mouth like he’s tasted something disgusting. Derek stares back at him, his heart sinking. He’s fucked up—but where, when? He didn’t misread the signals, unless—his heart drops to his stomach—unless his heat drew Stiles in like a moth to the flame.
“Stiles,” Derek says hoarsely, frantically. “Please—”

But Stiles turns and runs, his long legs flashing over the pavement like Satan himself is on his heels. Like he thinks Derek’s going to hunt him down. The thought’s enough to keep Derek where he is, though the wolf inside him howls to chase. He sways, miserable, and watches Stiles swing himself into his Jeep and go roaring out of the parking lot at a speed his father probably wouldn’t approve of.

Derek staggers over to the building and sinks down against the wall, his back to the cold brick. The pavement freezes his ass, but he’s grateful for it; his heat’s lapping at him in gentle waves now, like the outer rings of ripples on a pond. He waits out there, silent, until Laura steps outside the office, curling a scarf around her neck.

“Ready to go?” she asks, and then seems to really look at him. A frown passes over her face. “What’s wrong?”

“Everything,” Derek says miserably. He scrubs his hands over his face, sighing.

“Well,” Laura says, “let’s get you some lunch and you can tell me about it, if you want to.”

Derek doesn’t particularly want to talk about it, and Laura doesn’t push him. They go to a local diner and Laura orders a salad, then watches with amusement when Derek orders a steak, waffles, and biscuits and gravy.

He glowers at Laura after the waitress disappears. “What.” She just shakes her head, smiling faintly. Laura’s finished eating and Derek’s halfway through his second vanilla malt milkshake before he feels settled enough to reach into his pocket and pull out the piece of paper Stiles had left him with, pushing it across the table to Laura. She picks it up curiously, and then her face goes pale. “Der,” she breathes. “Is this the—”

“A girl,” Derek says quietly, and Laura looks up at him with her eyes wide and wet.

“Where did you—“

“Apparently, Stiles’ doctor’s office is right next to yours,” Derek says.

“You saw him,” Laura says. “He gave you this?”

Derek nods.

“That’s why you’re upset?” Laura asks, her tone softening. “Because you saw him?”

Derek nods again. It’s close enough. He’s not going to tell her about the kiss. He can’t believe he was that stupid. He’ll be lucky if the sheriff doesn’t hunt him down and arrest him on assault charges.

Laura reaches across the table and curls her hand over his, squeezing his fingers gently. She doesn’t say anything, but she doesn’t have to; the expression on her face says _we’ll get through this together._ Derek wants to believe her. They always have.
Stiles

Stiles doesn’t blame his dad for what happens on Christmas. Christmas is usually pretty low key at the Stilinski house; he and his dad sleep in late and exchange a couple presents—though Stiles feels guilty because his dad definitely spent way more money on Stiles than he should have this year, buying him things for both himself and the baby—and then they veg out for most of the day, still in their pajamas. His dad makes way too much food, and Stiles is just lying on the couch, one hand on his stomach as he wonders if he’s got any more room for more pierogies, when his dad raises a finger in the air and says, “Just wait a minute. I almost forgot.”

Stiles turns his head, watching with interest as his dad disappears into the den and comes back with a red envelope in his hands. “Found this stuck in the door the other day,” he says, handing it to Stiles. “I figured Scott must have left it here.”

“Oh, thanks.” Stiles says, taking the envelope. He flips it over curiously, a frown furrowing his brow when he sees the word Stiles written on it. That’s not Scott’s handwriting. He can’t think of anyone who’d leave him a card except—oh no. No. He swallows hard, trying to hide the irritation on his face, because his dad’s smiling down at him, thinking he’s done a good thing. “I’ll open it later,” Stiles says thickly. “It probably makes fart noises or something.”

His dad rolls his eyes and, to Stiles’ relief, sinks back down into his recliner. “You two,” he says, in a fond tone, “are trouble.”

Stiles gives his dad a weak smile, shoving the card under a throw pillow. He holds off on opening it for almost an hour, but when his dad gets up to use the bathroom, Stiles gives in; he sneaks upstairs, sits on the end of his bed, and rips the envelope open. He pulls open the card and his jaw drops as hundred dollar bills slither out of the card and across his knees.

“Jesus,” he hisses, scrambling to pick a few fallen bills off the carpet. Stiles counts it: two thousand dollars. For a couple long seconds, all he can do is stare at the money in his hands, more money than he’s ever had in his bank account. He could do so much with this; he could get everything he needs for the baby, could help his dad pay off the insurance deductible when he gives birth.

But then his eyes land on the card again and the single line written inside. I want to help.

Suddenly, Stiles is furious. He told Derek, he fucking told him to leave him alone. He’s not going to say anything else to anyone—his dad’s not saying anything—is this Derek’s idea of fucking hush money? No fucking way is Stiles going to take this.

He shoves all the money in the pockets of his hoodie, growing angrier by the second, and thumps downstairs to the front hall, slipping his shoes on.

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“Stiles?” his dad calls from the living room. “Where are you going?”

“Scott’s!” Stiles calls back, already halfway out the front door. He hears his dad protest, “But it’s Christmas!” but he doesn’t stop, striding to the Jeep and yanking the door open. His rage builds the entire way to the Hale house, clenching his teeth every time the Jeep jolts over a pothole in the private road through the woods. When he pulls up to the house and sees Derek standing outside, Stiles grins in savage triumph.

Every time he’s seen Derek since finding out about the baby, it’s been Derek catching him off guard, and Stiles is sick of feeling like he always has to be on his toes. It feels so good to yell at him; they’re
not in public, and he lets himself get loud, enjoying the feeling of being able to take the frustration and anger he’s been feeling since October and dump it all on Derek’s shoulders. See how he likes it.

Except...he didn’t expect Derek to look so hurt. He stands there with his shoulders hunched and hundred dollar bills scattered in the snow-dusted grass at his feet, and he says “Shouldn’t you be more than fine?” and Stiles feels like he’s been struck in the chest with a steel bar. He doesn’t want this; why did he come here? He didn’t think Derek would stand there with a pleading look on his face and say, “I want you.”

Stiles can feel his eyes burning. He has to get out of there, has to leave before he does something even stupider than all the things he’s done lately. Derek doesn’t chase him when he leaves, but part of Stiles wishes that he would. Prove he wants Stiles, prove he wants them.

Stiles has to pull over to the side of the road, press his forehead against the cool plastic of the steering wheel and squeeze his eyes shut. This is too much. He has no idea what he’s doing. It’s not too late; he could go back, talk to Derek—but no. This is his mess. Derek will go back to school in a week or two, and Stiles will be back to where he’s been all along, just him and the people he cares about most.

It seems like years pass before he straightens, scrubs his hands over his face, and continues the drive. His dad’s still sitting in the living room when Stiles comes inside, his hood tugged up over his head.

“Short visit,” his father remarks. Stiles just grunts and flops down on the couch. His dad glances over at him carefully, taking in the flush of Stiles’ skin and the dried tear tracks on his cheeks. Maybe he knows when to pick his battles, though, because he doesn’t say anything else, just tosses Stiles a candy cane, and Stiles slouches so deeply into the couch that he’s in danger of disappearing. He sucks moodily on the candy cane and tries not to think about the hurt on Derek’s face. He doesn’t need Derek. Stiles repeats this in his head like a mantra. He doesn’t need Derek. He can do this on his own.

- 

Stiles tells Scott about the money because he needs to tell someone, and Scott is his number-one confidant. Scott’s eyes widen when Stiles tells him about the card, but he doesn’t expect Scott to say “Maybe you should have kept it.”

Stiles stares at him indignantly. “Are you serious?”

“Yeah,” Scott says, looking a little uncomfortable. It’s a couple days after Christmas and they’re in Stiles’ bedroom. “I know you don’t want his help, but I mean...he gave it to you, and you’re going to need that money.”

Stiles narrows his eyes at Scott. He’s been acting weird ever since that pseudo-heat, and Stiles is pretty sure it has something to do with how one of Derek’s t-shirts ended up stuffed under his pillow. Stiles doesn’t remember anything from that night, and Scott hasn’t offered up any sort of information about it, but Stiles knows something happened. “Just whose side are you on?” he asks suspiciously.

He regrets saying it almost instantly; Scott looks immensely hurt. “Your side, dude, always,” he says softly. “But, I don’t know, don’t fuck up your life just because you’re trying to punish him.”

“I’m not!” Stiles protests.

“He said you refused his help,” Scott says, a little sternly.

“He said?” Stiles latches onto this. “When did you talk to him?”
“Uh,” Scott says blankly. Stiles frowns at Scott, who flushes and says, “I, um, saw him at the store?”

“Uh huh,” Stiles says, unconvinced. “And what, you had a real heart-to-heart in the bread aisle?”

“Maybe,” Scott winces. "Look, I just wouldn't be so fast to dismiss him, all right? I don't get the feeling that he's being so persistent just because he feels obligated to help you."

Stiles nods quietly, chewing at his lip as he remembers the plaintive way Derek had said I want you.

"Anyway," Scott says, leaning over the side of the bed to grab a large gift-wrapped box. "This is from me and my mom. I think she cleared out all of Babies-R-Us."

“Aw, dude, you guys didn’t have to get me anything,” Stiles sighs, opening the box to find it crammed full of baby clothes.

“Yeah, we did,” Scott says solemnly. “That’s what pack does.”

Stiles grins half-heartedly, leaning against him. “Thanks, man.” They’re quiet for a while, and then Stiles says, “I know you and Derek did something about my heat.”

Scott stiffens. “Uh,” he begins, but Stiles shakes his head.

“I’m not mad,” he says. “I just—I wanted to say thanks. For whatever you did.”

He feels Scott hesitate before he says, “I promise Derek didn’t do anything...um. Inappropriate.”

Stiles snorts. “He left room for Jesus, huh?”

“Yes,” Scott says firmly, and then ruins the effect by laughing. It doesn’t take long before Stiles joins in, laughing until he cries.

School starts back up two days after New Year’s. In some ways, it’s a relief; Stiles had been ready to go nuts being at the house all the time, even if he and his dad had managed to get two college visits done over the break. In other ways, though, it’s not so great. He’d thought that people might have gotten over the whole he’s-pregnant thing, but on the contrary; they’re staring harder than ever on the day classes start again.

“I don’t think I’ve ever seen teenagers look judgier,” he complains to Lydia during chemistry. “You know how high that bar that is? Teenagers judge everything.”

Lydia gives him a patient look—surprising, for her. “I think you’ve grown a bit,” she says pointedly.

“What?” Stiles asks blankly. Her eyes flicker down to his stomach. “Oh,” he says irritably. It makes sense, he supposes. He sees himself every day. It’s not like he’s going to notice himself getting bigger, only the fact that his clothes are getting increasingly harder to squeeze into.

From this side of New Year’s, though, a lot of things seem a lot closer. His due date, for one, and with that, the end of school, and... college? Part of him doesn’t even dare think about it—like how’s he supposed to manage that with a baby? Ms. Morrell pointed out that, if he didn’t feel ready for it in the fall, he could defer for a year, so Stiles has gone ahead and applied to all the schools he was looking at, but it’s still terrifying to think about.

Stiles wants to ask Lydia if she thinks it’s time for him to move up a shirt size, but Mr. Harris is giving him The Look, so Stiles puts his head down and gets to work on the day’s experiment.
There’s a new girl in English class.

“Why would anyone move in the last semester of senior year?” Stiles hisses at Scott, who shrugs, his eyes on the girl standing at the front of the room next to Ms. Blake. Stiles narrows his eyes at Scott, recognizing that dreamy look. “Oh no, dude, no. If you pull an Allison—“

“An Allison?” Scott repeats, giving him a bemused look.

“The pen thing!” Stiles hisses back, waving his own pen around.

Scott just gives him a smug smile as the girl—“Kira Yukimura,” she’d said with a nervous smile—settles into the seat in front of Stiles. He watches Scott lean across the row and say to her, “Hey, do you need a pen?”

Kira gives him a bewildered half-smile. “Um—I have one?” She looks even more bewildered when Stiles starts cackling with mirth at Scott’s disappointed look.

"If that's your idea of a good pickup line, you need to work on your game, my friend," Stiles says later, when they're in line for lunch. "It was second period; obviously she had a pen. What do you think she used during first period; spit?"

"Shut up," Scott says good-naturedly. "Unlike you, I can't just shake my butt around and attract people."

"True," Stiles grins, grabbing two slices of pizza and then, after a moment of reflection, two more. "The only good thing about being an omega is the power to attract alphas using only my butt, am I right?" he adds blithely, addressing the person next to him, who he recognizes a moment too late as Cora Hale.

She's been decidedly cold since he rejected her offer to join the pack after Thanksgiving, which—okay, that’s fair. He has ruined her brother's life, and it isn’t like she and Stiles were ever close in the first place. Still, it's been a little awkward because while Cora's been cold, Lydia's been much warmer. He and Scott sit at their table a couple of times a week and it's just—awkward, especially since Stiles suspects Lydia and Cora are dating, or, at the very least—and this Scott has reluctantly confirmed by scent—sleeping together. It's not like Stiles wants to be on her bad side.

Now, Cora just gives him an unamused and judgemental look that makes her look way too much like Derek. "Yeah," she says dryly. "I do know who you were fucking all summer."

"Er," Stiles says. "Uh—"

"Dessert!" Scott enthuses a little too loudly, dumping three cups of pudding onto Stiles' tray.

Cora's judgemental look only deepens. "You sure you should be eating like that?"

"Whatever," Stiles snaps. "Like you have any right to tell me what to do."

Cora’s mouth thins. “You’re right,” she says scathingly. “Like I want anything to do with you after the way you treated my brother.”

“Hey,” Scott says sharply.

Cora looks at Scott. “You’re no better,” she says coldly. “Laura’s gone out of her way to try to
welcome you to the pack and all she’s gotten in return is a big fuck you.”

“I never said—”

“Come on,” Stiles says, grabbing Scott’s arm. He glares at Cora. “I’m not hungry.”

“Bye,” Cora says, rolling her eyes. “Try to keep your flirting down a minimum, all right? You guys are making me sick.”

Scott tries to protest, but Stiles drags him out of the line and out into the cafeteria, where they thump themselves down at an empty table. Stiles glares when he sees Cora come out of the line, but she ignores him wholeheartedly, heading for the table where Lydia’s already sitting. “Why are all the Hales such huge assholes?”

Scott doesn’t answer him, and when Stiles looks at him, he finds a guilty expression on his face. “What’s wrong?”

Scott shifts around in his seat, looking uneasy. “Laura has been really nice to me.”

“So?” Stiles says. “You don’t want to join their pack.” Scott’s look of guilt deepens, and Stiles frowns at him. “You have told her that, right?”

“I told her I’d think about it,” Scott says. “And then I kind of just stopped answering her calls.”

“Oh,” Stiles says. He laughs weakly. “That is kind of rude, man.”

Scott scowls at him. “At least I haven’t made enemies out of their entire family.”

Stiles flips him off. Scott gives him a petulant look. “I was hungry, dude.”

“Suck it up, you big baby,” Stiles says flippantly. And then, because he does feel a little bad about depriving Scott of food, he nods toward the cafeteria doors as the new girl comes through them. “Hey. Ten o’clock.”

“Huh?” Scott spins around, a smile brightening his face as he spots Kira. “Oh!”

“Go on, man,” Stiles says. “She’d probably appreciate a friendly face.” Scott grins and gets to his feet, and as he heads over to talk to Kira, Stiles calls after him, “Just don’t offer her any more pens!”

According to the app Stiles downloaded, his baby’s almost the size of an eggplant by the time of his next doctor’s appointment. His dad’s supposed to go with him, but as they’re pulling on their jackets to head out the door, his dad’s phone rings.

He answers it with an irritable “Hello?” but as the person on the other end speaks, his face grows serious, and he ends the call with a blunt “I’ll be there as soon as I can.”

Stiles gives him a curious look. “What’s going on?”


“No, you cannot,” his dad says irritably. “You’ve got an appointment to go to.” He hesitates, and
then says, “Are you okay with going alone?”

“It’s fine,” Stiles says, waving an impatient hand. “But can’t I—”

“No,” his father says firmly, putting his hands on Stiles’ shoulders and walking him toward the door. “You keep your nose out of this.”

“Fine,” Stiles grumbles, though he fully intends to go through his dad’s papers after he goes to bed that night.

At the doctor’s office, the secretary gives him a warm smile and says, “By yourself today?”

“Yes,” Stiles says moodily, dropping down into one of the chairs in the waiting room. He drums his fingers against the arm of the chair for a moment before he pulls his phone out to text Scott. *you hear about the bodies in the preserve?*

It’s five minutes before Scott texts back. *Bodies??*

*The dead kind,* Stiles confirms. *You haven’t heard anything, then?*

*Not yet. Ill ask around.*

“Stiles?”

He lifts his head to see a nurse looking at him, holding open the door to the back. He follows her down the hallway and she takes care of the usual basics; he gets his height and weight measured, and his blood pressure taken. Then the nurse disappears, leaving Stiles sitting on the end of the examination table, swinging his legs aimlessly. He’s feeling a little anxious, though he’s not sure why—maybe it’s just because his dad’s not there. He tries not to think about how nice it would be if Derek was here with him.

He likes his doctor a lot, though, which makes things much easier. Her name’s Dr. Yukimura, and he likes the way she talks, soft and straightforward. When she comes into the room, she gives him a faint smile and says, “Hello, Mr. Stilinski. How are things going?”

“Good,” Stiles says, fighting to keep his hand off his stomach; it’s become a subconscious habit in the past few weeks.

“Any concerns?”

Stiles shakes his head as she steps up next to him, warming her stethoscope in her hand. “Can’t think of anything.”

“How are the suppressants working?”

Stiles hesitates. His father had brought him here after the whole pseudo-heat thing, and he’s been put on suppressants to stave off any future heats—they’re too dangerous for both him and the baby, Dr. Yukimura had said. It’s not like Stiles is eager to face one again, but the suppressants make him feel...empty. He already felt shitty enough without Derek being around, but now he feels like something’s been ripped out of him.

“Okay,” he eventually tells her.

Dr. Yukimura pauses in the middle of lifting her stethoscope to her ears, watching Stiles with an intense look in her dark eyes. “Just okay?”
Stiles shrugs. “I don’t like how they feel.”

“And how’s that?”

Stiles tells her about the emptiness, and now he’s glad his dad’s not there, because it was awkward enough to go through the whole pseudo-heat; his dad doesn’t need to know that Stiles is still pining for Derek.

Dr. Yukimura listens intently and when he’s done, she says, “What you’re experiencing isn’t uncommon. The point of the suppressants is to break the chemical bond between you and your siring alpha, but your body doesn’t know that. It’s a mental and physical battle.”

“It sucks,” Stiles says.

“Yes,” she agrees. “But unfortunately, they’re doing what they’re supposed to.” She gives him a faint encouraging smile. “Can you lift your shirt for me?”

Stiles does, sucking in a sharp breath as she presses the stethoscope to his stomach—it’s cold, even though she warmed it in her hands. “Can I ask you something?”

“Go ahead.”

“Are you related to Kira?”

Dr. Yukimura straightens, still smiling faintly. “She’s my daughter. You’ve met?”

“Oh,” Stiles says. “Um. Yeah. She’s in some of my classes. You guys just moved here?”

“I moved here in November—just before I started seeing you,” she tells him. “Kira and my husband followed after her old school finished for the semester.”

“Oh,” Stiles repeats.

Dr. Yukimura leans in again, listening to the baby’s heartbeat in several places before doing the same to Stiles, listening to his heart from the front and the back. “Have you felt any movement?” she asks.

“No,” Stiles says, a little ruefully. He rubs at the cold spots the doctor’s stethoscope left behind. “Should I have?”

Dr. Yukimura shakes her head. “Not necessarily. First-time parents may not experience movement as early as seasoned parents. I’d expect it in the next couple of weeks. What about your body—any pain? Back aches?”

Stiles shakes his head. “Not really.”

“You’re lucky, then,” she says, lips quirking up at the corners. “Though I wouldn’t expect that to last much longer either. Things start changing quickly after the halfway point.”

“Oh,” Stiles says once more, more thoughtfully this time. He rubs at his stomach, then flushes when he realizes what he’s doing.

Dr. Yukimura just gives him an indulgent look. “Ready for an ultrasound?”

“Sure,” Stiles says, and leans back on the table as a nurse wheels in the equipment. Dr. Yukimura stands by his shoulder, pointing things out, and it’s weird. The last time, at the hospital, Stiles had been too panicked and worked up over his dad finding out to really take it in, but that’s his baby on
the screen, with the weird big head and tiny fists clenched in the air. It’s kind of ugly and kind of cute, but it’s his.

“Do you want to know the sex?” Dr. Yukimura asks softly.

Stiles stares at the screen, his mouth going dry. Does he?

“It doesn’t have to be this time,” Dr. Yukimura tells him. “You can wait until your father’s with you—or let it be a complete surprise, if you want.”

“No,” Stiles says, a little unsteadily. “No—uh. I’d like to know.”

Dr. Yukimura smiles down at him. “Well, then,” she says. “Congratulations, Stiles. It’s a girl.”

“Oh,” Stiles says faintly. Oh no. He doesn’t know anything about girls. It’s just been him and his dad in the house for like ten years.

Dr. Yukimura squeezes his shoulder. “Are you all right?”

“Yeah,” Stiles says dazedly. God, when did his eyes get all wet? “I’m good.”

“Do you want a picture of the ultrasound?”

Stiles nods. His dad would like that, he thinks. They can hang it on the fridge. His dad can take it to work and show all the deputies.

He gets a black and white printout placed in his hands, and then he’s shuffled along through the check-out process, making another appointment for several weeks down the road. Stiles feels like his head’s wrapped in gauze; it’s a relief to step out into the sharpness of the cold air outside. He pulls out his phone as he walks; there’s a new message from Scott.

We listened to the scanner during lunch and there’s three bodies! Someone said they were all tied to trees. They think it might be a druid thing i guess

Stiles shudders a little. He’s just about to reply when there’s movement at the edge of his vision and he glances up automatically, freezing in place when he sees Derek standing there, staring at Stiles with a look of horror on his face. For one brief moment, he’s relieved to see Derek, but then he’s furious, because he’s told Derek over and over to leave him alone, and he still won’t fucking listen.

“Are you stalking me?” he snaps.

Derek looks hurt. “No,” he says. “I’m—Laura’s office is right there.”

He points behind Stiles, and Stiles turns to look, scowling when he sees the sign by the door. He must have walked past it a thousand times, but he’d never noticed it before. “Fine,” he says waspishly.

Derek shifts half a step closer, his brow furrowing. “What are you—”

“That’s my doctor’s office,” Stiles says flatly, gesturing over his shoulder. He’s got to get out of there; this close, he can smell Derek, and Derek smells so fucking good. Stiles wants him so badly. It’s a struggle to make himself say, “Well, I’ve got to—”

Derek cuts him off. “Is everything okay?”

Stiles is startled by the concern in his voice, the worry on his face. “Everything’s fine,” he says, not
sure why he feels the need to reassure Derek. “It was just a check-up.” The worry on Derek’s face doesn’t dissipate, and it makes Stiles hesitate. It’s not like he owes Derek anything, but he’s feeling lost and overwhelmed right now, and Derek’s right there and smelling so good and reassuring. Maybe he would like to know. Stiles bites down on his lip before he rummages around in his pocket and pulls out the picture of the ultrasound, offering it to Derek. “Um. If you want to see—”

Derek takes a couple slow steps toward him, and when he reaches out for the paper, Stiles swears his hand is shaking. An odd stillness falls over him when he looks at the photograph. “Is this—”

“Twenty-two weeks,” Stiles says, his throat tight. Derek looks up at him, and the want in his eyes frightens Stiles, yet sets his heart pounding. He breathes in slowly, letting Derek’s scent flood his lungs, and says, “I found out today. It’s a girl.”

He doesn’t expect the wide-eyed way Derek looks at him then, or the way Derek reaches for him, but he—he’s caving. He wants Derek so bad, and the suppressants aren’t doing a fucking thing to help with Derek standing right in front of him, reaching for him, wanting him in return. Stiles sways as the last of his fight drains away, and then he steps in close, so close their chests are almost touching. He can feel the heat pouring off Derek’s body; just being so close to him makes Stiles feel better than he has in weeks. Derek touches his cheek gently, and Stiles struggles not to cat into his hand. He has to—he has to touch, so he lifts his hands, twists his fingers in Derek’s jacket. He can feel Derek’s heart pounding under his palms.

Stiles feels like he’s lost in a dream, heat curling through his body. His entire being misses and craves Derek and he hates it so fucking much, hates even more that it feels so good right now. He’s so fucking lost that he’d fuck Derek right there on the sidewalk if Derek suggested it. When Derek leans in and brushes his lips against Stiles’ forehead, that’s it; he can’t take it any longer. An unhappy noise slips from his lips, and then he jerks his head up, smashing his mouth against Derek’s.

And god, it’s so good. He’d forgotten what kissing Derek feels like—what kissing anyone feels like, for that matter—and Derek’s so warm and open against him. Maybe this could work, he thinks desperately. Maybe driving Derek away was a bad idea. After all, Derek wouldn’t be kissing him right now if he wasn’t interested in Stiles, right? But even as he thinks this, he realizes why Derek smells so good; Stiles knows this scent, knows why Derek’s cheeks are so flushed. He’s in fucking heat. He doesn’t want Stiles at all—Stiles just happens to be the closest omega. Derek would probably fuck his mailman right now if they gave the right signals. Fuck.

He shoves Derek away, taking a couple fumbling steps backward as he tries to escape the range of Derek’s scent, wiping at his mouth like it’ll undo the kiss. Derek stares at him, his cheeks red, eyelids heavy.

“Stiles,” he pants. “Please—”

But Stiles isn’t going to wait around; he’s not going to let himself fuck up again. He spins around and takes off through the parking lot. Derek could catch him easily, but he doesn’t follow; Stiles chances a glance in his direction after he scrambles into the Jeep, and Derek’s still standing over by the building, looking lost. That tells him enough, he thinks, as he roars out of the parking lot, heart still banging loudly in his chest. If he meant anything at all to Derek, Derek would have chased him down and apologized.

Whatever, Stiles thinks miserably. It’s his own fault for giving in and getting his hopes up. He should have learned by now that it’s pointless to wish for the best.
Finding out the baby is a girl is the only bright spot in an otherwise miserable week. His dad gets so wrapped up in the murder investigation that Stiles has to bring him dinner at the station every night, or else he’d probably go without (or get takeout, which Stiles will not allow). The night of Stiles’ doctor appointment, the station is abuzz with deputies and journalists; Stiles’ dad takes his phone off the hook just so he and Stiles can get five minutes to peace to eat and talk. It’s somewhat comforting to see how his dad’s face lights up when Stiles tells him the baby’s a girl.

“Your mom would have been pleased about that,” he tells Stiles, not even complaining that Stiles got him quinoa salad instead of chips. “She always wanted a girl.”

Stiles makes an exaggerated face. “Thanks a lot.”

His dad winks at him and says, “Now you’re going to have to start thinking about names. We were going to name you Zuzanna if you were a girl.”

Stiles blanches. “No names with Z in them. I’m speaking from experience here.”

His dad laughs. “Fair enough.” He watches Stiles eat his sandwich for a long moment before he asks, “Everything all right?”

Stiles shrugs ambivalently. It’s not like he’s going to tell his dad about seeing Derek, or how shitty he feels now. “Just a lot of stuff going on.”

“I can sympathize with that,” his dad sighs.

Stiles brightens. “Tell me about the bodies!”

“No,” his dad says. “I told you; keep your nose out of this.”

His dad’s warning is pointless, though; in a small town like theirs, news and rumors travel like wildfire. It’s not long before everyone knows the three bodies were found lashed to trees out in the preserve, their throats slit. It’s definitely a ritualistic killing; all anyone’s talking about are all the druids in town. Scott’s boss is one, but even though he voluntarily goes down to the sheriff’s station for questioning, Stiles doubts he’s the culprit; the man spends all of his time healing animals, for crying out loud.

Later that week, Stiles is at the station dropping off dinner for his dad when to his surprise—and slight horror—the door to his dad’s office opens and Laura Hale comes out, a serious expression on her face. She pauses when she sees Stiles in the hallway, her brows drawing together in a frown he’s become all too familiar with seeing from the Hale family.

Laura’s the one member of the family Stiles barely knows. He’s had classes with Cora since elementary school, and obviously he and Derek have their history, but he’s only met Laura a couple of times, and only in passing. She’s always been nice to him, but she’s a little scary, and he hasn’t encountered her since finding out about the baby. He’s not at all sure how she feels about it. He’d honestly been expecting some kind of visit or message from her; if his baby turns out to be a werewolf, Laura’s going to be her alpha, and even if not, the baby’s still Derek’s kid, and she’s his alpha. It makes him nervous that she hasn’t tried to stake a claim, especially since she runs a charity specializing in werewolf adoption.

As the door to his dad’s office swings shut behind Laura, with her tone even, she says, “Hi, Stiles.”

“Hi,” Stiles replies uneasily, eyes flickering toward his dad’s office, hoping she’ll get the hint and move out of the way.
Laura doesn’t move, but silently observes Stiles for a long, uncomfortable moment. Finally, she says, “Congratulations on the baby.” Her tone is perfectly polite, but it still feels like a slap in the face, and before Stiles can even figure out how to respond, Laura moves past him, striding off down the hallway. Stiles watches her until she disappears around the the corner, his mouth hanging open.

When he finally moves and slips into his dad’s office, he doesn’t even wait for his dad to look up before he asks, “Why was Laura Hale here?”

His father sighs, looking up from a massive amount of paperwork spread across his desk. “The preserve is privately owned land, Stiles—Hale pack land. Laura is understandably curious to know who murdered three people on her property, and we were curious to know if she’d noticed anything unusual happening lately.”

“And had she?” Stiles asks curiously.

His dad waves a finger at him. “Open investigation. You know that.”

Stiles sighs. “She didn’t ask you about me, though?”

His father frowns. “Why would she?”

Stiles raises his eyebrows significantly. “Uh, because she’s Derek’s sister?”

“Oh, right,” his dad says, his expression clearing. “No, she didn’t. Why? Did you want to talk to her about it? I can call her back—”

“No!” Stiles says loudly. Lowering his voice at his father’s look, he says, “I just—what if she—” he gestures at his stomach “—turns out to be a werewolf?”

“Then we’ll deal with that,” his dad says evenly.

“Yeah, but what if the pack tries to get custody of her or something?” Stiles protests. “I mean—adopting werewolves is Laura Hale’s thing!”

“That’s not going to happen, Stiles,” his dad says, his voice calm. “Do you have any reason to believe Derek, or his family, want custody?”

Stiles hesitates, but apart from Derek saying he wanted to help and Cora offering the pack’s support, there hasn’t been any other sign that they’re interested in the baby at all. He relaxes a little. “No.”

“There you go, then,” his dad says. “Stop stressing yourself out; there’s no point in worrying about it unless it seems like it’s actually going to happen. Now,” he raps his fingers against his desk, giving the bag in Stiles’ hands a hard look. “That better not be salad again.”

Stiles scrounges up a smile. “Sorry, Dad. You’re out of luck.”

Lydia Martin’s birthday party is the last week of January, and Stiles doesn’t particularly want to go. Dr. Yukimura’s prediction that Stiles’ aches and pains wouldn’t hold off for much longer has come true; he’s got this constant low-grade backache that’s only alleviated by sleeping on his side—his least favorite sleeping position. Also, his nipples are starting to get sensitive, which is...not unexpected, but new. According to all his research, he’s not going to need, like, a bra or anything, but he’s going to get...bigger. It’s annoying; he has to go out and buy nice t-shirts, because the cheap kind that come in a pack of ten are too rough, and feel like freakin’ sandpaper on his nipples.
All of this, combined with the fact that he can’t drink, and the fact that he’s a bit of social pariah at the moment anyway, doesn’t make him inclined to go, even if Lydia’s party is always the best of the year. Scott’s desperate to go, though; he’s crushing on Kira hard, and he thinks that the party’s his chance to finally make a move.

“And?” Stiles asks sourly. “Why do I need to be there?”

“Because it’ll be fun!” Scott says pleadingly. “And I won’t be so nervous if I know you’re around!”

“So, you want me to be your emotional wingman?” Stiles says sarcastically, but he’s softening to the idea. After all, Scott’s been super supportive with the baby. Stiles owes him this, and much much more. “Have you ever dated a human being before?”

Scott grins beguilingly. “Please?”

Stiles rolls his eyes with a huff, but he’s grinning too. “Fine, you big baby.”

The party is fun. Stiles is the DD because he’s not drinking, and Lydia greets them at the door with a smile, kissing them both on the cheek. Scott looks sheepish and pleased, even more so when they make their way through the house and find Kira out by the pool. Stiles likes Kira; she’s sweet, and she’s cool, and they share a mutual love of comic books that Scott just doesn’t understand. It’s a little weird that her mom’s been all up in his junk, but it is what it is. Strictly professional.

Even though his back’s aching, Stiles has a good time right up until the moment Kira turns to him with a wide smile and says, “So your boyfriend—is he coming here tonight? I’d like to meet him.”

Stiles’ smile fades from his face as Scott looks at Kira in faint horror. She looks between them quickly, her cheeks going red. “Oh God,” she says. “I’m sorry. I said something wrong, didn’t I? I didn’t—”

“No,” Stiles says with a tight smile. “He’s not in the picture.”

Kira’s lips form a silent oh. “I’m so sorry,” she says frantically. “I shouldn’t have—I just assumed—”

“It’s fine,” Stiles says. “I—I’m going to go get a drink.”

He nods at Scott, who gives him a worried look as Stiles turns into the crowd around the edge of the pool. Behind him, he gets a second of Kira talking to Scott, sounding horrified as she says, “I didn’t know! I feel so—” and then Stiles gets a group of people between him and them and he doesn’t have to hear her anymore.

People are watching him again, probably wondering what kind of idiot goes to a party pregnant, but he ignores them wholeheartedly, heading for a table laden with drinks by the back door. It’s mostly alcohol, but there’s a big bowl of punch, which he takes a small sip of to check it’s nonalcoholic before pouring himself a cup.

He stops there by the table for a long second, eyes flickering around the party. He spots Cora and Lydia dancing together on the other side of the pool, and smiles faintly to himself, happy Lydia’s happy, even if it’s Derek’s sister she’s with. He doesn’t particularly want to go back to Kira and Scott; besides, he can see them through the crowd, and Scott’s looking at Kira in that awed way he used to look at Allison, and Stiles figures he’s performed his wingman duties successfully.

Stiles heads inside instead. It’s quieter there, away from the main party—plus, less people to catch staring at him. He settles onto a loveseat tucked into a corner and slumps against the armrest, nursing his punch moodily. His back’s aching, which is making him cranky, and he’s inexplicably horny—
like, he really, really wants to suck a dick right now, but he highly doubts he’ll be able to find anyone at this party open to that, not when they’re all still staring at him like he’s a freak. It just makes him even crankier. He can’t leave, because Scott’s been drinking, and Stiles is supposed to drive him home. If he didn’t owe Scott for a lifetime of friendship and support, he’d be out of there like a shot.

Stiles has sunk so deep into the couch he’s almost disappeared, wrapped up in a bad mood almost as deep, when he feels the cushions next to him dip as someone sits on the couch with him.

“Really?” Stiles complains, turning to glare. “Like there’s not a thousand other couches in this house you could—” He stops abruptly, mouth falling open.

Derek’s sitting next to him, watching Stiles silently, a faint smile curving his lips. He looks good—much better than the last time Stiles saw him; his hair’s styled, beard trimmed back to dense stubble, his eyes warm. Stiles suddenly wishes he’d bothered to put some effort into his own image; his hair’s out of control, and his jeans—stupid maternity pants only a couple weeks old—already have holes in the knees. He feels gross and shabby next to Derek, and resents him for it.

“Hi,” Derek says quietly.

“Hi,” Stiles mutters, his eyes flickering nervously around the room. For once, though, no one’s staring at him, wrapped up in their own conversations. Still, if anyone sees him talking with Derek, they might make the connection—

“Can we talk?” Derek asks him.

Stiles hesitates before responding. He’s been fighting Derek off for months, and he—he’s so fucking tired. He doesn’t want to push him away any more; he aches for Derek with his entire being.

“Okay,” Stiles sighs. He takes a sip of punch. It’s warm by now, but he drinks it anyway. “What?”

Derek tilts his head to one side like he’s trying to figure Stiles out. Good luck; Stiles is mystery to even himself sometimes. “I want to know,” he says, his pale eyes fixed on Stiles’, “if you really hate me. If you do, I promise I’ll leave you alone. I won’t talk to you ever again, if you want. But I need to know.”

Stiles takes another sip of punch so he doesn’t have to look at Derek, his palms growing clammy. A month ago, even a week ago, he would have said yes, if only to drive Derek away from a life he doesn’t deserve, but now… He’s wholeheartedly ready to blame it on the hormones for making him feel so weak and lost, but he’s exhausted, and Derek said he wanted to help.

“I don’t,” he says, watching Derek out of the corners of his eyes.

Derek pauses, surprise rushing over his face. Then he leans forward slightly, and Stiles can smell him, his alpha scent making Stiles’ toes curl inside his sneakers. “Stiles,” he says softly, and it’s stupid how just hearing his own name sends heat unfurling down Stiles’ spine. “Will you let me help you?”

Stiles nods, biting down hard on his lip, his heart soaring at the pleased look that breaks over Derek’s face, his mouth curving into a smile. He stiffens when Derek slowly reaches out and takes his hand, curling his warm fingers around Stiles’. It’s a long moment before Stiles relaxes under his touch, but when he does, it’s with a flood of relief because Derek’s here, Derek’s going to help, and everything is going to be okay.

Derek’s still smiling. “Okay?”
Stiles nods again but then, because he has to look a gift horse in the mouth, he asks, “Why, though? Why do you care?”

Derek looks startled. “Why shouldn’t I? You shouldn’t have to do this alone.”

“Yeah, but—I fucked up,” Stiles says. His eyes, to his horror, are starting to burn. He’s going to blame that on the hormones too. “This is my mistake, and I treated you like shit. You don’t owe me anything—”

“This isn’t a mistake,” Derek says, his eyes dropping to Stiles’ stomach. “This is a gift.”

Stiles croaks out a laugh. “You sound like a shitty Hallmark card.”

Derek snorts. “That was bad, wasn’t it? Sorry.” But still, he leans in closer, his eyes soft. “This isn’t just about the baby,” he says quietly. “I was looking forward to your birthday.”

Stiles breathes in sharply. “Really?”

“Really,” Derek nods, the corners of his lips curving up once more.


Derek leans back, looking content. “Do you want to go home?”

Stiles nods, and then winces. “I gave Scott a ride—”

“He’ll find someone else,” Derek says, rising to his feet and tugging Stiles up with him. “Come on.”

Stiles follows him through the house in a daze, staring at the place where Derek’s fingers are threaded with his. People are watching them now, but no one seems shocked; everyone Stiles looks at gives him a smile, or a nod of encouragement, and he straightens, feeling complete for the first time in weeks.

It starts to rain as they head for the front door, drops of water splashing down on Stiles’ head. He touches his hand to his hair and it comes away damp. “You feel that?” he asks Derek, but Derek’s shape is wavering in the sudden downpour. Stiles blinks, and suddenly Derek’s gone and he’s in a bathroom, sopping wet in a bathtub as cold water rains down on him.

Scott bends over him, looking scared. “Stiles?” he says. “Stiles, are you okay?”

“What?” Stiles asks weakly. His chest hurts with the cold. “Where’s Derek?”

Scott’s brow furrows. “Derek? Stiles, no, you had—someone spiked the punch with wolfsbane. You were hallucinating—”

“No,” Stiles protests, his eyes burning. “He was here, Derek was here, and we worked things out—”

Scott shuts off the water, his lips thin, and it’s only then that Stiles notices Lydia standing in the doorway, looking worried.

“You invited him, right?” Stiles asks her frantically. “He was here—”

Lydia shakes her head. “He wasn’t here, Stiles,” she says gently.

“Fuck you,” Stiles says furiously. He tries to lever himself up out of the bath, but his limbs are kitten-weak and he just skids around like a fawn on ice. Scott has to help him, levering him to his feet with
one hand under his armpit. Stiles hates him—hates Lydia too, and the way they both stand there looking at him so pityingly.

“Come on, man,” Scott says pleadingly, tugging him toward the door. “Lydia’s got some spare clothes for you.”

Stiles doesn’t resist, but he doesn’t help, either, slumping so Scott has to drag him. It’s not like it’s hard for him, what with the werewolf strength and all, and Scott seems to just take it in stride, pulling him along without complaint.

Cora’s standing out in the hall with Kira, her arms folded over her chest, but she doesn’t say a word to him, and it’s the only time he’s ever liked her. Kira looks horrified but she doesn’t say anything either. Scott drags him into a bedroom down the hall that doesn’t look like it gets used, and props him up on the end of the bed. Lydia, who’s followed with an armful of towels, hands one to Scott, and they set to work drying Stiles off. He lets them do it, sitting still as it sinks in that everything that just happened had been a total fabrication. He hasn’t worked things out with Derek; they’re just as shitty as they’ve always been. He feels hollow.

Lydia offers him a stack of clothes with a weak smile. “This is all I have,” she says. “Sorry. Since my dad moved out, we don’t have any guy’s clothes.”

Stiles stares at them blankly. There’s a purple bathrobe on top.

“I’m really sorry this happened,” Lydia adds quietly, her eyes flickering to the bedroom doorway, where Cora’s leaning up against the doorjamb, watching them silently.

Stiles feels like he’s going to be sick. He was fucking drugged, he was fucking—Panic shoots through him. “Is she okay?” he asks frantically, pressing his hands to his stomach. “I’ve got to go to the hospital!”

“She’s okay, dude,” Scott says soothingly. “I called my mom, and she says you’ll be fine.”

Stiles exhales roughly. That means Melissa will probably tell his dad, but whatever; as long as his baby’s okay. Still, he’s left with this sinking, empty feeling, misery clutching at his lungs. It’d felt so real. He’d been so relieved.

“I’m so stupid,” he mutters.

“Hey, no way,” Scott says, sinking down onto the bed next to him. He wraps his arm around Stiles’ shoulder, but Stiles can’t even enjoy his warmth; all he wants is Derek. “You couldn’t have known, man.”

There are tears threatening at the edges of his vision again; Stiles rubs at them angrily. “I am,” he insists. “I didn’t even think—I was going to leave with him, just—“ He draws in a ragged breath, eyes flickering to the door. He doesn’t want Cora listening. “I was just going to leave you here.”

“It’s okay,” Scott says insistently. “I know you didn’t want to be here—”

“Don’t excuse my shitty behavior,” Stiles laughs unhappily, wiping at his nose. “Did everyone see me?”

“Nah,” Scott says softly. “They’re all gone. You were just sitting on the couch. You wouldn’t get up.”

Thank god for that, at least, Stiles thinks dismally. Everyone in town still talks about that time
Lydia’s ex got high on hallucinogenic wolfsbane and chucked a bunch of kids in the pool.

“Look, Lydia says you can sleep here,” Scott says. Next to him, Lydia nods, smiling encouragingly. “Kira’s going to give me a ride home—unless you want me to stay.”

Stiles shakes his head. He’d really really like to be alone right now. Scott hesitates before he gets to his feet. “It’s not your fault, all right?” he says firmly. “None of this is.”

Lydia presses the pile of clothes into Stiles’ hands. “Let me know if you need anything else,” she says softly, and then they all leave the room, closing the door quietly behind them.

The sudden silence is deafening, buzzing in Stiles’ ears. It takes him a long moment to realize that he’s shaking, his skin pebbled from the cold. He can barely get his jeans off, fingers fumbling with the button three times before he gets it open and peels them off. The sweatpants Lydia left him are light blue and say Victoria’s Secret down the leg, but they’re warm, at least, even if they’re tight on him.

Clothes changed, Stiles climbs into bed and shuts off the light. He tries to keep his mind empty so he can sleep, but it’s an already lost battle; his mind is fixed on reliving the hallucination, replaying it over and over in his head. He feels worse with every cycle. How could he have believed that that was actually Derek? It’s not even that there’s no reason why Derek Hale would have been at Lydia’s birthday party, but for him to seek Stiles out, to smile at Stiles like he’s something special—Stiles is such a fucking idiot. He should know better, after the way Derek didn’t chase him down the other week, that he doesn’t mean anything thing to him.

Stiles rolls onto his side, shoving his face in the pillow as his tears dampen the cotton. The last thing he needs is for his friends to hear him crying and come stampeding back into the room. He’s already caused them enough trouble.

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Stiles wakes the next morning feeling as though he’s been struck in the face with a sledgehammer, and it’s a long moment before he remembers where he is and why he’s not in his own bed. He groans softly to himself, scrubbing a hand over his face before he pries himself out of bed. He slowly shuffles out of the room, pausing every few feet to squeeze his eyes shut against the pounding in his head. He’s never taken wolfsbane before, preferring getting drunk over getting high; so far, he’s not enjoying it at all.

Lydia’s house is quiet; it doesn’t sound as though anyone else is awake, so he moves as quietly as he can, seeking a bathroom and hopefully aspirin. The first room he passes is big, probably the master bedroom—Lydia’s mom’s room, if she were home. The second door, on the other side, is ajar, and Stiles peers inside. Lydia’s room, he thinks, strewn with clothes. There’s a vanity covered in what’s probably a couple thousand dollars worth of makeup, and next to it, Lydia’s bed. Stiles gets just a glimpse of long, dark hair and a naked back before he jerks his head away, realizing Cora and Lydia are in bed together.

Stiles finally locates the bathroom around the corner and slinks inside gratefully, shutting the door behind him. He feels guilty digging through Lydia’s cabinets, but luckily it only takes a few tries before he locates the one with all the medicine, and he closes his fingers around a bottle of aspirin with great relief. After he takes a couple pills, he sits on the toilet for a while with his head in his hands, waiting for the pain to go away.

His head and heart are both heavy. Last night seems far away, like it happened years ago, but it still hurts. He still feels like a fool for wanting to go with Derek, for actually believing that things might
work out. Stiles looks at himself in the mirror hanging on the back of the bathroom door. The shirt Lydia gave him to wear cuts low enough to show his collarbones, stretching tight across his chest, loose across his stomach. He touches his stomach unhappily. Even if Derek were to stick around for some reason, it wouldn't be because he was attracted to Stiles in any way. Like anyone would. Like anyone's going to want him now, seventeen and already with a kid. He's used goods.

Stiles sighs, running his hands through his hair. Scott would probably kick his ass if he could hear his thoughts. He hates it too; maybe it's hormones, or maybe it's the suppressants, but he can't seem to kick this rut of misery he's fallen into. He sighs again. It's probably something he should tell Dr. Yukimura about.

When Stiles finally leaves the bathroom, he finds Lydia's bedroom door wide open, the bed empty. He hesitates there, hearing voices downstairs. He would have liked to have left without seeing either her or Cora, but it doesn't look like his luck's running that way today. And as he discovers when he ducks back into the guest bedroom, his clothes are still damp and cold from his impromptu shower last night, leaving him to unwillingly go downstairs in his borrowed clothes.

He finds Lydia and Cora in the kitchen; Cora's slumped at the kitchen counter with a cup of coffee in front of her, while Lydia stands at the stove, stirring a pan of scrambled eggs. They both turn to look at him when he comes in, eyes sharp.

"Good morning," Lydia says.

"Hey," Stiles says, uncomfortably aware of Cora staring at him. "Uh, thanks. For last night. I was just going to head home—"

"Stay for breakfast," Lydia commands. "I have baby stuff I want you to look at."

Stiles shifts his weight around uneasily. It's a Sunday, and he doesn't have anything better to do, but he doesn't really want to hang out here with Cora—but she'll know if he lies about being busy. Lydia probably will too; she's always been way too perceptive.

"Fine," he sighs.

"Sit," Lydia orders, jabbing her spatula toward the counter bar where Cora's sitting. Stiles gives her an unloving look.

Cora just rolls her eyes. "Sit down, you big baby," she says. "I'm not going to bite."

"Whatever," Stiles mutters, easing himself onto the chair next to her.

It's not all that bad, mostly because Cora makes no attempt to speak with him, nor he with her. Lydia looks exasperated, but she doesn't try to make them converse, and they eat breakfast mostly in silence.

When they're done, Lydia says "Come with me," imperiously, and Stiles gets to his feet with some relief.

Lydia also looks at Cora, who makes a face and says, "Not my thing. I'll do the dishes."

That's fine with Stiles.

He follows Lydia down into her basement, which is mostly empty except for a bunch of boxes against the far wall. She's already pulled a bunch forward, all labeled Lydia & May, baby things.
"Did you ask your mom if this is okay?" Stiles asks uncertainly, watching Lydia kneel down and open a box. "She must have kept this stuff for a reason."

Lydia shrugs. "She kept it for when we have kids, but I think you're in greater need than we are." And when Stiles doesn't move, she gives him an impatient look. "I did ask. She said it was fine."

"Okay," Stiles says, finally sinking down next to her. He peers into the box she's got open, and it's mostly baby clothes. "Jesus, it's all designer." He pulls out a tiny Burberry coat and waves it around.

Lydia shrugs again. "Dad liked to show us off."

"Yeah, but I can't take this," Stiles argues. "This stuff's worth thousands of dollars!"

"You can take all of it," Lydia says, a steely note to her voice. "I didn't bring you down here to look at clothes. I want to talk to you."

"About what?" Stiles retorts. "I'm fine! Everything's fine!"

"Like hell you're fine," Lydia says, looking angry. "Last night—"

"I am not talking about last night!" Stiles snaps, jabbing his finger toward the ceiling—toward Cora.

"All she wants to do—any of us want to do—is help you!" Lydia snaps back. "You are not fine. You always look like you're just about to fall asleep, you never smile anymore—stop carrying all this weight on your shoulders. You're not alone."

Stiles stares at her, open-mouthed in surprise. He's offended that she doesn't think he can do this alone, but...maybe she's got a point. Ms. Morrell, his doctor, all the books he's read—they've all made it clear that he's not meant to do this alone. He'd have Derek, optimally, but even without him, there are others to pick up the slack. Stiles has been carrying most of it by himself—he won't even let Scott help as much as he wants to—but he knows he's being stupid. He's already exhausted, and it's just going to get harder from here.

"I'm tired," he says quietly.

"I know," Lydia says, her face softening. "But we're here for you—even Cora, believe it or not." Stiles grimaces, and Lydia reaches out, putting her hand on Stiles' arm. "Go easy on her, please," she says softly, watching Stiles intent. "All she wants is what's best for her pack and her family, but you're my friend, and she's trying to respect that, too. It's a weird situation for her."

Stiles looks down at his hands and exhales slowly before he nods. "I'll try to lighten up."

Lydia squeezes his arm. "That's all I ask."

They share a brief moment of silence before Stiles asks, "How long have you guys been together?"

Lydia smiles at the boxes in front of them, a soft, secret smile that makes Stiles' heart ache a little. "Since just after Christmas."

"Oh," Stiles says quietly. They fall silent again, the basement quiet. Stiles is fiddling with a tiny pair of Gucci baby booties when he gets this weird fluttery feeling in his stomach, almost like he's nervous, but he's not, he's not nervous, he’s—Stiles' eyes go wide, sucking in a sharp breath as he presses a hand to his stomach. Is this—

Lydia's looking at him with concern. "Are you all right?"
"Yeah," Stiles breathes. "I just—" He exhales roughly. "I think she just moved."

"Really?" Lydia asks. She leans in, looking delighted. "Is this the first time you've felt her?"

"Yeah," Stiles says again, keeping his hand pressed to his stomach. "I was getting kind of worried, but—she's moving."

"Could I—" Lydia raises a hand, looking at him hopefully.

"If you want," Stiles says, moving his hand away. "You might not feel anything. I read that sometimes it's a few weeks between me feeling anything before anyone else can."

Lydia tries not to look disappointed as she tentatively touches his stomach, her palms flat to his skin. "I can't feel anything," she admits.

"We can keep trying," Stiles tells her, grinning faintly.

Lydia squeezes his arm again, and then sits back on her heels, her face filled with a new purpose. "All right," she says briskly. "Let's get these loaded into your car and then I'll let you leave."

Stiles snorts, rolling his eyes when Lydia won't actually let him help carry anything—"Share the burden," she reminds him sternly, roping Cora in to help instead.

When everything's loaded into the Jeep, Stiles climbs in but leans out the window to say to Lydia, "Thanks for all of this, seriously."

She smiles faintly. "That's what friends do."

Stiles nods, and then looks at Cora. "Thanks for your help, too," he says, a little more stiffly than he means to—but the sentiment's there, he hopes.

Cora nods, her dark eyes fixed on his face. Stiles goes to roll up his window, but stops as Cora steps forward, stopping just next to his door. "What?" he asks uncertainly.

"Derek transferred to BHCC," she tells him seriously.

Stiles flinches at the mention of him. "So?"


"Thanks," Stiles says flatly. "Now I know where to avoid."

Cora makes a frustrated noise. "Why? Because you don't want to see him, or because you think he doesn't want to see you?"

"Both," Stiles says irritably, his eyes flickering to Lydia. She gives him an annoyed look.

"Well, you're wrong," Cora tells him bluntly. "He doesn't talk about it much, but I know he cares about you. He—"

"Whatever," Stiles snaps. Whatever she thinks she knows, it's not true. "If I meant anything to him, he'd have come to me by now. Why hasn't he?"

"I don't know!" Cora snaps back. "Maybe because you told him to fuck off and he's actually trying to respect that?"
"Whatever," Stiles says again, angrier than ever. "Thanks for breakfast." And with that, he slams the Jeep into reverse and speeds off down the driveway.

February's a miserable month. Stiles' dad's not actually all that mad at him about the party; he seems to believe that Stiles didn't take the wolfsbane intentionally. And anyway, he's too busy laughing at Stiles coming home wearing Victoria's Secret sweatpants. Lydia and Cora are both mad at him, though, and while he doesn't feel bad about Cora, he does feel guilty about Lydia, especially since she'd just given him several huge boxes of really expensive baby stuff. Scott wants to talk about what happened the night of Lydia's party, but Stiles really really doesn't, so he spends most of his time finagling ways for Scott and Kira to be alone together instead.

His misery over Derek doesn't go away. He tells Dr. Yukimura about it—in more vague terms—and she wants to up his suppressant dosage, but he balks at the suggestion; if the light dose currently makes him feel like shit, he doesn't even want to know what the increased dosage would be like. Instead, he does precisely what Lydia told him not to, and keeps it to himself. He's gotten this far, he reasons; he can make it another two months.

He spends a lot of time hanging out with Ms. Blake; he's already got most of his college applications out the door, but she writes him a really nice recommendation letter and helps him with his essay. Sometimes she lets him grade the freshmen's papers, and he even goes over to her house for dinner a couple of times.

It's kind of weird, sure, but he's kept in mind what Ms. Morrell said about having an adult in his life that he could trust, and Ms. Blake is nice, and she never asks him prying questions like who the dad of his baby might be. Plus, she's having a baby, too, and even if she's not actually the one carrying the baby, it's nice to commiserate about things.

She shows him the nursery she's set up in one of her spare bedrooms, and it makes Stiles think guiltily about the room he's yet to set up at his dad's house. Right now, he's just got boxes of all the gifts he's gotten piled up on the bed in the spare bedroom. Ms. Blake's painted the walls of her nursery blue, then sponge-painted clouds on the ceiling. He's quietly jealous.

"How often do you talk to your surrogate?" he asks abruptly one evening over Chinese food, fiddling with his chopsticks.

"A couple times a week," Ms. Blake says, setting down her own chopsticks, watching him curiously. "Why do you ask?"

Stiles shrugs with one shoulder. "What do you guys talk about?"

Ms. Blake frowns. "The baby, mostly," she says, "but a little bit of everything."

"Have you ever asked them how they feel about it?" Stiles asks. "Carrying the baby for you?"

"Not really," Ms. Blake says, her face softening. "Why, Stiles?"

"I don't know," he says, looking down at his Kung Pao chicken. He thinks again about the spare bedroom at home and how it's lightyears from looking like a nursery.

Ms. Blake lowers her voice. "Are you having second thoughts about keeping your baby?"

Stiles winces. "I don't know." He's excited about the thought of her sometimes, but a lot of the time he just avoids thinking about it altogether. More than half a year along, and he's still not sure he's
“Well,” Ms. Blake says firmly, “it’s your choice, but you know you can always talk to me about it.”

It's rainy and cold through most of the month, the days warming as they head toward spring. There are several cold nights where the temperature dips toward freezing, making the roads slippery, and it's on one of those nights toward the end of the month when Stiles finds himself driving home from dinner with Scott and his mom. It's raining, but he's not paying that much attention to the weather, distracted by his baby moving around inside him. She always seems to get more active in the evenings; she's started doing this thing where she presses up against his ribs, and it's remarkably uncomfortable.

He's got a hand on his ribs, gently pushing back, trying to get her to move away, when the car in front of him hits their brakes, tail end weaving on the slick road. Stiles slows, but not carefully enough; his back end swings out behind him and the Jeep starts to skid sideways. He curses, heart hammering in his chest as he narrowly misses an oncoming truck, and tries to correct the spin. Before he can, though, his back wheels get sucked off the edge of the road, and suddenly the Jeep's barrelling backwards down a steep hill, branches whipping at the windows. Stiles swears frantically, slamming on the brakes, but nothing seems to be happening. All he can see is trees zipping by, receding in the light of his headlights, and then he's stopped very abruptly, just enough time for him to hear the back end crumple in before the jolt catches up to him and his head slams forward into the steering wheel.

When Stiles cracks his eyes open next, his head's pounding worse than it had after the wolfsbane, and he's still in the car. Judging by all the noise his car's making, and what sounds like branches raining down on his roof, it's only been a minute or two since he crashed. For a moment, Stiles sits still, trying to take stock of what just happened, and then he panics because oh fuck, the baby! A frantic assessment of his stomach reveals no obvious wounds, but that doesn't mean everything’s all right. He can feel blood trickling down the side of his head—it hurts, and it itches—but he ignores it as he scrambles for his phone, pounding in the number for the station.

"Beacon County Sheriff's Department," says a voice Stiles recognizes as Peggy, the night dispatcher. She's been working at the station for over thirty years, and she used to drop Stiles off at school sometimes, back when his mom was in the hospital.

Stiles heaves a sigh of relief, but it's kind of a shock when he goes to speak and his voice comes out high and wavering. "Peggy, it's Stiles."

"Oh, Stiles!" she exclaims. "We got some calls in about a Jeep going off the road—was that you? Are you hurt, sweetheart?"

"I think I hit a tree," Stiles says weakly. "I'm—I think I'm okay. I hit my head."

"Just sit tight, sweetheart," she says. "Deputy Parrish is headed for you, and I'm mobilizing a bus."

"My dad—"

"He's on a call, but I'll get him on the radio and let him know what's going on," Peggy assures him. "Do you want me to stay on the line?"

"No," Stiles says. "I can see someone coming down the hill." It's true; he can see a flashlight
bobbing around as someone makes their way toward him. "Thanks."

"No problem, sweetheart," Peggy says, and hangs up.

Stiles rolls down his window as the light approaches, head aching with even that small movement. It's Parrish, who's one of the relatively new deputies, only been on the force for three years. He frowns in at Stiles, eyes flickering over him and the Jeep. "What happened?" Parrish asks, reaching out to press two cold fingers under Stiles' jaw, checking his pulse.

"Lost traction," Stiles tells him. He's starting to shake, though whether it's from cold or adrenaline he doesn't know.

Parrish seems to notice; his frown deepens, and he pries open the door. "Can you walk? Are your legs hurt?"

"I think I'm okay," Stiles says, tentatively unfolding himself from the car. He hits the ground and sways; Parrish steps in to catch him, looping an arm around him to keep him upright. "I'm okay!" Stiles protests, but it's just like Lydia's all over again, his legs weaving around under him without his say-so. Parrish starts to lead him back up the hill, but Stiles cranes his head around and groans at what he sees; the entire back end of his Jeep's crumpled up against a massive tree. "Oh, shit."

"It's just a car," Parrish says, helping him over a log.

"It was my mom's," Stiles replies mournfully. "Dad's going to be pissed."

"I think he's going to be more relieved you're not dead," Parrish says calmly.

There's an ambulance just pulling up as they reach the road, another squad car behind it. He's sat down on the back of the ambulance as the EMT wraps a blanket around his shoulders and starts assessing him, and Parrish goes off to help the other deputy direct traffic. Stiles is mortified.

"I'm fine," he insists repeatedly. He thinks it's true; his head's stopped bleeding, and the baby's pressing up against his ribs again, so he thinks she's okay. He doesn't need this whole scene, and now traffic's all backed up because they closed a lane so there was room for the ambulance. People are staring at him as they drive slowly past, and that's even worse. It's not enough, he supposes, that people stare because he's pregnant; now he's a threat to his own safety. Stiles sighs.

"All right," says the responder. "We're going to take you to the hospital."

"Why?" Stiles protests.

"You've got a concussion, and with the baby, we don't want to take any chances," she tells him. "We don't want to risk any internal damage."

Stiles lifts his head, ready to go into Stilinski Fight Mode, which his mom was famous for when she was pregnant with him, and then he spots, in the line of traffic crawling by, Derek Hale. He's not looking in their direction at all, eyes fixed on the road in front of him, the corners of his mouth turned downward. Upon seeing him, all the fight goes out of Stiles. It shouldn't surprise him by now, but Derek's clear disinterest in him still stings, and this stupid, treacherous omega part of him that he always fights tooth and nail to subdue, whispers that that's his alpha, and his alpha's abandoned him. It feels like he's been dunked in ice water.

"Stiles?" the EMT presses.

"Fine," he says quietly, and doesn't argue as she shoos him into the ambulance. He just pulls the
blanket tighter around himself as they drive, the technician cleaning the wound on his temple.

Parrish follows them to the hospital, and waits outside the examination room while Stiles gets another ultrasound and the baby's given a clean bill of health.

"You didn't have to wait," Stiles says dully, zipping up his jacket as he comes out of the room.

"I need your statement for the accident report," Parrish replies, "and your dad wants me to take you to the station." He gives Stiles a considering look. "You all right?"

"Fine," Stiles says, but when he thinks about Derek, he feels like crying.

"Okay," Parrish says skeptically, but he doesn't push it. He drives Stiles over to the station before he takes his statement, and then Stiles sits in his dad's office for nearly two hours. He's aware, vaguely, of a lot of movement going on in the station around him, but he's too wrapped up in unhappiness to want to pry.

When his dad finally comes back, he's soaking wet from the rain, but he wraps Stiles up in a tight hug. It's only then that Stiles cries, his face tucked against his dad's shoulder, when it suddenly sinks in that he could have died, or the baby could have been hurt, and then the hurt from Derek's compounded on top of that, and it all reaches this point where he can't handle it any more, and it comes out in tears.

"Sorry, sorry," he says, over and over, but his dad just hugs him tighter.

-  

It turns out that the call his dad was on was another triple homicide, same M.O. as the last time—though Stiles’ dad tells him that the bodies had been out there for at least a day before the call came in. The town gossip, which had started to die down in the last few weeks without any new news, sprung up in a fervor. The good thing is that no one has any time to spare a word about Stiles’ accident—or, for the first time in weeks, the baby. The bad thing is that Stiles' dad is working nonstop again, leaving Stiles plenty of time alone at home to brood, languishing in his melancholy like a pig in a sty.

He gets three days of that before Cora marches up to him while he's standing at his locker in-between classes and shoves a paper bag from McDonalds into his hands.

"Wha—"

She cuts him off, looking irritated. "His idea," she says pointedly. "Read the note."

"Note?" Stiles says, bewildered.

"In the bag," Cora says, looking pained by his stupidity. "Read the note, then go fucking see him, and leave me out of this."

"Hey," Stiles calls out, but she's already disappearing into the crowded hallway. Still feeling bewildered, Stiles opens the bag and finds half a dozen apple pies and, on top of them, a folded note. Heart beginning to beat faster in his chest, Stiles pulls out the note and reads:

Stiles -

*I'm sorry for not stopping the other night. I should have, and I wanted to, and I haven't stopped thinking about it since. Cora says you're at school and you look okay, and I know you don't want to*
see me, but I still want you to know that I care about what happens to you and the baby.

You don't owe me this, but I'd like to know you're both okay. I know you deleted my number, but you could tell Cora, or Scott—he's got my number, or Laura's, if he's deleted mine. So I know for sure.

- D.

Stiles exhales shakily, fingers tightening around the note so that the paper crinkles. This—he wasn't expecting this. He never thought—

"You okay, man?"

Stiles looks up to see Scott standing in front of him, his brow furrowed in concern. Stiles shoves the note at him wordlessly, anxiously watching Scott read it. Scott looks from the paper to him, brow still furrowed.

"I told you," he says. "He's not—he doesn't feel obligated—"

"I think I fucked this whole thing up," Stiles admits, all the air rushing out of his lungs. He glares up at the ceiling, and counts to ten while Scott reads the note again. He inhales. "I've been such a fucking asshole to him."

Scott gives him a hesitant smile. "Well. It seems like he's still interested in you anyway. I mean—" He waves the note around. "Do you want me to text him for you?"

Stiles exhales again, more controlled this time, and then he nods. Stiles watches Scott pull his phone from his pocket, tapping out a swift message to Derek. "There," he says. "That's a start. I'll let you know if he replies."

"Thanks," Stiles says, a little shakily. He thinks about it all day, anxiety mounting as there's no response from Derek. He asks Scott so many times if he's heard anything that by the end of the day, all Stiles has to do is look at Scott for him to shake his head.

He's got plenty of time to think about it that night, his dad working at the station until sunrise. Stiles feels raw and anxious; his heart won’t stop racing in his chest. He’s been wrong. This whole time, he’s been wrong. Cora tried to tell him—fucking Derek told him that he wanted to help, and Stiles still wouldn’t believe that he could be wanted. He’s not attractive right now, not with his stomach tight with seven months of child, but apparently that doesn’t matter to Derek.

Stiles wants him so bad—he’s so tired of rocketing between hatred and want—but he tries not to get his hopes too high, always doubtful. Maybe Derek’s just being nice. Maybe Cora put him up to it. It’s certainly disappointing when he gets to school the next morning and Scott says, “I heard from him. He says he’s glad you’re okay.”

“Anything else?” Stiles asks, trying not to sound too eager, and utterly failing.

Scott shakes his head with a rueful smile, watching Stiles slump in his chair. “What are you going to do?”


Scott squints up at the ceiling thoughtfully. “Beats me,” he decides. “I don’t know—do you want his number?”

Stiles shakes his head dourly, and then stills as he remembers—Cora told him where Derek’s living
right now. What if he just went and saw him? He’s sick of all this dancing around; he could go see Derek and get this settled once and for all. If Derek’s not interested in him, then that’s it, over, done, but if he is—Stiles’ stomach twists nervously.

Scott leans back in his chair and carefully says, “I went to the Hale house last night.”


Scott chews on his lip for a minute before he says, “I realized there are things I need to learn.”

“Oh,” Stiles says slowly. “Well. That’s good. What’d you learn last night?”

“Does your back hurt?” Scott asks.


“Derek did this thing when you were in heat. He—well, look.” Scott reaches out and presses his palm to Stiles’ shoulder blades. Stiles’ eyes go wide as black lines go swirling up Scott’s veins, and the low ache at the base of his spine begins to fade away.

“Dude,” he says reverently. “That’s—does that hurt?”

“A little,” Scott says, shaking his hand. “Pins and needles. Laura says it hurts more depending on the injury.”

“But it’s not like—” Stiles twists, trying to see his own back. “Is it healing?”

Scott shakes his head. “It just takes the pain.”

“You know I’m going to need you to follow me around all day and do that,” Stiles says, and Scott laughs. A little more seriously, Stiles adds, “Does this mean you’re thinking about joining their pack?”

“No,” Scott says, frowning a little. “I mean—maybe. I don’t know. No? But—if you and Derek—I mean, if you guys start seeing more of each other, maybe I should.”

“Did Laura say that?” Stiles asks suspiciously.

“No,” Scott says again, looking surprised now. “She didn’t even mention you. It was kind of weird.”

“Hm,” Stiles says thoughtfully, but it kind of helps, somehow. He bends his head over his textbook and starts copying down questions, but the idea of going to see Derek never leaves his mind. It sticks with him all day, even when he goes to see his dad at the station in an attempt to distract himself. It doesn’t work; his dad’s so busy that he can’t step away to see Stiles, just gives him a weary nod from across the office. Stiles is worried about him; people are saying that it might not be a druid after all, but a serial killer.

He goes home and eats dinner alone, but the idea of going to see Derek still hasn’t left his head. He tries to ignore it, body tight with nerves, but he drags his feet as he heads upstairs to get ready for bed, chewing on his lip until it bleeds.

Stiles is in his room, about to start undressing when he makes up his mind, jerking his shirt back down over his head. He whirls downstairs and outside, striding across the lawn determinedly. He doesn’t have a car right now, and he’s not ready to share this plan with Scott, so he has to catch the last bus of the night downtown. It drops him off across the street from Derek’s building, and Stiles
has to stop to stare up at it, at all the lit panes of glass, breathing heavily through his nose.

He can do this, he tells himself, and sets off across the street.
Derek

Derek would pay any amount of money if it meant he never has to live through another winter as shitty as the one that has just passed. It’s too long, cold and wet and stressful. Laura drops him off at the loft the day he kisses Stiles and his heat’s barely set in before she’s calling him, panicking because someone found dead bodies out on the preserve, three of them, lashed to trees and their throats slit.

“It’s happening,” she says hoarsely, and the fear in her voice makes Derek’s skin break into goosebumps. “What I felt—it’s coming.”

Derek whines softly, frustrated and nervous. “I can’t—come to you—”

“It’s okay,” Laura says, her voice suddenly dropping low and calm. “It’s all right. I’ll talk to the police and see what they say. Call me after your heat’s passed.”

But even after Derek’s passed his heat, angry and miserable and longing for Stiles, there aren’t any answers. The police haven’t learned anything, don’t even have any suspects, and Derek spends a lot of his spare time in the woods with Laura, shivering in cold rain and snow. Laura’s fixated on the woods.

“This is our land,” she keeps saying angrily, eyes burning red around the edges. Cora’s the only one who can get her to come out of the woods and eat, but the moment Laura’s come home from work and eaten dinner, she’s off in the woods again. After a while, Derek only goes out there with her once a week at most; there’s nothing to see, and he’s got homework to do.

He sees Jennifer Blake a couple of times. They go out for coffee, drinks. Derek had started to forget what going out was like; he’s been isolating himself all year, holding out for Stiles. It’s a little weird that she’s having a baby too—she shows him the nursery she’s put together, walls painted blue and sponge-painted with clouds. Derek stares at it and tries not to think about how the blue matches the color of Stiles’ Jeep. It’s odd, too—he thinks he catches a whiff of Stiles’ scent in her house once, but he must be imagining it.

Derek’s got another heat coming on at the end of February, and when Jenn tentatively offers her company, Derek gives it some thought, and then agrees. It can’t be worse than being alone, he thinks, and he doesn’t want to spend another three days fucking his hand and pining for Stiles. That hole in his chest is still there—and maybe it’ll always be there—but he’s gotten better at learning to ignore it.

That’s what he thinks, at least, but when he’s over at Jenn’s and she smiles at him and starts leading him toward her bedroom, Derek—can’t. His heat’s starting to come on strong, aching for something, please, but he can’t do it. Jenn’s sweet and funny and kind, and he does like her, and if he weren’t so fucking wrapped up in Stiles he’d have no problem dating her, but he can’t do this.

“It’s okay,” Jenn says softly, though she looks disappointed.

It’s not, though. Derek’s been selfish, using her company to try to distract himself from Stiles. “I’m really sorry,” he says, and it’s the truth. He feels like shit.

“It’s okay,” Jenn says again, giving him a small smile. “I know I’m not the one on your mind.”

“I’m sorry,” Derek says again, feeling worse than ever.
Jenn sees him to the door, presses a gentle kiss to his cheek, and Derek drives off feeling shittier than he’s felt in weeks, now having ruined things with two people. He’s such a fucking asshole; no wonder Stiles has no interest in him.

He’s halfway home when traffic slows; it’s raining again, the asphalt slick, and he can see flashing lights off the side of the road ahead. An accident, he guesses, and like everyone else he stares as he approaches the scene. There’s no car in sight, but two sheriff’s deputies’ cruisers sit on the side of the road behind an ambulance, and sitting on the back step of the ambulance is—Derek almost hits the back of the car in front of him—Stiles, hand pressed to a bandage on his temple. There’s blood running down the side of his face; he looks exhausted and hurt.

For one wild moment, Derek thinks about pulling over, panic rising in his chest as he wonders if Stiles—and the baby—are okay. But—Derek clenches his teeth. No. Stiles doesn’t want him, doesn’t want his help, and the last thing either of them wants is other people knowing Derek’s the dad. Derek exhales harshly and fixes his eyes back on the road in front of him, refusing to look in Stiles’ direction even as traffic creeps past.

Derek gets home and crawls into bed, jerking off quickly to stave off his heat just a little longer so he can sleep, but as he lay in bed, trying to fall asleep, all he can think about is Stiles sitting there in the rain with blood on his face. Is he okay?

This time around, his heat’s not all that bad; at the very least, he’s able to get himself out of bed and go to class. It’s a blessing and a curse because it means he’s awake and coherent enough to spend the entire time worrying about Stiles. Surely he would have heard something if Stiles was really hurt, but he can’t even find a mention of the accident on The Beacon Hills Herald’s website, just an article about the weather that night and a vague reference to “multiple minor vehicle accidents.” That’s a good thing, he supposes, but it doesn’t stop Derek stressing out over him.

Cora comes over when his heat’s mostly dissipated and he’s just hot and cranky. She comes over quite often during the week, spreading her homework out over the dining table and working quietly until dinnertime. She’s been happier since she and Lydia started dating just after Christmas, and Derek’s glad for her; with Laura’s obsession with the woods, and his problems with Stiles, it’s good that someone in their pack is happy and content. (It doesn’t help that there were three more murders the night of Stiles’ accident—ritual sacrifices, asserts The Beacon Hills Herald. Laura doesn’t call him up this time, but Cora says Laura’s worried.) Cora still won’t tell him what she and Lydia argued about before Christmas, but he’s got a feeling it had something to do with him and Stiles—he knows Lydia and Stiles are friends.

Still, the first thing he does when Cora comes through the door is turn to her and snap, “Is Stiles okay?”

Cora gives him a surprised look. “As far as I know. Why?”

He tells her about the accident and she frowns thoughtfully, pulling books out of her bag and laying them out on the table before finally shaking her head. “I haven’t noticed anything. Why don’t you just ask him?”

Derek shakes his head, the corners of his mouth turning down. “He’s not interested in talking to me.”

Cora rolls her eyes, thumping herself down in a chair at the table. “You’re both idiots.” When Derek glares at her, she says impatiently, “He is so gone on you, you dumbass. He tries to pretend he’s not, but everyone knows it—except you, apparently.”

Derek stares at her, lips parting in surprise. “Is that—are you serious?”
Cora gives him an exasperated look. “Do you really think I’d lie to you about this?”

“No,” he says, slowly sinking down to sit at the table next to her. “I just...are you sure?”

“Yes,” Cora says vehemently. “God—I promised Lydia I wouldn’t tell you, so don’t you dare say a fucking word about this to anyone, but he accidentally took wolfsbane at Lydia’s birthday party, and you know what he hallucinated about? Making up with you.”

“I—” Derek doesn’t know what to say, his heart pounding in his chest. Cora’s not lying—her heartbeat’s steady and slow. He takes a moment to breathe in slowly before he asks, “What should I do?”

“This is your mess,” Cora says irritably, but then she sighs and adds, “Maybe take it slow? Don’t just show up at his house like last time.” She eyes him for a moment. “If you want me to give him a message, this is the only time I’m going to offer to be your go-between. Once.”

“Okay,” Derek says quietly. “Let me think about it.”

Cora nods briskly, turning her attention to her homework. Derek sits, lost in thought, until the heat makes him antsy and he gets up to make dinner. The whole time he’s cooking he’s thinking, wondering what to say. He’s pretty sure he’s already told Stiles everything he feels, but maybe Stiles wasn’t listening, or didn’t want to listen, or maybe it was too much too soon. He knows, reasonably, that they’ve only really known each other for a month, and a casual month at that, and it’s not like he’s ready to declare his love, but maybe Stiles found it offputting that he was so adamant about being involved with the baby, and with him. Take it slow, Cora said. Maybe she’s right.

“Did you make up your mind?” Cora asks as he sets a plate of food down in front of her. “Thanks.”

“You’re welcome,” he says automatically, and then, “Can I write him a note?”

Cora rolls her eyes as she digs in. “Do what you want.”

“Promise you won’t read it,” Derek presses.

“Like I want to read your gross love letters,” Cora snorts. “I promise.”

After they’ve finished eating, Cora keeps working on her homework and Derek pulls out a notepad to write. It takes several tries before he ends up with something he’s satisfied with; he tries to keep it open-ended and as unaggressive as possible—he doesn’t mention wanting to see Stiles, or wanting to help him at all, just wants to know he’s okay. He folds it carefully and then pulls a twenty dollar bill out of his wallet, pushing both over to Cora.

She raises her eyebrows at him. “Is that a bribe? I already told you I’d do it.”

“I need you to go to McDonald’s and buy a couple of those apple pies. You can keep the rest of the money. Shut up,” he adds irritably, as her eyebrows rise higher. He still remembers Stiles eating three of them in quick succession the second night they’d been together, and the way he’d tasted like sugar and cinnamon when Derek kissed him later.


“Just do it, please,” Derek sighs. “I’ll never ask anything of you ever again.”

“Like hell you won’t,” Cora says, sounding fond. She doesn’t argue further though, taking the note
and the money and putting it carefully into her pocket.

Cora heads home a little while later, and Derek’s surprised to find that he’s not all that anxious to learn what Stiles’ response to his note is going to be. He feels calm; he’s done what he can, and if Cora’s right, he’ll hear from Stiles somehow. If not, and Cora’s wrong about how Stiles feels about him, this is it, he thinks. He’s done everything he can to help Stiles, and if he doesn’t hear from Stiles after this, then fine.

Derek takes a shower, washing the last of his heat away, and goes to bed. In the morning, he gets up and goes to class, and he’s almost forgotten that it’s even happened until he checks his phone just after lunch and he’s got a message from Scott McCall that says Stiles says he and the baby are ok, thanks. Right after it is another one that says Good call on the pies btw. he loves those things.

Derek slips his phone back into his pocket, warmth flooding his chest. Does this mean something? Is Stiles just being polite? But Stiles isn’t really the type to be polite; the way he’d shouted at Derek while throwing his money back in his face was proof enough of that. And he’s spent enough time telling Derek to fuck off that he wouldn’t voluntarily get in touch unless it was just that—voluntary. Unless it was Scott being polite, which is possible; he seems like the type.

But if it was Stiles—what should he do now? Text Scott back, probably, but his next class is starting so he’ll have to wait until he gets home. It’s past five by the time he does, and he agonizes over what to send back before settling on I'm really glad to hear that. Scott doesn’t reply, which isn’t unexpected; Laura says he doesn’t return the majority of her messages, and Derek has a further vague memory of her saying he’s involved in one of the school sports, so he’s probably at practice. He’s impatient now that Stiles has responded, and he’s tempted to try texting Stiles again—he has Stiles’ number still, even if Stiles deleted his—but then he remembers again Cora saying Take it slow. He takes a deep breath instead, and immerses himself in a paper for one of his classes until his eyes start to feel gritty and then he goes to bed.

Laura calls him early the next morning, an odd note to her voice that Derek can’t decipher. “Did you tell Scott that I’d teach him how to pull pain from people?”

Derek rolls onto his stomach with a weary sigh, rubbing a hand over his eyes as he tries to remember the few words he and Scott exchanged at the Stilinski house the night of Stiles’ pseudo-heat. “I might have. Why?”

“How?” Derek asks, smiling faintly. He can’t remember the last time he heard Laura like this. “Did it go well?”

“I think so,” Laura says brightly. “I took him through the preserve, too, and—god, Derek, did you know he’s never been out on a full moon before? He always stays at home. We have to take him out next month.”

“Okay,” Derek says indulgently. “You think he’s going to say yes to you now?”

“I don’t know,” Laura says, “but now I feel like he’s actually paying attention. Whatever you said to him—thank you.”

Derek grins, relaxing as he lets the sound of his alpha’s voice, pleased and content, wash over him.
“I have to get to work, but this is a good day, Derek,” Laura says, almost singing—just like how their mom used to get when she was truly happy. “I’ll talk to you later!”

Derek rolls back onto his back, sprawled out across his bed. It is a good day, he thinks, even though there’s been no word from Scott. He gets up and takes a shower, jerks off lazily because he’s in no rush, and heads to class with plenty of time to spare. It’s late afternoon before he checks his phone: more messages from Scott.

That’s weak dude—that’s all you have to say?

hes bummout man, step up your game

just ask him on a date or something. im like 95% sure he’ll say yes

Derek stares at that last message for a while, his throat tightening. If Scott’s so sure—and, by all accounts, he and Stiles have been basically joined at the hip since Scott moved to Beacon Hills in middle school, so much so that according to Cora most of her classmates think that Scott’s the father of Stiles’ baby—is Stiles finally going to relent?

Derek’s got a lot to think about—and no time to think about it, because Laura calls him just then; she wants to patrol the woods for a couple hours, which is her unsubtle way of saying she wants company. Derek sighs, but as the dutiful brother and beta he is, he pulls his shoes back on and heads out the door.

- It’s late when Derek gets back, cold and somewhat damp from too many fruitless hours wandering the preserve with Laura. At this point, he’s fairly certain she’s quit expecting to find anything and just does it because she wants to spend time with him—which is ridiculous because he’s over at the house all the time. Or maybe she just needs a sounding board, because she spends most of the night talking about a tough orphan case out in Oklahoma, a state notoriously sparse in werewolf packs.

“And I don’t want to uproot him entirely,” she says worriedly. “Relocation’s easiest when the land around you is still recognizable.”

“Is that why you never adopt any of your cases?” Derek asks, and she stops walking to stare at him.

“I’m not bringing any kids here,” she says seriously. “Not until our pack is stable.”

“And how do you plan on doing that?” Derek asks. “Scott?”

“Hopefully.” Laura chews on her lip for a moment before she adds, “I’ve had a couple kids ask me for the bite, but I’m not turning any of them until they’re eighteen, and even then we’re going to have to choose carefully. A newly bitten wolf can make an unstable pack worse, if they’re not careful.”

“Who, then?” Derek asks curiously.

“A girl Cora knows,” Laura shrugs. “She’s got epilepsy and wants a cure, but I think she could make a strong wolf. Her boyfriend’s another; doesn’t have any family.”

“Another one of your orphans, huh?” Derek says, and watches Laura smile faintly. “That’d be good. If Scott doesn’t join us, I don’t want to be the only guy in the pack.”

Laura’s smile widens. “I know,” she says softly, “and your baby’s a girl too. You can’t get away from us.” She steps in close to Derek, looping an arm around his shoulders, reeling him in so she can
rub their cheeks together. “Any news there? Cora mentioned things might be improving?”

“Maybe,” Derek says, a little guardedly. He doesn’t want to jinx anything. “Scott told me I should ask Stiles out.”

“Oh?” Laura gives him a searching look. “Are you?”

“Do you think I should?”

“I think you should do whatever makes you happy,” she replies, touching their foreheads together. “I’m sorry I pushed you so hard when you first found out. I think I may have been part of why he pushed you away.”

“No,” Derek says. “He was mad at me, not you. Nothing you told me to do would have changed that.”

“Well,” Laura says, as they began to walk back toward the house. “I’m glad that things are looking up.”

Derek is glad too, though right now he’s tired. He takes a shower, standing under the hot water for a long time with his head bowed right down toward his chest, letting the warmth seep into his bones. He’s loose and relaxed by the time he’s done, and dresses comfortably in an old shirt and sweatpants, and he’s just eyeing his bed when he picks up the sound of the elevator stopping out in the hall. Derek frowns, not sure who’d be there at this time of night—Laura was headed to bed when he left the house, and she’d said Cora was at Lydia’s, unless they had another fight and Cora’s come over to vent.

But whoever it is seems hesitant to approach. Derek listens to the doors slide open, and there’s a long pause before the doors begin to slide shut again, only to abruptly stop and open again. Someone walks down the hall slowly, and Derek heads to the door, still frowning, to meet them. He’s got his hand on the doorknob when the stranger’s scent hits him, immediately recognizable as Stiles’, though soured by anxiety and exhaustion.

Derek’s struck by a fierce hurricane of emotion—hope and want and fear—and he doesn’t even stop to think before he’s ripping open the door.

Stiles freezes, his eyes going wide. He’s got his hand up in the air like he was about to knock. “Oh,” he says.

“How,” Derek says roughly, not sure why he’s there, not sure what to expect—but then Stiles is rushing forward, tucking himself up against Derek’s body. He smells like stress and his heart’s hammering in his chest, drowning out the sound of the baby’s own heartbeat, but Derek exhales in relief, curling around him.

“I’m sorry,” Stiles says into Derek’s shoulder, voice muffled by Derek’s shirt. “I thought I knew what I was doing. I—”

“Shh,” Derek murmurs, rubbing his cheek against Stiles’ hair, just glad he’s there. Stiles exhales roughly, his whole body shuddering, his fingers curling against Derek’s shoulder blades.

“You smell so good,” Stiles mumbles, turning his head to breathe against Derek’s throat. “I missed __”

Derek draws back slightly, pressing his palm to Stiles’ cheek. “Are you in heat?” he asks seriously, because he needs to know if this is real. Stiles doesn’t smell like he’s in heat, but maybe Derek still
is; maybe this is all a heat-induced dream—

Stiles shakes his head frantically. “One hundred percent my own will,” he says fervently, his eyes dropping to Derek’s mouth. “If you—if you still want me after I’ve been such an asshole.”

“I always want you,” Derek breathes. Stiles gives him a startled half smile, eyebrows rising as if to say really? Derek nods because really; there’s not a day that goes by where he doesn’t crave Stiles, that empty place in his chest aching for him.

Stiles presses in close again, smelling eager and nervous, and brushes his nose against Derek’s before dipping in and catching his mouth. It’s not like the kiss in the parking lot a month ago, frantic and rushed; it’s like the last kiss they shared at the end of the summer. Derek shouldn’t read into it, he knows—Stiles has been there less than five minutes—but it’s a kiss that feels like it means something: a kiss and a promise.

He makes a low noise at the back of his throat when Stiles loops his arms around Derek’s neck, completely eliminating what little space there was left between them as their kiss deepens. He wants to pick Stiles up and carry him to bed, or possibly bed him right there on the floor. He can’t get over how good Stiles smells, rich and sweet and lush with pheromones, with the fullness of his stomach pressing up against Derek’s. That jolts him a little, Cora’s words running through his head—take it slow.

Derek pulls away from Stiles reluctantly. “We need to talk.”

“Yeah,” Stiles agrees, sounding just as unenthusiastic. He makes a disagreeable noise when Derek takes a couple steps backwards, his cheeks flushed splotchy pink, but he draws in a deep breath and says, “I didn’t really come here with a plan,” He laughs quietly, a little too harshly. “Seems to be my M.O.”

Derek frowns. “Don’t talk about yourself like that,” he says. “We all—I’m just as guilty as you are.”

Stiles looks down at his stomach. “Well,” he says slowly. “Hindsight’s twenty-twenty, I guess. But—” He looks back up at Derek, a tentative expression on his face. “I’m tired,” he says, and then he swallows hard. “I’m sick of pretending I’m mad at you. I don’t want to do it anymore.”

“I’d like that,” Derek says quietly.

“Are you sure?” Stiles says hesitantly. “After the way I—”

“I’m sure,” Derek says firmly. He hesitates, not wanting to ask, but he needs to. “Does your dad know you’re here?”

Stiles shakes his head, his expression going grim. “He’s been working like crazy on the whole sacrificial murder thing. He hasn’t been coming home.”

“He wouldn’t be happy you’re here,” Derek says.

“No,” Stiles agrees quietly, folding his arms across his chest. “But—I don’t care. I just—” He rubs his hands over his face, looking exhausted. “Can I stay here tonight?”

Derek blinks, startled. His first instinct is to say of course, yes, please, but he hesitates. “I’m not—we shouldn’t—”

“I’m not expecting anything,” Stiles says, giving him a miserable smile. “I just want to be near you. I’m sick of this—this divide.”
Derek forces himself to exhale slowly, and gives in. “Okay,” he says, shoulders relaxing at the way Stiles’ scent sweetens in relief. He knows they still have a lot left to talk about, but this is a good place to take a break. “You want a shower or anything?”

“That sounds good,” Stiles says, and drifts along behind Derek when he steps away from the front door and toward his bedroom. Derek can see Stiles looking around surreptitiously, but doesn’t bother calling him out on it; he likes this place, and wants Stiles to like it too. He stops by his dresser and pulls clothes from the drawers for Stiles to wear after he’s showered, turning and pressing them into Stiles’ arms.

“The bathroom’s through there,” he says, nodding toward the far wall.

“Thanks,” Stiles says, taking half a step in that direction before pausing, his eyes on the clothes in his arms. “Thanks for leaving me your shirt,” he adds abruptly. “Scott said you behaved yourself when I was in heat. I wish you hadn’t had to come, but I appreciate it.”

“It was nothing,” Derek says quietly.

“It was something,” Stiles replies. He looks up at Derek, and there’s something in his eyes that makes Derek sway in close to him and put a hand around the back of his neck, leaning in so he can press a kiss to Stiles’ temple. They stand still for a long moment, and then Stiles presses the flat of his palm to Derek’s chest—just a warm touch—and then he steps away and heads for the bathroom.

Derek sinks down onto the edge of his bed as the shower turns on, feeling almost light-headed with relief. Stiles is here, finally, and he wants Derek—unless this is a dream, and Derek’s still in the shower, daydreaming and lost in thought. But he jabs himself in the arm with a claw and it hurts; this is real. Stiles is here.

Derek tries not to let himself get too worked up; they’ve still got a lot to discuss, and they shouldn’t rush into anything the way they rushed into their summer romance, but his wolf’s so happy, satisfied his mate’s come back to him—it’s hard not to start imagining Stiles moving in, getting the nursery put together. Derek jabs himself in the arm again. Take it slow.

He’s still sitting there when Stiles comes out of the bathroom, his hair damp and clinging to his forehead. Derek has to swallow back a pained sound at the way Stiles smells like him, wrapped in his clothes—just like he’s been craving for months. Most of the tension’s gone from his body, and he half-smiles when he sees Derek sitting on the edge of the bed, coming to a stop just in front of him. His stomach’s getting bigger, stretching the shirt he’s wearing.

“You want to feel her?” Stiles asks. “She’s moving all around tonight. I think she knows you’re here.”

Derek straightens. “Can I?”

Stiles nods, stepping between Derek’s knees. Derek draws in a slow breath before he lifts one hand and presses it to Stiles’ stomach, spreading his fingers against his warm skin. He feels her almost immediately, an odd, almost alien motion under Stiles’ skin. He exhales sharply.

“You feel her?” Stiles asks quietly. He reaches out, tentatively settling a hand on Derek’s head, curling his fingers in his hair.

“Yeah,” Derek says shakily. Seeing the ultrasound was one thing, but feeling her—feeling their baby—is entirely another. “I can—I can hear her. Her heartbeat.”

“Oh yeah?” Stiles says. “Does she sound good?”
“I don’t know,” Derek says, finally dropping his hand away from Stiles’ stomach. “It’s fast.”

“That’s good,” Stiles says. “It’s supposed to be.” He hesitates then, looking at Derek like there’s something on his mind.

“What?” Derek says. “You can ask me anything.”

Still, Stiles hesitates for another long second, his eyebrows drawing together in a frown before he asks, all in a rush, “Will you scent me?”

Derek blinks, startled by the request. “I—of course. Do you...want to sit? Lie down?”

Stiles nods, but he moves forward instead, climbing onto the bed to straddle Derek’s legs. “Is this all right?” he asks, voice so quiet he’s almost whispering.

“Fine,” Derek breathes, leaning in to inhale his scent, swallowing down greedy lungfuls of him. He’s been dreaming about this for so long, longing for it; now that Stiles is here and so close, it’s hard to keep himself under control. He can feel his fangs itching at his gums, claws pressing at the tips of his fingers. He doesn’t even get like this when he’s in heat, but Stiles’ scent, the rich smell of pheromones, is doing unexpected things to him.

“‘S okay,” Stiles murmurs, pressing his forehead to Derek’s. “Shift if you want. I’ve never seen you do it before.”

Derek makes a low noise and shifts without any effort at all, the world around him sharpening as his senses enhance. Stiles smells even better like this, blood burning under his skin. Derek breathes against his neck, rubbing his cheek against every bare patch of skin he can reach, so content he’s almost purring. They’re smelling more like each other with every second that passes and it soothes something deep inside of him that’s been hurting for months.

They’re both breathing heavily by the time Derek leans back, Stiles’ cheeks flushed, his eyes glassy. “Your eyes are glowing,” Stiles says, pressing his fingers to the stiff ridge of Derek’s brow. His gaze drops to Derek’s mouth and his eyes drift half-closed as he leans in—but Derek stops him with a hand on his chest.

“Take it slow,” he reminds himself, even though all he wants to do is lay back and let Stiles do whatever he wants. Stiles frowns at him, sudden uncertainty flickering in his eyes.

“Just—hold on,” Derek says, and forces himself to shift so he doesn’t have to talk around his fangs. Stiles sits back, looking like he’s about to get up, but Derek puts a hand on his hip, keeping him still. “Just tell me,” he says slowly, “why you ran after we kissed last month.”

“Oh,” Stiles says, embarrassment creeping over his face and flushing his cheeks darker. “You were in heat, and I—I thought you only kissed me because you wanted...someone. Not me. And you—why didn’t you come after me?”

“Because you kept telling me to leave you alone,” Derek says, “and I thought that it had been my heat that made you kiss me.”

“I’m not that weak,” Stiles says irritably. “I have some self-control.” He’s quiet for a moment, and then he adds ruefully, “Not that much, obviously.”

“Well, I’m sorry for not coming after you,” Derek tells him. “You looked like you would have punched me if I had.”

“I probably would have,” Stiles admits. He sighs, looking down at his stomach.
“I’m glad you’re both okay, though,” Derek says quietly, squeezing Stiles’ hip. “I wanted to stop, that night you were in the accident, but we’re not supposed to know each other, and I don’t think your father’s deputies would have understood.”

Stiles doesn’t look up. “Is that going to change?” he asks. “Us pretending not to know each other?”

“If you want it to,” Derek says softly. “But I think we need to take it slow.”

“Why?” Stiles lifts his head. “A little late for that, don’t you think?” he adds sarcastically, patting his stomach.

“I know,” Derek sighs, “but I’d like to get to know you as a person.”

Stiles stiffens for a moment before his shoulders slump and he admits, “I’d like that too.” He watches Derek for a long moment, his face pensive, before he leans forward again. Derek doesn’t stop him this time, closing his eyes against the soft press of Stiles’ lips to his. It’s a nice kiss, slow and gentle, but Derek pulls back before it can deepen—as much as he’s loathe to.

“Bed?” he suggests quietly, and Stiles nods, climbing off his lap and getting to his feet so Derek can peel back the covers on the bed. He waits for Stiles to worm his way under the sheets and then he goes into the bathroom to brush his teeth. The air’s warm in there, still steamy from Stiles’ shower, and Derek lets his eyes drift half shut, soothed by the sound of Stiles’ heartbeat, his scent hanging around Derek’s shoulders like a cloak.

He pauses in the doorway after he’s done, watching Stiles; he’s lying on his back, fiddling with his phone with one hand, the other rubbing slow circles over his stomach. He looks like everything Derek’s been dreaming about for months; he looks right.

“You know, I’ve never been in your bed before,” Stiles says, putting down his phone and looking over at Derek.

“No,” Derek agrees, a little ashamed. Stiles has never even been in his car before; he was so afraid, last summer, of one of his sisters catching Stiles’ scent and figuring out who he was seeing.

“This is a nice place,” Stiles says, and makes come here gestures at him until Derek uproots himself from the doorway and crosses the room to sink down into the bed next to him.

“Thanks,” Derek tells him. “It’s been in the family a long time. My uncle lived here, before the…”

“The fire,” Stiles finishes quietly. He watches Derek for a long moment before he starts squirming around, trying to get comfortable.

“You need more pillows?” Derek asks, and Stiles makes a face.

“My back,” he says, sounding aggrieved. “I’ve been transformed into an old man.”

“Or, you know, you’re pregnant,” Derek points out, handing him another pillow.

Stiles groans as he rolls onto his side, tucking the pillow under his stomach. “Funny, funny,” he says, beating his pillow into submission. “Can you do that pain thing your sister taught Scott?”

“Sure,” Derek says, shifting closer so he can press his hand to Stiles’ spine. He begins to pull at Stiles’ pain, feeling it in his jaw like a toothache, but it’s not much of a bother; he’s more satisfied to see Stiles going limp, the last vestiges of tension in his body seeping away. Stiles’ heart rate has slowed dramatically since his arrival at the apartment, his scent losing most of the sour traces of
anxiety it’d held. Derek listens to the baby’s heart beating, so much faster than his and Stiles’. “Do you get weird cravings?”

Stiles, whose eyes had started to shut, glances over his shoulder at Derek. “What, like pickles and ice cream or whatever? Not really. I just want to eat everything, whatever it is.”

“Are you hungry right now?” Derek asks. “I could order takeout—”

“I’m fine,” Stiles says sleepily, yawning widely. “Don’t worry about it, man.”

“Okay,” Derek says, watching Stiles for a long moment before settling onto his side. He keeps his hand on Stiles’ back even though there’s no more pain to pull from him at the moment, enjoying the fact that he can. Stiles sighs quietly—not an upset noise, but peaceful. Derek echos him in a slow inhale before asking, “What do you think of all of this?”

Stiles opens his eyes again, but he doesn’t look at Derek this time, giving the wall opposite the bed a thoughtful look. “You mean the baby, right?”

“I—yes,” Derek admits.

Stiles sighs again. He’s silent for so long that Derek starts to think he’s not going to answer, and then he says, “I was really mad, at first. Not at you, just...at me. For being so careless. I felt like such a disappointment to myself, and my dad, and everyone I knew. And people—everyone in town is always talking about me. Kids at school stare at me. It just—it sucked. I know it’s fucked up, but I was kind of relieved when those people got killed, because it meant people weren’t talking about me anymore.” Stiles sucks in a slow breath, the corners of his mouth turning down as he shifts onto his back so he can see Derek.

“I wish I’d never pushed you away,” he says unhappily. “I thought I was doing the right thing. I didn’t think it was fair to drag your life down with mine. I wish I’d just asked you what you wanted. This would have been so much easier if you’d been with me from the start.”

Derek stares at him for a moment, trying to wrap his head around what he’s saying. Finally, he says, “You think this is a mistake?”

“Well,” Stiles says, his voice wavering, “life’s never going to be the same.”

“And that’s a bad thing?” Derek presses softly. “Stiles, I can’t say that I was ready for this, but I’m not upset it’s happening.”

Stiles stares at him for a long time, eyes roving over Derek’s face like he’s searching for a lie, but there isn’t one; Derek really means it. “Are you sure?” he breathes.

“I’m sure,” Derek tells him quietly. “This burden isn’t just on you. I want to share it, if you’ll let me.”

“You know, Lydia said the same thing to me,” Stiles says, an unamused smile tugging at the corners of his mouth again.

“And?” Derek asks. “What’d you say?”

Stiles exhales noisily, lifting his hand to brush his fingers against Derek’s cheek. “I’m tired,” he says, so softly his voice is almost a whisper. He hesitates, and then he adds, “Please.”

That’s all Derek needs; he shifts forward, leaning into Stiles’ space so he can press their foreheads together. “I’ve got you,” he murmurs.
Stiles makes a soft noise that could be relief or could be a sob—either way, he loops his arms around Derek’s shoulders and holds on tight. Derek can’t move on top of him like he’d really like to, not with Stiles’ stomach in the way, but he can settle half on top of him, chest to chest, tucking his face against Stiles’ neck while Stiles breathes unsteadily.

Sleep comes easily that night; Derek drifts off to sleep with his face still smushed against Stiles’ throat, surrounded by both their scents, Stiles’ hands warm on his back.

Derek wakes slowly in the morning, gently, like he’s rising to the surface of a vast ocean of molasses. He doesn’t open his eyes right away, lying still as he takes stock. The bed’s empty next to him, sheets saturated with Stiles’ scent, but Stiles is still in the apartment; Derek can hear him moving around in the kitchen, trying to be quiet.

He stretches luxuriously before pulling himself out of bed, running a hand through his hair as he pads quietly through the living room and into the kitchen. Stiles is standing by the sink, mostly turned away from Derek as he drinks a cup of water, and Derek pauses to watch him. He’s suddenly worried that Stiles is going to change his mind about everything—he was upset last night, and now he’s slept on it.

Stiles turns just then and catches sight of Derek standing there; it startles him and he jerks backward, smacking into the counter. “Jesus!” he groans, rubbing at his back. “You’re like a fucking shadow!”

“Sorry,” Derek says apologetically. He hesitates for a moment, trying to gauge how Stiles is feeling about him. “Would you...like some breakfast?”

Stiles’ face lights up, but then he looks at the clock on the microwave and sighs. “Can’t. I have school, and I took the bus here since my car’s out of commission.”

“I can drive you,” Derek offers. It’ll make him late to his own morning class, but he’s not particularly bothered by the idea.

Stiles hesitates, chewing on his bottom lip. Derek can see him giving in, but then he shakes his head firmly. “Sorry,” Stiles says. “It’s like you said, right? We should ease into this, and anyway I have to get back to the house and change before my dad notices.”

“Right,” Derek says glumly, angry at himself for ever suggesting they take it slow.

Stiles snorts quietly, setting his glass down by the sink before stepping forward, fitting himself up against Derek like he’s meant to be there. “Thanks for not kicking me out on my ass. I would have deserved it, if you had.”

Derek softens, leaning in to indulge in the urge to drag his nose against Stiles’ throat. “I wouldn’t do that to you.”

Stiles takes a step back, his dark eyes moving over Derek’s face. “No,” he says thoughtfully, “you wouldn’t.” They stare at each other for a long moment before Stiles clears his throat and says, “I’ve gotta get going.”

“Right,” Derek says again, stepping aside so he can head for the front door. Derek trails behind him, watching him pull on his jacket. He’s not sure what to say now. Does he invite Stiles over again? Maybe he should see if he’d like to go out to dinner sometime.

Stiles, however, beats him to the punch. He turns as he zips up his jacket, and asks, “Can I come
Derek blinks. “Of course. Any time.”

“Any time?” Stiles repeats. He hesitates, and then asks, “Tonight?” Derek nods, and Stiles grins. “Tonight, then,” he says, and sways in close to press a swift kiss to Derek’s cheek. “I’ll see you.”

Derek nods again and then Stiles is gone, the door swinging shut behind him. After a moment, Derek hears the sound of the elevator doors opening, and then Stiles has truly left, the sound of his and the baby’s heartbeats fading.

Derek goes back into his bedroom and sits down at the end of his bed, running his hand through his hair. It all still feels like a dream. He feels like it was too easy for them to fall back together, like he did something wrong—but what? Stiles was clearly ready for Derek to be pissed at him, but Derek’s not angry. Sure, there were times in the past few months where he was frustrated with Stiles, but all he’s ever wanted to do is help, and be there for him. And now it seems like that’s actually going to happen, and that’s good. Better than good—it’s fucking awesome.

Derek has to get ready for class, but he’s floating on cloud nine all day. Cora texts him partway through the day—proud of you—and Derek grins.

The feeling starts to fade in the afternoon, doubt setting in once more. They never set a time so it’s not like Derek’s counting down the minutes until Stiles appears, but what if he doesn’t? He’s changed his mind before—what if he gets cold feet? Derek can’t handle this constant roller coaster, but as it turns out, he has no need to worry; Stiles shows up at his door just after six, his cheeks pink from the cool evening air, and they spend an idle night on the couch watching movies. Stiles can’t spend the night—he says his dad’s supposed to be home—but even so, it feels...right, somehow. When Derek goes to bed, he can barely feel the ache in his chest any more.

Stiles keeps showing up, usually sometime after dinner, and sometimes he stays the night and sometimes he doesn’t. Derek doesn’t push him in either direction; if Stiles wants to stay, Derek’s certainly not going to say no, but he won’t try to make him—especially as he’s not keen on Stiles’ father finding out about them.

Sometimes, Stiles comes over right after school and he and Derek work on their homework in companionable silence at the dining table. It’s a near disaster once, when Cora shows up too—Derek should have been expecting it, since it was part of their routine, but he’d completely forgotten, and Cora had frozen in the doorway of the apartment, she and Stiles eyeing each other warily until Derek had sighed.

“This apartment’s a neutral zone, all right?” he’d said, and they’d both pretended to relax. Fifteen minutes later, he’d heard them hissing at each other while he was in the bathroom, and he’d been ready to step out and break it up before he realized they were apologizing to each other for acting like assholes. By the time he got back to the table, Cora was evenly asking Stiles if she could borrow his notes from history class. Derek’s relieved; it’s important to him that his family gets along with Stiles, and vice versa.

A couple evenings later, he and Stiles are both sitting at the table. Derek’s finished with a paper so he’s just sitting quietly, watching Stiles work with his head bent over his books. Stiles frowns at the paper in front of him, turning to consult a book before he lifts his head and catches Derek watching him.

“What?” he asks.
“Have you thought about what comes next?” Derek asks quietly.

Stiles frowns at him. “What do you mean?”

“For you,” Derek says. “I mean—what about college?”

“Oh,” Stiles says, looking back at his books. He’s quiet for a moment before he says, “I don’t know. I’ve applied to some schools because I know it’s what my dad wants, but...I just don’t know how feasible it is.” He sighs quietly, rubbing his hand over his stomach.

“I can help,” Derek offers tentatively. Stiles looks at him sharply, and he says, “I transferred back here so I could help you if you changed your mind, Stiles.”

Stiles’ mouth twists unhappily. “You shouldn’t have to rearrange your life just because I got pregnant.”

“And you should?” Derek retorts. Stiles doesn’t answer, and Derek gets to his feet. “Come on.”

Stiles gives him a guarded look. “What?”

Derek rolls his eyes. “Just follow me.”

Stiles looks suspicious, but he rises from the table and follows Derek across the apartment, where Derek pauses at the doorway to the office next to his bedroom, flicking on the light. It looks more like a storeroom at the moment, filled with boxes that Derek hasn’t gotten around to unpacking yet, and stuff that had been in the apartment when he’d moved in that he hadn’t been sure what to do with.

“Okay?” Stiles says, giving the room an impatient look. “What about it?”

Derek draws in a slow breath before he says, “I thought I’d make it into a nursery. You know—if you wanted to go to school, I could watch the baby.”

Stiles looks back at the room, gaze lingering this time as his lips part in surprise. “You’d do that for me?”

“Sure,” Derek says quietly. “You shouldn’t have to rearrange your life just because you got pregnant, right?”

“What about you, though?” Stiles asks. He steps into the office, looking around at the crowded space. “You’ve still got a year left.”

Derek shrugs. “I can take night classes.” He hesitates before adding, “And if you want to go somewhere else for school—I’ll follow you. If you want me to.”

Stiles is quiet for a while, idly riffling through a cardboard box on Peter’s old desk. After a moment he straightens with something in his hands, though since he’s standing with his back to Derek, Derek can’t see what it is. “Is this your family?”

“Hm?” Derek steps up behind him, peering over his shoulder. Stiles is holding a framed photograph he and Laura must have missed when they were packing the apartment up, because she definitely would have wanted this for the house; it’s of their old pack, taken on the front steps of the old house. His mom’s in the middle, his dad’s arm around her shoulders, and Derek himself sitting at her feet, the rest of his siblings ranged along beside him. Peter’s on his mom’s other side, his boyfriend next to him, and Dad’s twin sisters, never married, are on Dad’s other side. Behind them are both sets of
grandparents—his parents’ parents. Derek remembers this day; he’d been young, thirteen at the most, and hadn’t wanted to be in the picture, which shows in the unhappy set of his mouth. He’s the only one not smiling.

“You had a baby face,” Stiles says, brushing his finger over the glass. He leans back against Derek, still looking down at the photograph. “I bet you were a chubby baby.”

“Don’t really remember,” Derek says. He looks at his young face, trying to remember what it felt like to be that age. “We lost most of the family photos in the fire.”

“Sorry,” Stiles says quickly, moving to set the picture frame down. “I shouldn’t have—”

“It’s fine,” Derek says. He lifts his arms, crossing them over Stiles’ stomach, and briefly feels the baby push at him. He lets his head drop forward, nuzzling at the back of Stiles’ neck. He smells like an odd mix of emotions tonight: sorrow and anxiety and hope. After a moment, he twists around, and Derek loosens his grip, thinking that Stiles is trying to get out of the room, but he stops when he’s facing Derek and looks for a long moment, his expression soft. Derek returns his gaze, attention flickering from Stiles’ eyes to his lips to the dual heartbeats inside him, and then quickly back to Stiles’ mouth as Stiles leans forward and kisses him, one of his hands lifting to cup Derek’s cheek.

Derek leans into his touch readily, closing his eyes as the kiss deepens and the fingers of Stiles’ other hand curl in his shirt, pulling him in close. They kiss lazily, unhurriedly, indulging in each other. Derek lets his hands wander, trailing down Stiles’ sides, squeezing at his hips before slipping behind to palm at his ass. Stiles makes an agreeable sort of noise, nipping at Derek’s bottom lip before tilting his chin and going after his neck. Derek leans his head back with a quiet groan as Stiles’ teeth scrape against his skin, skin breaking out into goosebumps at the feeling.

He crowds Stiles back against the desk, catching his mouth to kiss him again, a little more heat and impatience in it this time. Stiles meets him eagerly, his fingers digging into Derek's shoulders for leverage as he sits on the edge of the desk, knees bumping against Derek's hips. His back knocks against the box on the desk, sending the photograph of Derek's family to the ground, and the sound makes Derek pull back, reluctantly reminding him that they're supposed to be taking things slow.

"No, come on," Stiles protests, trying to reel him back in. He's got two splotches of color high on his cheekbones, his pupils blown wide open. "Please, dude—"

Derek hesitates. It's been almost two weeks since he and Stiles started seeing each other again, and while it's not like they've been entirely chaste, he's been careful about not going too far too fast—admittedly difficult, especially when he wakes up in the morning with a boner and Stiles is sleepily rubbing up against him. He knows Stiles is frustrated; he smells like arousal and irritation most of the time, and almost always appears at Derek's apartment smelling like he's just gotten himself off. It's frustrating Derek too; it goes against the grain to leave Stiles unsatisfied, but he's worried about going too fast and messing up what they have between them.

"Come on," Stiles repeats softly. He pulls at Derek and this time, Derek allows himself to be drawn back in. "I need you," Stiles mumbles, tilting his head up to mouth at Derek's throat. "Please."

Derek swallows tightly. "I—tell me what you want."

Stiles exhales roughly, snapping his teeth against Derek's neck. "Just—touch me."

"Okay," Derek says quietly, forcing himself to move slowly, hands nearly shaking with eagerness. He presses his lips to Stiles' temple, sliding a hand over the curve of Stiles' stomach, pressing his
palm to the crotch of Stiles' jeans. He's hard, and he groans when Derek touches him, hips bucking up under even that slight touch.

"Please," Stiles breathes again, and Derek bends to kiss him into silence, deftly unbuttoning his pants, Stiles lifting his hips to help him pull them down his thighs. He breaks away from Stiles to lick his hand and then he wraps his fingers around Stiles' dick, and—god, Derek has missed this. Stiles tilts his head back and the noise he makes is so familiar, as is the way his hands dig into Derek's shoulders, and the way he shudders when Derek twists his wrist in that one particular way. It's a little awkward now; Derek has to jerk him off with his hand in an somewhat uncomfortable position due to the swell of Stiles' stomach, but it's worth it just to see Stiles' face contort, his eyes squeezed shut as Derek slowly jacks him off. Derek likes the way his mouth goes slack, his lips parting in a silent oh, hips rocking up into Derek's grip.

It's a delicious tease; every roll of Stiles' hips brings his thighs within brushing distance of Derek's own hard-on, and he can't help but grind into him, groaning softly. He's in no rush to get off, more focused on helping Stiles out, but Stiles seems to take notice because he manages to pry his eyes open and reach for Derek's pants. Derek's not going to say no; he angles his body so it's easier for Stiles to reach, and hisses when Stiles get him out of his pants, unabashedly rutting into Stiles' hand, smearing precome against Stiles' stomach with every thrust.

"Missed this," Stiles pants, voice slipping into a whine at the end of his sentence. "Missed you."

"I've got you," Derek promises urgently. "I've got you."


"I'm good," Derek breathes, fucking up into Stiles' hand. Stiles tightens his grip, biting at Derek's throat with a vengeance, and Derek comes with a strangled noise, splattering come into the crease of Stiles' hip. He sags against Stiles, the desk propping them both up, and Stiles hums against his throat, pulling his fingers through Derek's hair. "I missed you too," Derek says quietly.

Stiles smells pleased, all the frustration gone from his scent. Derek turns his face and nuzzles against his throat for a moment, and when he straightens, Stiles has a faint smile on his face, his cheeks still flushed a splotchy pink. Derek tugs him into the bathroom so they can wash their hands, and he wets a cloth to clean up Stiles' stomach while Stiles watches patiently, hand resting on his baby bump.

"Do you ever talk to her?" Derek asks suddenly, and Stiles' eyebrows raise in surprise.

"Not really," he says after a moment. "It feels...weird."

"Isn't talking supposed to be good for them?"

Stiles shrugs, grinning faintly. "Why? Are you going to go all Life Aquatic on me and read kids' books to her?"

"Maybe I will," Derek says defensively.

Stiles watches him for a moment, still grinning. "You want to say something to her?"

"I—sure," Derek says uncertainly. He pauses for a moment and then crouches down in front of him, spreading his hands across Stiles' stomach. "Uh," he says. "Hi."

Above him, Stiles snorts, and Derek shoots him a dark look. "Your dad's a dork," Stiles tells his stomach.
"And your other dad's an ass," Derek retorts, though his chest warms at the way Stiles had said your dad. It's the first time he's felt like they're a team. It gives him the courage to lean in and softly say, "I can't wait to meet you."

He chances a look up at Stiles and finds his face looking soft, maybe even fond. He lifts a hand and drops it on Derek's head, gently carding his fingers through Derek's hair as he says, "I didn't mean to sound ungrateful earlier, when you were talking about helping me. I really like the idea of making the office into a nursery."

Derek gets to his feet, hope blooming in his chest. "You do?"

"Yeah," Stiles says with a tentative smile, which fades after a moment. "My dad's not going to like it, though."

"He still doesn't know you're coming here."

Stiles shakes his head, a guilty expression crossing his features. "No," he admits. "He's starting to come home earlier now that they're not finding out anything new about the murders, too. I told him I was going to Scott's tonight."

"You shouldn't be lying to him," Derek says softly.

"I know," Stiles replies, his gaze dropping to the tiled floor. "I don't like to."

Derek watches him for a long moment before he says, "Well, if I do make the office into a nursery, it doesn't mean you have to move in—just that it's there if you ever want to stay over."

Stiles nods slowly, silently reaching out and twining his fingers through Derek's. They go back out in the apartment and Stiles returns to his homework while Derek makes them dinner. After they eat, they lie on the couch together and Derek drifts in and out of sleep while Stiles watches a movie. He's feeling extremely pleased that evening, instincts satisfied by the way Stiles smells of contentment, his skin still a little rough with sweat from their encounter in the office. He nuzzles sleepily at the soft spot behind Stiles' ear, reveling in his sweet scent.

"Hey," Stiles says after a while, sounding as sleepy as Derek feels.

"Mm?"

"I was just thinking," Stiles says, sounding a little nervous now. "Um. About my dad."

Derek sits up, propping himself up on one elbow so he can see Stiles' face. "And?"

Stiles draws in a deep breath before asking, "Would you come over for dinner tomorrow? You can meet my dad—"

"I have met your dad," Derek says, thinking ruefully of all the run-ins he's had with the sheriff. It's never been a pleasant experience.

Stiles makes a face at him. "I mean meet him properly," he says. "Shake his hand. Tell him your name—"

"He knows my name," Derek says, aggrieved.

Stiles elbows him hard in the ribs. "You know what I mean," he says irritably. "Meet him as in you're-my-boyfriend meet him."
"Boyfriend," Derek repeats.

"Yes," Stiles says, even more irritably. Derek stares down at him as Stiles blinks and seems to realize what he's just said, color pinking his cheeks. "I mean," he says, his cheeks darkening. "Not—"

Derek leans over him. "I thought that wasn't happening until next month."

"Yeah, well," Stiles says, his cheeks scarlet now. "The plan's changed, if you hadn't noticed." He hesitates and then says, "I didn't mean to assume. I just—"

"It's fine," Derek says easily.

Stiles stares at him. "It is?"

"Yeah." Derek exhales slowly and says, "I know it's only been two weeks, but I'm committed to this—and you. I have been—since the start."

"Oh," Stiles says faintly. Then, more firmly, "Oh." A smile winds its way across his face. "Then it's official? Can I tell Scott?"

Derek rolls his eyes, but he says, "Sure. And," he adds carefully, "I'll come to dinner." It's a frightening prospect; he knows he's no favorite of the sheriff, but he knows it's important to Stiles, and if Derek's going to figure as a major part of his life for any amount of time, he needs the sheriff to not hate him.

"Seriously?" Stiles breathes. "You will?" Derek nods, and Stiles grins again. "I'm going to kiss you now," he announces, and proceeds to do just that. Derek doesn't mind at all.

Dinner ends up being postponed for a couple of days; Derek’s got a few classes that don’t get out until seven, and the sheriff’s still working shifts until late in the evening. In some ways it’s good, because it gives Derek some nerve, and time to figure out what he’s going to say, but at the same time he’d rather just get it over with. Laura tells him to just take it easy and be respectful, but Derek’s got a feeling that no matter how polite he is, the sheriff is not going to warm to him.

He finally goes over on Friday, done with his classes by four, and with a reassurance from Stiles that his dad’s going to be home by six. Derek’s nervous; he can’t shake the worried feeling that the sheriff’s going to see him and arrest him—or shoot him, maybe. He dresses with care, which is probably a futile exercise considering the multiple terrible impressions he’s already made on the sheriff, but it can’t hurt.

It feels weird parking on the street in front of the house, though it’s probably a good thing, in case he needs to get away quickly. The sheriff isn’t home yet, so it’s Stiles who opens the door when he knocks, and his eyebrows rise when he sees Derek.

“You look like you’re going to a wedding,” he says by way of greeting. “Didn’t you see on the invite that it’s casual dress?”

Derek scowls at him and Stiles grins, motioning him inside. Derek’s never spent much time in the downstairs of the Stilinski house—he’s intimately acquainted with Stiles’ bedroom and, less so, the upstairs hallway and bathroom—but it’s small and comfortable, the very walls soaked with the scent of the men who live there. He follows Stiles into the kitchen, which is cluttered and looks a little disused, like it doesn’t see a lot of meals being made in it—probably the case, knowing how busy the sheriff is, and how Stiles is always over at Derek’s place.
“The chicken’s almost done,” Stiles says, bending to peer through the oven door.

“You know how to cook?” Derek asks, a little surprised. Whatever Stiles is making, it smells good.

Stiles straightens, giving him an irritated look. “I’m not useless,” he says. “My mom taught me.”

“I didn’t mean it like that,” Derek says. “I just didn’t know.”

Stiles sniffs haughtily. “I’m an awesome cook.”

“I’m sure you are,” Derek says placidly.

Stiles narrows his eyes at Derek like he’s not sure whether Derek is just humoring him or not, but then he says, “I’m going to run upstairs and change into something nicer so you don’t feel left out.”

“You don’t have to do that,” Derek protests as Stiles heads for the stairs.

Stiles waves a hand over his shoulder. “Whatever. Just watch the potatoes and make sure they don’t boil over.”

“Hey,” Derek calls after him. “You told your dad about all of this, right?”

“Just hold on a second!” Stiles hollers down the stairs, and Derek hears him walk down the hallway to his room. He leans back against the counter, not entirely reassured. He certainly hopes Stiles told his dad about dinner; Derek definitely wouldn’t have wanted it dumped on his shoulders if he were the sheriff.

The house is mostly quiet, the silence only broken by the faint noise of Stiles moving around upstairs and water bubbling on the stove. Derek looks around without moving, resisting the urge to riffle through the books on the shelf by the fridge. It’s a little odd, he thinks, being in a house so clearly full of years of memories and possessions. It makes his loft and the family house out in the woods seem sterile by comparison; there’s barely anything he owns that’s more than five years old. Most of the family photos they still have were scrounged from newspapers and yearbooks and far-flung relatives.

The noise of a car door slamming shut outside yanks Derek from his thoughts. From where he stands in the kitchen, he can see the edge of the sheriff’s cruiser parked in the driveway through one of the windows in the living room, and the sheriff himself striding up the walkway to the front door, his face set and angry. By his expression alone Derek knows, with a heavy drop of his stomach, that Stiles didn’t tell the sheriff Derek was coming over for dinner. He starts to sidle sideways, wondering if he could escape out the side door without being caught.

The front door jerks open as the sheriff storms inside, slamming it behind him after. He heads right for the stairs.

“Stiles!” he bellows, and there’s a startled thump from Stiles’ room. “That car outside better not belong to who I think it belongs!”

Behind Derek, a timer on the stove goes off, and Derek freezes as the sheriff’s head whips around, his pale eyes landing on him. The sheriff abruptly changes course, swinging his body around to head right for Derek. Derek hurriedly backs away only to bump against the counter, trapped. He doesn’t miss the way the sheriff’s hand goes right for his belt, fingers landing on his gun. He doesn’t stop until he’s mere inches from Derek, icy eyes glaring into Derek’s.

“What the hell are you doing in my house?”
“Uh,” Derek says nervously, his eyes flickering to the stove, where the timer is still buzzing, grating on his ears. Where is Stiles? “I’m—here for dinner.”

“Like hell you are,” the sheriff says furiously. “Was this Stiles’ idea?” Derek hesitates, unwilling to let Stiles take the blame, but the sheriff clearly knows his son; he yells again. “Stiles!”

Derek winces at the volume. “Sir,” he tries, remembering Laura’s advice to be respectful.

The sheriff, however, cuts him off, pointing an angry finger at him. “No,” he says bluntly, as Stiles goes stampeding down the hall above them, his feet hammering down the stairs. “You don’t get a say in this. This is my house, and he is my son, and you’ve already done enough damage here!”

“Dad!” Stiles says furiously, skidding around the corner from the stairs. “Don’t—” He pushes his way in between his father and Derek, forcing the sheriff to take a couple steps back. “Don’t fucking talk to him like that!”

The sheriff’s cheeks go the same splotchy red Stiles’ do when he gets worked up. “Don’t you talk to me like that!” he snaps. “I told you, Stiles! I don’t want you hanging around him!”

“He didn’t do anything!” Stiles yells.

In the tense and slightly startled moment of silence that follows, Derek puts his hand on Stiles’ arm. “Stiles, it’s fine,” he says quietly. “I’ll just go—”

“No,” Stiles says firmly, glancing briefly at Derek and then at his dad. “Dad,” he says quietly, most of the venom gone from his voice. “I don’t want to lie to you. You don’t like Derek, and maybe you never will, but I do, and I want to keep seeing him—and I will, whether you say I can or not. He’s not the bad guy, Dad. He’s been trying for months to help, and I’m the one who’s been acting like an asshole.”

The sheriff stares at his son for a long, long moment. After a while, he takes a step sideways and shuts off the timer on the stove, which has been buzzing the entire time. Stiles makes an aborted movement, like he wants to check on the food, but this is more important. Derek wants to touch him, take his hand, reassure him, but he doesn’t dare with the sheriff there, his gun at his hip.

After another long moment, the sheriff sighs, rubbing a hand over his face. “What do you have to say about all of this?” he asks, and Derek’s startled to realize the sheriff’s talking to him.

Derek hesitates before responding. He’s scared of saying the wrong thing, of getting himself arrested, and getting Stiles into more trouble. The sheriff’s expression is completely unreadable—perfectly blank after years on the job, or maybe he was always that good at a poker face. Stiles, like he senses Derek’s unease, takes a step backward, putting his hip in contact with Derek’s. Derek can feel the warmth of his body through their clothes, the double heartbeats inside of him a grounding force that steadies Derek’s nerves.

“I didn’t mean for any of this to happen,” Derek says, forcing himself to meet the sheriff’s eyes and hold his gaze. “I know I fucked up, but I’m not turning my back on Stiles. He’s pack, if he wants to be, and so is the baby, and we don’t turn our backs on pack.”

“Dad,” Stiles adds, his voice small, and the sheriff’s eyes snap back to his son. “I know you did your best when I was growing up—you’re the best dad I could ever ask for—but it sucked sometimes, only having one parent.” The sheriff flinches and Stiles hurries to say, “That was beyond anyone’s control, obviously, but this—this isn’t beyond our control. I want Derek here, and he wants to be here, so—”
The sheriff holds his hands up, stopping Stiles mid-sentence. “Enough,” he says quietly. Stiles shuts his mouth, eyeing his father nervously, clearly worried that he went too far with the single parent argument. Derek carefully lifts his hand and rests it against Stiles’ lower back, grounding him like Stiles had for him. They both watch the sheriff warily; he’s not looking at either of them, his gaze distant. “I’m going to go take a shower,” he says abruptly, and Derek blinks.

“Dad?” Stiles says uncertainly, but the sheriff holds up his hands again.

“I have some things I need to think about,” he says, and heads upstairs. Stiles and Derek watch him disappear up the stairs, and then Derek tilts his head to listen to the sheriff walk down the hall in case it’s a feint and he’s going to get a shotgun or something—but the sheriff just goes into the bathroom and, after a long moment, the shower turns on.

Stiles turns toward the stove and decisively pulls on oven mitts, yanking the pan of chicken out of the stove. He shuts off the burner where the pot of potatoes sits, and then he just stands there, staring into space.

“Stiles?” Derek says softly. “Are you—” He cuts himself off as Stiles spins around and presses himself into Derek’s arms, tucking his head against Derek’s neck. Derek holds onto him tightly, absently rubbing his cheek against Stiles’ hair. “What do you think he’s going to do?”

“Dunno,” Stiles says, exhaling wetly against Derek’s throat. “Is he talking to himself?”

Derek directs his attention to the ceiling again. He can hear the sheriff muttering to himself, but he can’t make out the words over the noise of the shower. “I can’t hear what he’s saying.”

Stiles sighs. “I don’t care what he decides,” he says stonily. “I’m not going to stop seeing you.”

It’s Derek’s turn to sigh. “Stiles,” he says quietly, “I’m not going to come between you and your dad like that. He means too much to you.”

“Like you don’t?” Stiles retorts angrily. Derek stares at him and Stiles pulls away from him, his cheeks going pink. “Anyway,” he says, addressing the stove. “I guess I should finish this. I can give you a to-go box if Dad decides to kick you out.”

“Okay,” Derek agrees quietly, watching Stiles move around the kitchen. Stiles won’t look at him, his cheeks and ears bright pink. “Anyway,” he says, addressing the stove. “I guess I should finish this. I can give you a to-go box if Dad decides to kick you out.”

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For a moment, Stiles leans back against his chest, and then there’s a pop somewhere as the water shuts off upstairs, and Stiles leans forward again as he says, “Well, good, because I made a shit-ton of food and someone’s got to eat it all.” He shoots Derek a quick grin over his shoulder, though, to let Derek know he gets it. Derek smiles back.

By the time the sheriff comes thumping back down the stairs, dressed in civilian clothes and mercifully missing a gun, Stiles and Derek have set the table, laying out all the food. The sheriff pauses, watching Stiles drop the last fork onto the table. “Didn’t leave me a choice, huh?”

“No,” Stiles says firmly, thunking himself down at the table. Derek sits more cautiously, his eyes on the sheriff. He wants to make Stiles happy, but he’s wary of angering the sheriff; if there’s going to be any turmoil here, he knows it’s going to skip Stiles and land on his shoulders and while he can accept that, he doesn’t want that to happen. Before all this happened, he never had any qualms with
the sheriff; he was just a busy man doing his job, and he’d been nice to Derek in the hospital after the fire, touching his shoulder and calling him son, and while at the time Derek may have been too miserable to appreciate it, he knows the value of it now.

“Relax,” the sheriff says, approaching the table, and Derek realizes he’s talking to him. He meets the sheriff’s eyes tentatively, expecting to see hatred, but Stiles’ father just looks tired. He sits on Stiles’ other side, at the head of the table, and says, “No guns at the dinner table.”

“No guns ever,” Stiles says sharply, and the sheriff sighs.

“Just a joke, son.”

“It’s not funny,” Stiles says, the corners of his mouth turning down.

“I suppose not,” the sheriff says a little apologetically, looking at his son. Derek slowly moves his hand, trying to move without being too obvious, and puts it on Stiles’ knee.

Stiles exhales loudly, his hand curling over Derek’s. “Dinner,” he says pointedly. “Who wants chicken?”

Dinner’s awkward; there’s no way around it. Stiles’ food is really good at least, but the little conversation there is is stilted and forced. Derek can tell that the sheriff still doesn’t want him in the house, but he’s being polite about it now, which is somehow almost worse. Stiles has gone surly, his lips pressed tightly together between bites of food. Derek wants to tell him to relax—he can smell the stress on Stiles, and the baby’s heart rate is starting to tick up—but he doesn’t think either of the Stilinskis would react well to that. So he keeps his head down, eating quietly while the sheriff eyeballs him from the end of the table.

“So, Mr. Hale,” he says abruptly, when they’ve all mostly finished the food on their plates. Stiles and Derek both stiffen. “I thought you were going to college out on the coast. Why are you in town?”

Stiles bristles at the suggestion in his dad’s voice that Derek’s a dropout, but Derek keeps himself calm. “I transferred to BHCC,” he says evenly. “I wanted to be close to help, if I could—if Stiles wanted me to.” He glances at Stiles, who gives him a quick smile.

“And what are you majoring in?” the sheriff presses.

“Secondary Education,” Derek tells him. “I was doing the five-year program at Humboldt for history so I could teach social sciences, but BHCC doesn’t offer the same program, so I had to change it.”

“Oh,” the sheriff says, looking almost annoyed.

Stiles looks triumphant. “Mom taught high school biology,” he tells Derek.

“Oh,” it’s Derek turn to say. He’s pleased he has something in common with the family, though maybe that’s why the sheriff’s looking a little irritated; if he was ready to denounce whatever Derek’s going to school for, he can’t very well do it for the career his wife chose. No wonder Stiles is looking triumphant, though that look vanishes when the sheriff says, “You know Stiles is going to college, right?”

“Dad!” Stiles snaps, and the sheriff spreads his hands, his eyebrows lifting. What? “Maybe we should wait until after I have the baby to start laying down final decisions.”

The sheriff’s expression hardens. “And what does that mean?”
“It means that I’m dealing with life as it comes, and it might be a little irresponsible for me—or you—to make sweeping decisions about my future right now!” Stiles says angrily.

Derek tenses, expecting the sheriff to get irate, but even though Derek can smell the anger and disappointment building on him, after a moment the sheriff sighs and says, “You’re right, you’re right,” and some of the tension in the air dissipates.

There’s no more conversation after that, and when it’s obvious that they’re all done eating, Derek helps Stiles clear the table and clean up the kitchen. The sheriff stays close as they wash the dishes, like he doesn’t want them to be alone together, which is “Stupid,” Stiles mutters under his breath, so soft Derek can barely hear him over the sound of the faucet running. “S not like I can get pregnant again just by standing next to you.”

Derek doesn’t reply because the sheriff’s sitting at the dining table, pretending to ignore them, but he bumps his hip against Stiles’, bringing a faint smile to Stiles’ face.

The moment the last dish is washed, the sheriff gets to his feet and says, “It was nice having you here, Mr. Hale—” Stiles rolls his eyes at the blatant lie. “—but it’s a school night, so you’d better be getting home.”

“Dad, it’s not a school night,” Stiles says, sounding exasperated. “And his name’s Derek.”

“Don’t worry about it,” Derek says. “I should get going.” Stiles purses his lips but nods, and Derek looks to the sheriff. “Thank you for having me.”

The sheriff nods stiffly and Derek heads for the door, Stiles on his heels. As soon as they’ve got their shoes on and stepped out onto the front porch, Stiles says, “I’m sorry. That was way shittier than I thought it was going to be.”

Derek sighs. “You don’t have to apologize. I don’t expect your dad to love me.”

“Yeah, well, he doesn’t have to act like an asshole,” Stiles scowls.

Derek shrugs. “If it ever happens, it’s not going to be overnight,” he says.

“I know,” Stiles sighs, glancing over his shoulder at the house. Derek looks too, expecting to see the sheriff watching them through the window, but to his surprise the sheriff’s nowhere in sight.

“I should get going,” Derek says softly, and Stiles brightens.

“Can I come with?”

“No,” Derek says, after a moment of hesitation. Stiles starts to scowl again, and he says, “Let’s both try to stay on your dad’s good side, all right? I’m sure he’d like to spend some time with you after being gone all the time for the past few weeks.”

Stiles looks like he’s about to argue, then abruptly sighs, his shoulders dropping. “You’re right,” he says reluctantly. Lowering his voice, he adds, “Tomorrow?”

Derek nods, and Stiles sighs again, stepping forward to curl his arms around Derek’s neck. Derek’s eyes snap to the windows again, but the sheriff is still nowhere in sight, so he allows himself to nuzzle Stiles’ neck, pressing a kiss to his cheek before pulling away. “Have a good night,” he says, and then puts a hand on Stiles’ stomach. “You too,” he adds gravely.

Stiles snorts. “You big sap,” he says, sounding fond.
Derek grins at him and turns, heading for his car. He drives back to his apartment and makes progress on classwork for a while, finishing up a paper that’s due on Monday. When he’s done, he veks for a while, laid out on the couch watching a movie, but he’s antsy. He keeps picking up his phone, expecting to see a message from Stiles, but there’s nothing. Eventually, he forces himself to go to bed, but the apartment’s too quiet, and he feels unsettled. He tries every position he can think of, even tries jerking off, but he can’t get to sleep.

It’s past midnight when Derek gives up and gets out of bed. He pulls his jacket on and goes outside, before driving to the neighborhood the Stilinskis live in. He parks on the usual street a couple blocks from the Stilinski house and takes the familiar path through the woods, crossing the Stilinski’s dark backyard. He very carefully pulls himself up on the porch roof and, when he leans against the window, Derek’s relieved to see Stiles awake, sitting at his computer desk.

Derek smiles to himself and pulls out his phone, sending Stiles a quick text. *let me in?*

He waits patiently, watching Stiles’ phone light up on the desk next to him. Stiles glances at it, and then over at the window, and the corners of his mouth quirk up when he sees Derek. Derek watches Stiles lever himself out of his chair—it’s starting to get difficult for him—and come over to the window, silently pushing it open.

“Hey,” Stiles greets quietly. “What happened to not pissing my dad off?”

“Couldn’t sleep,” Derek replies, keeping his voice low as he climbs in through the window.

“Glad I’m not the only one,” Stiles says. Derek gives him a worried look and he clarifies, pressing a hand to his stomach, “She’s going nuts tonight. I think she picked up on all the tension earlier.”

“Oh,” Derek says, coming in closer so he too can touch Stiles’ stomach. He can feel her, a series of tiny taps against his hand, but knows that Stiles can feel her much more strongly. “Rowdy,” he says dryly. “Just like her father.”

Stiles suckerpunches him in the arm, faking a scowl. “Asshole.”

Derek snorts, dropping down onto the edge of the bed, dragging Stiles between his knees so he can lean forward and rub his cheek against Stiles’ stomach. “Is your dad awake?” he rumbles, closing his eyes, listening to the life just centimeters from his ear.

“Yeah,” Stiles says. “I went downstairs for water a little while ago and he was passed out in front of the tv.” His hand drops onto Derek’s head, his long fingers threading through Derek’s hair. “Do you think she’s going to be a werewolf?” he asks after a while, his voice thoughtful.

Derek tries to remember if lycanthropy is a dominant trait, but tenth grade biology was a long time ago. “Dunno,” he says quietly. “Would you care if she was?”

“Course not,” Stiles says softly, his hand still moving gently over Derek’s hair. Derek listens carefully, but his heartbeat remains steady. It’s not like Derek had worried that he might be bothered by it—at least, not up until that moment—but it’s reassuring to know he’s not. He does sound a little worried when he asks, “Was it hard, growing up as a werewolf?”

Derek opens his eyes and sits back, looking up at Stiles placidly. “What do you mean?”

“Like—” Stiles furrows his brow in thought. “Like on full moons and stuff—are you born with control, or do you have to learn it? When Scott got bitten, he was like a totally different person on full moons, and he can control himself now, but it took a while.”
“Pack helps with that,” Derek says. “The power of the group is calming, and if you do get out of control, there are people to help you out. But born wolves don’t start coming into their powers until they hit puberty—when we’re kids, we might be able to grow fangs or claws, and maybe change our eye color, but that’s it.”

“Oh,” Stiles says, looking a little relieved. “So, no little werebabies running around on full moons?”

Derek snorts. “No, though my mom always used to say that we were all vicious on the full moons when we were teething.”

Stiles clamps his hands over his nipples, looking horrified. “No.”

Derek barks out a laugh at his expression, then casts a guilty look at the door.

“Don’t worry,” Stiles says, his horrified expression fading to amusement. “Dad sleeps like a rock.” He sighs a little, rubbing a hand over his stomach. “I wish she’d calm down so I could get some sleep too.”

Derek watches him for a minute, and then he says, “Get into bed. I want to try something.”

“Oh?” Stiles says, his eyebrows rising. “Something kinky?”

Derek rolls his eyes as he shoves off his jeans. “Do you want to get some sleep tonight or not?”

“I could be persuaded otherwise,” Stiles grins, climbing onto his bed and shoving back the sheets so Derek can slip in next to him. It feels familiar, even if Derek hasn’t been in Stiles’ bed for over six months—apart from the night of Stiles’ pseudo-heat, and that didn’t really count.

“Shh,” Derek says, leaning over to hush him up with a kiss before scooting down the bed until his head’s level with Stiles’ stomach.

“BJ?” Stiles says with interest, a sharp shock of arousal lacing through his scent.

Derek gives him a look. “I thought you wanted to go to sleep.”

“Like I said, I can be persuaded,” Stiles replies, but he doesn’t push it as Derek settles down next to him, pressing his cheek to Stiles’ stomach. He closes his eyes, a little self-conscious as he begins to hum a lullaby his mother used sing to him and his siblings when they were young. It’s one of his earliest memories, in fact, waking up from a nightmare to his mom rocking him in her lap, humming the song. There are no words, just a soft, lilting tune with no real end.

He keeps his eyes shut as Stiles’ hand finds its way back to his hair, but he knows it’s working; the baby’s heartbeat is starting to slow and Stiles’ is too, his body relaxing under Derek’s cheek. Derek’s already feeling closer to the edge of sleep than he has all night, lulled into relaxation by the nearness of Stiles and the baby, his little family. Derek hides a smile against Stiles’ stomach.

“Family.”

“Come here,” Stiles says after while, his voice soft. “She’s stopped.”

Derek makes himself move back up the bed, limbs heavy and flooded with the golden warmth of contentment. He curls himself around Stiles and presses a kiss to the back of his neck.

“What was that?” Stiles asks sleepily. “That you were humming?”

“Old wolf lullaby,” Derek murmurs.

“You think that means she’s a werewolf, since it calmed her down?”
“No,” Derek says. “I think it means she’s a baby and she liked the sound of it.”

“Fair enough,” Stiles yawns. He heaves out a long sigh and presses back firmer against Derek’s body. “Thanks for that.”

“Happy to help,” Derek says quietly, letting his eyes drift shut.

It’s so easy to fall asleep there, safe and warm. He even wakes up feeling so content that he’s not bothered when he has to duck into Stiles’ closet to hide from the sheriff when he pokes his head into the room to check on Stiles before heading to work. He doesn’t even care that Stiles laughs at him afterward. Derek is happy.
Stiles

It’s almost unnerving how, in the space of a couple hours, everything changes the night Stiles makes the decision to go to Derek’s apartment. He didn’t expect Derek to just let him into his life, not really; he expected anger, resentment at being kept at a distance, maybe because that’s how Stiles would have felt if their situations had been reversed. But Derek—Derek’s just openly relieved, giving Stiles a space in his life like he’s been holding it in waiting, and he has, Stiles realizes, standing in the shower after they’ve talked. Derek was kind and touched him so gently and was everything he’s been aching for—Stiles has to dig the heels of his palms into his eyes to keep from crying when he realizes this. He could have been happy months ago. He thought he was doing a good thing by keeping Derek out of his life, giving Derek a chance to make something of himself, and all he’s done is make the both of them miserable.

But Derek doesn’t resent him for some unfathomable reason; he lets Stiles stay at the apartment whenever he wants, makes him food, offers to drive him places, lets him sleep in his bed. He touches Stiles all over, doesn’t seem to care that Stiles has swollen up like a balloon, and for the first time in a while, Stiles holds his head up as he walks through the halls at school. People still stare, and it’s still uncomfortable, but Stiles tells himself he doesn’t care because Derek doesn’t care. He spends half their time together rubbing his face all over Stiles’ stomach and he doesn’t seem to give two shits.

Stiles didn’t tell Scott about his plan to go to Derek’s apartment, but he doesn’t have to. When Stiles sees him at school the next day, a bright smile breaks over Scott’s face and he says, “You didn’t.”

Stiles snorts because it’s the same exact thing Scott said to him the night he and Derek first hooked up. It’s like they’ve come full circle. “I did,” he says wryly.

“You’re happy,” Scott says.

Stiles pauses for a moment, thinking about this. “Yeah,” he says eventually, one side of his mouth quirking up. “I think I am.”

Scott wraps an arm around his shoulders, hauling him in close. “You reek,” he says cheerfully, as Kira steps up to them, smiling. “Did he jizz on your face or something?”

“Hey, Kira,” Stiles says, deadpan.

“Hi,” she says quietly, her cheeks bright pink. Scott’s head whips around, and his face and neck go a matching shade of cherry when he spots her standing next to them. Stiles laughs so hard it stirs the baby up, and she doesn’t stop kicking him in the bladder until third period, but it’s totally worth it.

Ms. Blake picks up on it too. Stiles goes to her house for dinner on one of the rare nights he doesn’t go to Derek’s, and as he helps her set the small table, she says, “Something’s changed in you.”

Stiles gives her a faint grin. “You think?”

She nods, the corners of her eyes crinkling up as she smiles. “They say being pregnant makes you glow, and you’ve definitely been glowing lately.”

“That’s just an increase in blood volume,” Stiles says, remembering his books. He hesitates, though. He trusts Ms. Blake. “But, um. Her dad and I are back together.”
For a moment, the warm expression on Ms. Blake’s face flickers. There’s something dark underneath that makes Stiles nervous—but then it’s gone, as quickly as it had appeared. “That’s wonderful, Stiles,” she says kindly, and he hears nothing in her voice that would suggest she’s lying. “I’m glad you’re happy.”

“Thanks,” Stiles says, wondering if he just imagined it—or maybe Ms. Blake is jealous of him? Maybe she wishes she were carrying her own baby instead of using a surrogate.

Still, it makes him uneasy enough that he eats fast and ducks out quickly, using a backlog of homework as an excuse to get out of there. Ms. Blake’s a teacher; she can’t argue with that.

When he goes home, his dad’s sitting at their dining room table, papers spread across the surface in front of him. It’s the first night he’s gotten home before Stiles in weeks, and he looks exhausted. “Where have you been?” he asks, not even looking up from his work.

“Ms. Blake’s,” Stiles says quietly, glad he doesn’t have to lie. He knows his dad wouldn’t be pleased if he knew Stiles had been going over to Derek’s almost every night. The fact that his dad’s been working so much is a blessing and a curse at the same time, in that it allows him to see Derek whenever he wants, but knowing how mad his dad would be if he knew isn’t a great thing. Stiles has already told him several times that he was at Scott’s when he was actually at Derek’s. Stiles swallows uneasily and sits down at the table, eyeing the papers his dad’s got spread everywhere. “How’s the investigation going?”

His father sighs, rubbing a hand over his eyes. “It’s not,” he admits wearily. “We’ve got no suspects, no leads—nothing.”

“I thought they were sacrifices,” Stiles says, craning his head to look at the crime scene photos spilling out of a folder. “It’s not a druid?”

“If it was, they’re not in the registry,” his father says. “We’ve questioned every druid in town, and they’ve all got alibis.”

“What’s the point, then?” Stiles asks. He tries to tug a coroner’s report toward him, but his father jerks it out of his hand. “I mean, there’s gotta be some reason behind it, right?”

His father shakes his head slowly. “We don’t know,” he says tiredly. “But I want you to be careful. If this is some renegade druid, they always do things in threes.”

Stiles straightens. “That’s why there’s three murders each time?”

“Exactly,” his father says. “And if that’s the case, there’s one set left. We’re working as hard as we can to catch them before it happens again, but I want you to be careful.”

“Yeah, of course,” Stiles says, rubbing an uneasy hand over his stomach.

His father looks at him then, his face lined with fatigue. “How are you doing?” he asks. “Everybody healthy?”

“Yeah,” Stiles says quietly, scrounging up a smile for his father. “Things are really good, Dad.”

His father gives him a relieved smile. “Glad to hear it.”

Stiles watches him for a moment, summoning the courage to ask, “Are you going to be home on time on Friday?”
“I don’t know,” his father sighs. “Why? I might be able to make it happen.”

“I was hoping we’d be able have dinner together,” Stiles tells him. He doesn’t mention Derek because he knows his dad would never agree to it, but if he can just get both of them together in the house at the same time, he thinks maybe they can work things out.

His dad gives him a long look before his expression softens and he nods. “I’ll see what I can do,” he says. “It’s been a while since we’ve had a sit-down meal, huh?”

“Yeah,” Stiles says, forcing himself to keep smiling. “We’ve got a lot to catch up on.”

To say that dinner is a disaster is an understatement. Stiles honestly hadn’t expected it to go so poorly. His dad’s pretty level-headed, for the most part, and apart from the little bit of friction between them when his dad had first found out about the pregnancy, he’s been supportive. Maybe he’s been hiding how upset he is, though, or maybe it’s just Derek, but Stiles definitely didn’t expect to come racing down the stairs to find him face-to-face with Derek, hand on his gun, snarling at Derek about the damage he’s caused. And Derek—Derek’s got his shoulders hunched and this expression on his face like he believes what Stiles’ dad is saying, and Stiles goes into combat mode almost automatically, worming his way between them.

Things don’t get better even after his dad’s taken a shower, because he goes super rude in an extremely polite way and Stiles just gets angrier and angrier watching Derek keep his eyes on his plate, a miserable expression on his face. He’s ready to scream by the time the meal’s over, nearly does when his dad not-so-subtly kicks Derek out of the house. He follows Derek outside with some relief, but then he starts getting angry all over again at the way Derek doesn’t even seem upset by the way Stiles’ dad treated him. He seems almost resigned to it, like he expects bad shit to happen to him, like he deserves it. Doesn’t he ever get angry? Doesn’t he ever fight back?

Stiles stands on the front porch for a long time after Derek drives away, his chest heaving furiously. Whatever Derek might think, he doesn’t deserve to be treated like shit. Stiles knows his father’s not the only one who’s guilty of it—he himself was an ass to Derek for months, and he didn’t deserve any of it. He’s going to treat Derek better, he vows. Just because Stiles is the one having the baby doesn’t mean that Derek doesn’t need kindness.

When Stiles finally goes back inside, his father’s sitting at the dining room table with his hands folded in front of him, waiting, and Stiles is ready, his jaw clenched tight.

“I don’t appreciate being ambushed inside my own house like that,” his father says stonily, without any preamble.

“Too bad,” Stiles retorts. “You wouldn’t have said yes otherwise.”

“You’re damn right,” his dad snaps. “I told you, Stiles, I told you—”

“I know what you told me!” Stiles says furiously. “But you don’t get to treat Derek like shit. What happened to giving him a break?”

“I may not be about to arrest him, but that doesn’t mean I want you seeing him,” his father replies sharply. “Having a baby doesn’t automatically make you an adult, Stiles. You don’t know—”

“I know how I feel!” Stiles yells. “I know I’m fucking sick of how people look at me and judge me, and Derek doesn’t do that! Why is it so bad if he wants to take care of me?”
“I’m not about to forgive him for this!” Stiles’ father says furiously, and Stiles’ mouth snaps shut. He feels like he’s been slapped.

“Forgive him for what?” Stiles asks, quiet and unhappy. “The baby? Is that how you see her—a mistake? If that’s the case, you better kick me out of the house because I’m just as much to blame as he is.”

“That’s not—I’d never—” His father cuts himself off, looking stricken. He shuts his eyes for a moment, and Stiles waits with his arms crossed defensively over his chest. “I’m sorry, Stiles,” he says gently. “This wasn’t what I wanted for you, you know that, but clearly I haven’t been in tune with what you wanted. I was angry and I took it out on Derek, and I’m sorry for that.”

Stiles nods stiffly, still hurt.

“I’m glad,” his dad says after a moment, watching Stiles tiredly, “that you’re happy with him, and if you say you know what you’re doing—okay. I won’t interfere. I can’t promise that I’ll be calling him son anytime soon, but I’ll be civil.”

Stiles eyes him warily, his hopes lifting. “Seriously?”

His father nods. “Now,” he adds, “that being said, I’m not giving you a free pass to hang out with him all the time. You’ve been taking advantage of me being busy by staying at his place, haven’t you?”

“Yes,” Stiles says guiltily.

“No more overnights,” his dad says severely. “You’re still in school and you’re still underage.”

“I always get my homework done!” Stiles protests. “Derek’s got homework too; we do it together.” He hesitates, knowing he’s pushing things when his dad’s starting to loosen up. He doesn’t want to make his dad angry again, but he wants to be able to see Derek, too. “Can I stay at his place when you have an overnight shift?” He hopes this is a reasonable compromise; his dad only gets a couple night shifts a week.

His father leans back in his chair, rubbing a hand over his eyes. “Fine,” he grumbles.

Stiles grins in relief. “Thanks, Dad.” He steps around the table and bends to give his dad a hug. “I’m sorry for springing him on you tonight.”

His dad pats him on the arm. “Stiles, you haven’t stopped surprising me since the day your mother went into labor two weeks early,” he sighs. He looks up at Stiles when Stiles straightens, his face worn with weariness. “I’m sorry she isn’t here for you.”

Stiles winces, remember what he’d said earlier. “No, Dad,” he says. “That was a low blow. I shouldn’t have—”

But his dad’s shaking his head. “No, you’re right,” he says quietly. “You’re a good kid, but Lord knows it would have been easier on both of us if she was still around. Being a single parent’s tough, son. I don’t want you to go through what I went through. Like you said—you’ve got a choice in the matter. It’s not fair for me to make your life more difficult just because I don’t like your boyfriend. I care about you more than that.”

“Dad, you don’t have to—”

“I do,” his dad says, patting him on the arm again. “That’s my job.”
“Dad,” Stiles says firmly, “you know with or without Derek in the picture, I’ve got plenty of support. I’ve got you and Scott—I’m not going to be alone.”

“As long as you remember that,” his father says, pushing back his chair and getting to his feet. He draws in a deep breath and lets it out slowly. “Long night,” he says, eyeing Stiles ruefully. “What do you say to a movie?”

Stiles grins. “I’d like that.”

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Stiles wakes up a couple days later with his shirt damp and sticking uncomfortably to his torso. He grimaces, wondering if he was sweating in his sleep—until he rolls onto his back and hisses when his shirt rubs against his nipples and they fucking hurt.

“Are you freakin’ kidding me?” he grumbles, struggling upright. In the process he elbows Derek—who’s been sleeping over on the sly since Stiles’ dad banned most sleepovers at Derek’s place, and is currently crammed into Stiles’ tiny twin bed next to him—in the face. Derek awakens with a startled grunt of pain, squinting up at Stiles in confusion as Stiles tenderly peels off his damp shirt.

“What’re you doing?” Derek says, his voice rough from sleep.

Stiles makes an irritated noise, glaring down at his damp chest. “I’m leaking.”

Derek jolts upright, looking worried. “What do you mean?” he presses. “Do you need—I can take you to the hospital—”

“Slow your roll, buddy,” Stiles says, giving him a distracted pat on the cheek. “I’m not hurt, I just—I’ve started lactating, I think.”

“You—oh,” Derek says, his eyes flickering down to Stiles’ chest. “You are.” His nostrils flare.

“Hey, stop smelling me,” Stiles says defensively, crossing his arms over his chest, then hissing in regret when he hits his nipples. “Ow,” he says plaintively, dropping his arms again. He and Derek both watch with interest as a bead of milk gathers at the tip of his nipple before spilling down his torso. “That’s kind of gross,” Stiles says, horrified and fascinated.

Derek rolls his eyes. “That’s nature,” he says.

Stiles eyes him. “If you ever say anything to me about the wonders of my pregnant body, I’ll put wolfsbane in your coffee.”

Derek flicks him on the nose and then gets out of bed, padding quietly over to pull open Stiles’ door.

“Hey,” Stiles says sharply, then drops his voice to a whisper. “Dad—”

“Asleep,” Derek says softly. “I’ll be right back.” He steps out into the hall but doesn’t shut the door behind him; after a moment, Stiles hears the sink in the bathroom turn on briefly before shutting off again. Derek reappears a moment later with a washcloth and carefully closes the door behind him. He settles back on the bed next to Stiles and offers him the cloth. “Do you—? Or I can—?”

“I can do it,” Stiles says, taking the washcloth. He sponges off his chest and ribs; due to the swell of his stomach, most of the milk he leaked slid down his sides or soaked into his shirt. “This is such a pain,” he grumbles. “She’s not even here yet and she’s making a mess. What am I supposed to do? Sleep with a towel shoved down my shirt?”
He glances over at Derek, who doesn’t seem to be paying attention, his gaze focused on Stiles’ chest. “Wake up, weirdo,” he says, snapping his fingers in front of Derek’s eyes. Derek blinks, his gaze shifting to Stiles’ face. “What?” Stiles says, a little guardedly.

Derek frowns a little, thoughtful. “Smells good,” he says, and his eyes go a little blue around the edges. “Can I…taste it?”

Stiles stares at him, his cheeks going warm. “You want to?” Derek nods, an intense look on his face, and Stiles swallows. “Okay,” he says, leaning back on his elbows. “Might as well take a test run before the baby comes, huh?”

Derek snorts as he leans forward, breathing in deep. He reaches out with one hand, gently pinching Stiles’ nipple between his thumb and forefinger, squeezing just hard enough that another droplet of milk spills out, and Derek leans in, slowly laving his tongue over the streak of milk. Stiles hisses at the sensation, his skin breaking into goosebumps. Derek lifts his head, looking concerned, but Stiles shakes his head at him. “’S okay,” he says. “Feels weird.” That’s the truth; it doesn’t hurt exactly, even though his skin feels tight and tender.

Derek watches him for a moment longer before lowering his head again, pressing the broad warmth of his tongue to Stiles’ nipple, firmer this time, then again and again, until Stiles is almost shaking.

“Don’t stop,” he says unsteadily, curling a hand around the back of Derek’s head. “Derek, don’t—”

Derek makes an indecipherable noise and then gently puts his entire mouth over Stiles’ nipple and sucks. A startled groan slips through Stiles’ lips; he’s completely thrown off guard by the way he can feel it through his entire body, the tips of his fingers and toes tingling in response. He can feel himself starting to produce milk, and it’s the weirdest fucking thing he’s ever felt in his life, but Derek is into it; he makes this pleased noise deep in his chest that Stiles feels in his ribs. Stiles’ body flares hot in response, happy his alpha’s happy and god he hates the stupid omega bullshit sometimes, but right then he couldn’t care less.

Derek lifts his head, licking his lips lazily, and Stiles whines. He’s fucking hard from Derek sucking his nipples, and he doesn’t want him to stop. “Derek—”

Derek actually growls at him, eyes flashing blue before he turns his attention to Stiles’ other nipple and latches on, the muscles in his jaw working hard as he sucks Stiles dry. At the same time, he gets his hand into Stiles’ sweatpants and starts jerking him off, fast and rough with no finesse or lube, but Stiles hardly needs it; he comes after only a handful of tugs, body completely overwhelmed by the battling sensations of Derek’s hand on his dick and his mouth on his chest. He only barely manages to slap his hand over his mouth to muffle his shocked cry.

“What,” Stiles says weakly, as Derek sits back looking satisfied, his eyes heavy. “What just happened?”

“Enjoy yourself?” Derek snarks, languidly licking Stiles’ come off his hand.

“Like you have any right to talk,” Stiles retorts. “Did you know that was going to happen? Holy shit, we’re going to do that again soon.”

Derek doesn’t look like he’s about to argue. As he shifts around to lay back down next to Stiles, Stiles stops him with a hand on his arm. “What about you?”

Derek raises his eyebrows. “What about me?”

“Don’t you want to get off?”
Derek gives him a sleepy half-smile. “Doesn’t matter,” he says, licking his lips pointedly. “I’ve already had my fill.”

“Nuh-uh,” Stiles says immediately, sitting up. He remembers his resolution from a couple days ago to treat Derek as well as Derek treats him. “Let me blow you.”

“No,” Derek says.


Derek hesitates.

“Is this the whole taking it slow thing?” Stiles asks, and after a beat of silence, Derek nods. Stiles sighs. “I get your concerns, dude, and if you really don’t want to, I’m not going to press it, but do you really think I’m going to break up with you for letting me blow you when I wanted to? That’d be a seriously shitty thing to do.”

Derek summons up a faint scowl. “I don’t think that,” he says.

“So?” Stiles presses. “Can I suck your dick, then?”

“Fine,” Derek says, sounding like it’s costing him a great deal to agree to it, but he grins after he says it. Stiles grins too, sitting up so he can assess the situation. He’s not sure the best way to go about this; he can’t lay down, not with his stomach, and he doesn’t think he could kneel and bend over Derek either. The floor’s probably the best bet, he decides, and climbs off the bed. Derek sits up and offers him a hand, supporting him as he sinks down to kneel on the floor, and then he passes Stiles a pillow.

“For your knees,” he says conscientiously.

“My hero,” Stiles says dryly. Derek looks pleased, and Stiles lets him have his moment, watching him lift his hips and shimmy his boxers down to his ankles. His dick’s an almost painful-looking red, curving toward his stomach. “Knew I wasn’t the only one who enjoyed myself,” Stiles says smugly, settling between Derek’s knees.

“Can’t help it,” Derek says quietly, cupping Stiles’ face in one hand. “I always want you.”

Stiles stares up at him, open-mouthed, his cheeks growing warm under Derek’s touch. There’s intent and truth in Derek’s words, more than lust talking. They haven’t really talked about how they feel about each other since the night Stiles first went to Derek’s apartment, but it feels...kind of awesome to know he’s got someone who cares about him—cares about him in more than just a family or friend way. This is going to be the best blow job he ever gives, he decides, keeping his eyes on Derek’s face as he lift a hand to his mouth, licking across his palm and fingers before reaching out and wrapping his hand around Derek’s dick. Derek’s fingers tense against Stiles’ cheek, his breath stuttering as Stiles jacks him slowly, watching Derek the entire time.

“Stiles,” Derek says in a small voice, mouth trembling as Stiles shifts forward and licks across the head of his dick, the bitter taste of precome flooding his mouth. He’s aware of Derek’s thighs tensing on either side of him, the hand that’s not on Stiles’ cheek touching his lips, his jaw, his neck, but Stiles lets himself get lost in his favorite sex act, kissing down Derek’s shaft before licking back up, letting the head slide against his lips. He looks up at Derek and finds him open-mouthed, watching Stiles with a lost expression on his face, spots of color high on his cheekbones. Stiles gives him a faint smile, puts one hand on Derek’s hip to steady himself, fisting the base of Derek’s dick with the other, and takes Derek into his mouth.
“Stiles,” Derek says again, breathless, almost a whine. Stiles doesn’t look away from him, his heart pounding in his chest. He takes it slow at first, getting reacquainted to the weight of a dick in his mouth, the taste of skin, remembering how to breathe. He bobs his head slowly, satisfaction curling through his body at the way Derek curses and clenches his eyes shut, his breathing hitching with every slow rise of Stiles’ head. He finally has to look away from Derek as he takes him in deeper, lest he go cross-eyed, but his whole body feels like it’s buzzing, acutely aware of every point of contact between him and Derek.

Derek won’t stop touching him, his hands brushing his cheeks, his neck, his hair, his shoulders, but there’s nothing aggressive in his movements. Stiles is sure he’d like to come, but he doesn’t jerk up with his hips, doesn’t try to force Stiles’ head down on his dick. Stiles doesn’t mind that—he likes getting his face fucked—but this is good too. Different, softer. Derek’s fingers trail down his arm, and Stiles takes his hand off Derek’s hip to catch his hand, threading their fingers together as Stiles goes down so far that his lips touch where his other hand’s curled around the base of Derek’s dick.

“Oh,” Derek says wonderingly, shakily. “I’m—I’m going to come.”

Stiles squeezes his hand, giving him the silent go-ahead, and Derek sighs softly, hips jumping just once as he comes in Stiles’ mouth. That’s another thing Stiles has to remember—don’t cough—but it’s all kind of like riding a bicycle, he thinks, swallowing Derek down and licking at his lips absently. It’s all coming back to him.

Derek sighs again, but it’s not a sad noise. He looks content, and Stiles feels content, pushing into Derek’s touch when his fingers brush against Stiles’ cheek. “Come here,” Derek says quietly, and he helps Stiles lift himself off the floor, steadying him when he wobbles. Derek waits patiently for Stiles to settle back down in bed, rebuilding his retaining wall of pillows, and then curls himself around Stiles, his body hot against Stiles’ back.

“That was fun,” Stiles says. It was more than just fun. It felt—important somehow. He’s not sure why.

Derek kisses the back of his neck. “How does your chest feel?”

Stiles takes stock, carefully touching his breasts. They’re sore, but they don’t feel tight like they did before. “I think you drank me dry.”

Derek snorts quietly. “Wasn’t much in them.”

“Yeah, well, it’s just getting started,” Stiles says with a yawn. He grins. “It’s all just getting started.”

Stiles wishes he’d never said anything, because apparently saying it’s all just getting started broke some kind of floodgate in him, and now things are happening to him that he really wishes weren’t. He’s had a fairly easy pregnancy so far, he knows—Dr. Yukimura’s said so, and so has Scott’s mom, both of them with a hint of jealousy in their voices—and it’s true; apart from morning sickness in the first trimester, and some weird nightmares and the pseudo-heat in the second, he’s been pretty okay otherwise.

Now, though, as the last month of his pregnancy rapidly approaches, he really starts feeling it. His back, a little achy before, just hurts, all the freakin’ time—and so do his feet, and his knees, and his head. He abuses Derek and Scott for their pain-taking abilities pretty much twenty-four seven, and Scott turns out to be amazing at foot rubs, which Stiles exploits unashamedly.
The baby pretty much doesn't stop moving unless Derek growl-hums his werewolf lullaby, which usually has the side effect of putting Stiles to sleep as well. She's getting huge; Stiles loses sight of his feet a couple days after he starts lactating, and quickly learns that anything he drops is lost forever because there's no fucking way he can bend over. It hurts; his skin hurts, too, and he hates the way people go out of their way to do things for him. He yells at Derek for getting a glass out of the cupboard for him, and then he cries because Derek looks so hurt, and also because he can't actually reach the glass himself.

That's another thing; people told him to beware the mood swings and changes in hormone levels, but he never expected to feel so deeply. It's like everything's enhanced by a thousand percent; things that would have been small irritations before make him nuts, and sometimes he's just sitting there, absolutely fine, when tears start welling up in his eyes for no reason at all. And it's not just feelings; his senses are ratcheted up sky high—sounds, scents, tastes. He can't eat garlic anymore, or eggs, or peppers, or chocolate, or any kind of ice cream other than Cherry Garcia.

Derek is very supportive, and Stiles oscillates violently between gratitude and hatred toward him. It's mostly gratitude, because Derek makes him good food, and takes his pain away, and blows Stiles—or lets Stiles blow him, depending on what he wants—but part of Stiles wants to see him get pissed, just once.

A week after Stiles starts lactating, he goes over to Derek's apartment, and as he's working on his calculus homework, Derek shyly pushes a cardboard box across the table toward him. Stiles lifts his head and eyes it critically; it's unopened. "What's this?"

"For you," Derek says enigmatically.

Stiles frowns and uses his pen to stab the tape so he can open the box. Inside is a package of maternity bras. He looks up at Derek, whose cheeks go a little pink. "You said you're sick of your shirts getting wet," he says. "I read these can help. With your back pain too."

Stiles looks down at the box, still frowning. He knows it's a nice thing for Derek to do, rationally, but he's suddenly annoyed, especially at the earnest expression on Derek's face. He shoves the box away, says meanly, "I told you I don't want your help."

Hurt filters across Derek's face and Stiles feels savagely triumphant. "I thought we agreed we're doing this together," Derek says quietly.

"Yeah, well, you're not the one carrying around a baby, are you?" Stiles retorts.

"I'm doing what I can," Derek says, his gaze falling to the table. He clenches his jaw before he adds, "You're the one that came to me."

Stiles opens his mouth and then closes it, all of his irritation replaced by guilt. Derek's right; Stiles is the one who came crawling back, begging for forgiveness. Derek had every right to turn him away, especially after the way Stiles treated him—the way he's still treating him. Stiles thinks about his resolution to treat Derek better and winces. God, he's a fucking asshole. "Sorry," he croaks.

Derek nods stiffly, not looking at him and great, fuck, now Derek's pissed. That's what Stiles wanted, but he doesn't know why the hell he ever did. Shit.

"I'm sorry," he says again. "I am. I'm—I've got to work on my asshole tendencies."

He sees Derek grit his teeth and then Derek says, "I can't do this if you're going to resent me every time I try to do something for you."
Stiles' mouth drops open. "What? That's not—" He pushes himself out of his chair with a groan, needing to be closer to rectify this stupid fight he's caused. He makes his way around the table, pausing next to Derek, who won't look at him, his jaw clenched. "Derek," he says slowly, trying to get his thoughts in order. "I'm not—it's not that I'm not grateful. I am, really. It's just—I'm used to taking care of myself, all right? After—after my mom died, it was just me and my dad, and he was working all the time, so I had to do a lot of stuff on my own. I'm not used to having someone else there, wanting to help me, and I'm not used to people buying me things. It's not like we were poor, but after Mom died and it was just Dad working, there wasn't a lot to spare."

He gestures at the box sitting on the table. "I knew those existed, and I knew they'd probably help, but I didn't even think about buying them because in our house, if it wasn't necessary, you didn't need it. I had to save money for like a year just to buy a used Xbox from some dude off Craigslist. I don't—I don't know how to accept things. I mean, you know how I treated the money you gave me for Christmas, and I really could have used that."

Derek's eyes flicker up to him and then away. "Just say thank you," he says.

Stiles hesitates, and then he says, "Thank you." Derek doesn't respond, but Stiles reaches out and puts a tentative hand on his shoulder. "Thank you," he says again, more firmly. "You listened to me complain and then did something to help me out with it, and I really appreciate that."

Derek is quiet for a moment, and then he sighs, turning his head to press a kiss to Stiles' wrist. "You're welcome," he says quietly.

Stiles bends as well as he can, rubbing his cheek against the top of Derek's head. "I'm sorry," he says again. "Can I make it up to you somehow?"

Derek's quiet for a long moment, his hand seeking out Stiles' hip. "Let me buy you something," he says.

"Like what?" Stiles asks suspiciously.

"I'm going to take care of the entire nursery," Derek says, nodding toward the disused office. "You're not allowed to complain about how much anything costs."

Stiles scowls. "Seriously? Can't I buy, like, a mobile or something?"

Derek looks smug now. "Nope."


"With pleasure," Derek says, looking satisfied.

- -

Stiles is sitting in English class a couple days later, ostensibly reading over Kira's essay on *Catcher in the Rye*, but really just staring blankly at the page in front of him, fondly remembering the blow job he'd gotten from Derek early that morning, when Scott leans over and hisses, "Hey!"

"What's up, man?" Stiles says absently, not looking up.

"Uh," Scott says. "So, I was talking to my mom last night, and she wants to throw you a baby shower."

"What?" Stiles squawks, jerking his head up. "No, man, you don't need to do that! I don't need
"You don't?" Scott says doubtfully. "Mom said your dad told her you don't even have a nursery put together yet."

"That's not—" Stiles cuts himself off. It is true, technically. Even if Derek puts one together at his place, Stiles has nothing set up at his house. He wonders, a little nervously, what his dad would say if Stiles told him he was going to live at Derek's after the baby's born. He's going to be eighteen in a few weeks; it's not like his dad could stop him. What would he say? Would Stiles even want to do that? Would Derek even want him there?

"Come on," Scott says patiently, interrupting his thoughts. "It'll be fun."

Stiles isn't sure it will. "What about—" He lowers his voice, glancing around uncertainly. "What about Derek?"

"Mom said you can invite him and the rest of the pack," Scott says cheerfully. "She wants to meet him."

Stiles frowns. "Who told her about him?"

"Not me," Scott says instantly. "I promise. I think your dad did."

Stiles still hesitates. "I'll talk to Derek," he says. "See if he's into the idea."

"All right," Scott says agreeably. "I'll let Mom know." He hesitates, and then adds, "Do you want to hang out tomorrow? I know you probably want to see Derek, but it's been a while."

Stiles winces guiltily. It has been a while since he and Scott hung out, which is completely his fault; he got so wrapped up with being back with Derek that he's been totally neglecting Scott—which is especially not cool considering how much Scott's been supporting him. "You're not hanging out with Kira?"

Scott shakes his head, casting one of his goofy in-love smiles across the room at Kira, who smiles back. "We're taking things slow."

"Well, I will definitely hang with you," Stiles says firmly. "And I'll talk to Derek tonight."

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Stiles tells Derek about the baby shower while they're hanging out at Derek's place. Stiles is sprawled across most of the couch, his feet in Derek's lap—Derek also gives good foot rubs, though they're nowhere near as good as Scott's. Derek's quiet for so long that Stiles feels it necessary to prod at him with a, "What do you think?"

Even then, Derek's quiet for another long moment before he looks over at Stiles and say, "Are you okay with me going?"

Stiles frowns at him. "Yeah? Why wouldn't I be?"

"Because if I'm there, people will know," Derek says haltingly. "Who your alpha is. Are you ready for that?"

It's Stiles' turn to hesitate. He hadn't really thought about that. "They're going to find out eventually," Stiles points out. "I mean, there's not going to be a ton of people there. Maybe it's the best time for
them to find out, you know? We can kind of ease into it."

Derek watches him for a moment, and then nods. "If that's what you want to do."

Stiles frowns at him, nudging him in the stomach with one of his feet. "What about you?" he asks. "Do you even want to go?"

"About as much as you do," Derek admits. "But I want to meet the people who are important to you."

"Dude," Stiles says softly, stretching out his hand. Derek reaches out and takes it, twining their fingers together. "You did the whole dinner at my house thing. We should do the same with your sisters."

"You already know Cora," Derek points out.

"Yeah?" Stiles says. "And you technically already knew my dad. Besides, I don't know Laura, and werebaby or not, she's going to be her alpha."

Derek looks pleased when Stiles says this. "I'll talk to Laura," he says.

"Okay," Stiles says contentedly. "And Scott says they're invited to the shower, too, so we can do a meet the family thing then as well."

Derek squeezes his hand. "All right," he says quietly. "You know, we should really start thinking about names."

Stiles blanches. "I know," he says. "I was hoping something would just strike me, but it hasn't yet."

Derek snorts. They're quiet for a while, attention returning to the television, and then Stiles draws a deep breath as he brings up something he's been thinking about for a while. "Have you thought about godparents?" Derek looks at him quizzically and Stiles soldiers on, "because I was thinking—hoping—that Scott could be the godfather."

Derek's quiet for a long beat, watching Stiles thoughtfully, and then he nods. "Okay."

Stiles blinks, a little startled at his easy acceptance. "Seriously? Have you even met Scott?"

"Once," Derek says. "But if we're going to quantify godparent eligibility by how long we've both known the person, we're going to end up with, I don't know, a teacher we both had in school, and that old lady who works at the post office."

"Gleniss," agreed Stiles with a nod. "Okay. You're sure?"

"Sure," Derek says softly. "He's your best friend. I don't mind."

"Okay," Stiles says. He nudges his foot against Derek's ribs again and Derek catches his ankle, curling warm fingers around it. "Do you want to pick the godmother?"

"Laura," Derek says immediately, not even bothering to think about it.

Stiles grins. "That's not going to piss Cora off?"

"Probably," Derek says. "She can have the next one." He stiffens immediately, eyes darting toward Stiles. "Not that—I didn't mean—"
Stiles stares at him, wondering why he’s getting so flustered. It takes him a moment to realize what Derek’s just said—implying that they’re going to have another kid.

“Oh,” he says blankly. Derek looks like he wants to crawl off the couch and go bury his head in the ground somewhere. “Uh. Let’s see how we like one first, huh?”

Derek nods, his cheeks bright pink.

“Do you, um, want to tell Scott and Laura about being godparents at the shower?” Stiles asks.

Derek nods again, his eyes firmly fixed on the television. “Sounds good.”

“Okay,” Stiles says, and they fall into silence again, but Stiles doesn’t stop watching Derek, his heart beating a little fast. They haven’t really talked about the future; they seem to have an unspoken agreement that they’re going to be together for the months to come—years, maybe, but what after that? His thoughts return to what he’d been thinking about in class that afternoon: will they ever move in together? What if they get married?

Stiles’ stomach gives a nervous twist. He’s not ready to think that far ahead; he needs to graduate fucking high school first. Still, he’d like to know what Derek thinks, if he’s thought about it at all. Was the talk of another kid just an absent slip of the tongue, or has he actually thought about it?

“Hey,” Derek says jolting Stiles from his thoughts. He's watching Stiles with a worried expression on his face, his cheeks still pink. "I didn't mean to freak you out.”

"I know," Stiles says. "I just—got caught up in thought. There's a lot to think about right now, you know?"

Derek nods, squeezing Stiles' ankle. He doesn't look away from Stiles, though, and after a moment Stiles says, "You're really far away," and Derek seizes on the hint, twisting around and carefully positioning Stiles so they're spooning on the couch. Stiles sighs, satisfied as Derek loops an arm over his stomach. "I miss laying on my stomach," he comments.

"Not too much longer," Derek says softly, his breath warm against the crook of Stiles' neck.

"Yeah," Stiles replies, his eyes drifting shut. Not long at all.

He's just starting to get really comfortable, Derek's hand rubbing up and down his stomach, when he's hit by a sharp pain in his pelvis and he breathes in harshly, his whole body tensing.

"Relax," Derek murmurs, his teeth grazing Stiles' shoulder. "I've got you."

"No," Stiles says. "That's not—" He cuts himself off as another keen stab of pain laces through him, an involuntary whine slipping between his lips.

"Stiles?" Derek says sharply, helping him sit upright. "What's wrong?"

"It's nothing, I just—" Stiles squeezes his eyes shut, clenching his teeth at the pain. He exhales harshly. "Cramps."

"Are you sure?" Derek presses. "It's not—she's not coming—"

Stiles laughs wildly. "She better not be." He shudders as another wave hits him, his hand clamping down around Derek's. "Nothing feels wrong; she's not coming. It's just—I read about this. My body doesn't know she's getting cut out, so it thinks it has to practice."
"Can I do anything?" Derek asks worriedly.

"Glass of water?"

Derek nods, though he's clearly reluctant to let go of Stiles' hand. He trots backward into the kitchen keeping an eye on Stiles as long as he can. When he's out of sight, Stiles exhales shakily and slumps forward, curling his arms over his stomach. The pain's not unbearable, and he knows it'll probably be worse the day it actually happens, but it's not exactly comfortable. He's gotten cramps during gym class, and sometimes he gets them during his heat, but they don't hurt anywhere as near as much as these do.

Derek returns; he touches Stiles' back so Stiles can sit up and take the glass from him, and then he crouches down in front of him, one hand on each knee, watching anxiously.

"I'm fine," Stiles tells him soothingly after drinking half the glass in three big gulps. "It should pass soon."

Derek doesn't look at all placated. "What if it doesn't?"

"Then you'll drive me to the hospital," Stiles says. He pauses, closing his eyes against a fainter ripple of pain, and then he adds, "It could happen, I guess. Mom had me two weeks early."

Derek looks alarmed. "We don't even have the nursery ready!"

"Yeah, we better get on that, huh?" Stiles says, taking another big sip of water. He adds, "Nice hustle today, though. No panicking. We'll be fine on the big day."

Derek still doesn't look reassured. Stiles reaches out and pets his hair while he downs the rest of his water, and they stay that way for another ten minutes, the cramps fading until all Stiles is left with is a vague feeling like a stomach ache. Derek makes him get off the couch and into bed, the look of worry not fading off his face as he builds Stiles' mountain of pillows around him. When he finally climbs into bed himself, Stiles twists around until he can catch Derek's face in his hands, pressing his thumbs to Derek's sharp cheekbones.

"It's gonna hurt me sometimes," he says to Derek. "That's just part of the whole process."

Derek heaves a frustrated sigh. "I don't like seeing you like that," he says tensely. "Doesn't feel right."

Stiles is sure it must go against his instincts; Derek feels like he has to protect him. "I know," Stiles says quietly. And then, because he thinks it's what Derek needs and deserves after the scare, even though Stiles hates playing into the traditional omega roles, he gentles his tone further, threading his fingers through Derek's hair as he murmurs, "My alpha."

Derek responds with a low rumble that sends a thrill of satisfaction down Stiles' spine. He luxuriates in it, stereotypes be damned, as Derek shoves his face against Stiles' neck and stays there long after they've both fallen asleep.

-Scott's house was left to his mom by her grandfather; it still smells like his pipe tobacco, and the roof leaks, but it's warm and cozy and like a second home to Stiles, who's slept there more nights than he can count. Derek's never been there, but he drags his feet as they head up the walkway, his face pale and expressionless.
"You sure you want to do this?" Stiles asks, for what feels like the fiftieth time. "You look like you're going to pass out. You don't have to be here."

"I'm fine," Derek says woodenly, his fingers tensing where they rest against the curve of Stiles' spine.

Stiles stops walking, looking at Derek intently. "I know you're freaking out," he says, "but I promise no one's going to have any beef with you. My dad's the only one who had even a bit of a right to be upset, and he got all of that out of his system. Okay?"

"Okay," Derek says, his eyes flickering to the house. He draws in a deep breath. "Do you like surprises?"

Stiles frowns at him. "Not really. Why?"

Derek nods toward the house. "Because everyone's already here."

"Huh?" Stiles swings around, confused. "But we're the only cars on the street."

"I guess they've all picked up on the park-a-couple-of-blocks-away trick," Derek says dryly. "Just act surprised."

"I don't like surprises," Stiles grumbles as they climb the front steps. Melissa opens the door before they can even knock, smiling widely.

"Stiles, sweetheart!" she says warmly, swooping in to wrap him in a tight hug. "Glad you could make it!"

"Well," Stiles says with an anxious laugh. "It's, uh, for me, right? Anyway, this is Derek. He's, uh, the, um. He's my boyfriend." His hand snakes out, grabbing for Derek's of its own accord. It's important to him that Melissa approves of Derek; she's like a second mom to him.

Melissa turns to look at Derek, inspecting him silently. Derek's hand tightens around Stiles'; he's way more nervous than Stiles is, even if he's doing a better job keeping it hidden.

"Hi, Derek," Melissa says eventually, her tone even. "It's nice to finally meet you."

"Pleasure," Derek says tightly.

"Well," Melissa says, turning her warm eyes on Stiles. "You're the first ones here, so come in."

Stiles glances at Derek as they step inside; Derek rolls his eyes a little and Stiles grins.

The moment they step past the front staircase and into the living room, there’s a group chorus of "Surprise!" He’s not surprised to see his friends and family, and Derek’s sisters, too, but he is startled by the banner over the couch that says Happy Birthday!

"I thought this was a baby shower," he says, eyes widening. "My birthday’s—"

"Next weekend, sweetheart," Melissa says, warm hand on his shoulder. "We decided to do two birds with one stone."

"Did you know?" Stiles asks Derek suspiciously, but Derek shakes his head. "Oh," Stiles says, looking back at the gathered crowd. His dad’s there, even though he said he was going to be on shift and wasn’t sure if he’d be able to stop in. Ms. Blake’s there too, and she’s got a strange expression on her face that Stiles isn’t able to parse before Derek’s hand tightens around his and he remembers.
“Um,” he says, a little anxiously. “This is Derek. He’s, uh, my boyfriend. And the dad of—you know.” He gestures expansively at his stomach and nervously watches their faces but, he realizes, most of them already *know* Derek in one way or another. Lydia does, and so does Scott. The only people who don’t are Kira and her parents, who both smile politely, and Ms. Blake, who still has that weird look on her face.

But then Scott’s bounding forward and wrapping him up in a big hug and Stiles laughs, slapping him on the back. When he steps away, Scott turns to Derek and says, “Hey, man. Congrats.”

“Thank you,” Derek says solemnly and Scott grins.

His dad slides in next, giving him a firm hug.

“Thought you said you couldn’t make it,” Stiles says.

“I always have time for you,” his dad says, ruffling Stiles’ hair. “I *will* have to get out of here in a few minutes, but I’ve got time for cake, too.”

“Don’t even think about it,” Stiles says warningly. His father gives him a soft smile before looking over at Derek. Stiles tenses—it’s their first face-to-face since the terrible dinner two weeks ago—but all his dad does is nod. Derek, looking startled, nods back, and Stiles’ dad moves off to talk to Dr. Yukimura. When Stiles turns back around, Ms. Blake is standing in front of him, a tight smile on her face. “Oh, hi Ms. Blake,” he says, startled. “Um, this is—”

“Derek,” she says crisply. "I know."


"You guys know each other?"

They both nod. "I need to get going," Ms. Blake says tensely, sparing Stiles another tight smile. "I'm sorry I can't stay longer. I got you this," she adds, pressing a gift bag into his hands.

"Oh," Stiles says, startled. "Thanks, I——" But she's already stepping around him and heading for the front door. Stiles looks at Derek, who's turned to watch Ms. Blake leave, an unhappy expression on his face, and Stiles gets an unfamiliar uneasiness tightening his stomach. The baby kicks hard as if to tell him to get his shit together and Stiles winces, drawing Derek's attention to him.

"Are you all right?" he asks, frowning.

"I'm fine," Stiles says. "What was all that——"

He doesn't get a chance to finish his question, however, because Lydia appears, and suddenly he's being dragged off to the dining room so they can sing and eat cake. Derek gets cut off from him by the flow of people to the other room, and by the time Stiles spots him again, he's being shoved into a chair at the table and Derek's all the way back in the doorway to the living room. He looks as unhappy as Stiles suddenly feels. Stiles doesn't understand what just happened. The baby kicks hard as if to tell him to get his shit together and Stiles winces, drawing Derek's attention to him.

"Not hungry," he explains with an apologetic smile. Scott frowns at him, catching the lie, and Stiles shrugs.

He tries to get back to Derek after that, but he keeps getting caught up in conversation with the party's guests; they all want to chat about the baby, and about college, and Stiles can't concentrate on any of it. Every time he looks up, he can see Derek standing over by one of the windows, an uneaten
plate of cake in his hands, not talking to anyone. Stiles looks for Laura, wondering if she's noticed, but she's deep in conversation with Dr. Yukimura, and Cora's laughing about something with Lydia.

Eventually, it's decided that it's time for presents. Stiles' dad apologetically announces he's got to get to work, but everyone else settles down in the living room, and Stiles and Derek get shuffled back together, because apparently they're supposed to open the baby's gifts together. Stiles watches him anxiously as he drops down onto the couch next to him. His expression is wooden, his face drawn, but he sits close, the sides of their thighs pressed together. He sits very still, spine ramrod straight, but when Stiles cautiously nudges his leg into his, Derek puts his hand on Stiles' knee and keeps it there. Stiles relaxes a little; that's got to mean something.

Despite Stiles' protests that they didn't need anything, there are lots of gifts to open. Derek won't open any; he shakes his head when Stiles tries to give him one, so Stiles opens them all. They get tiny clothes and tiny shoes and soft blankets. Lydia and her mom give them a stack of children's books even though—as Stiles tries to protest—they've already given him tons of baby clothes.

Cora hands him a thin, poorly made booklet, which he stares down at in confusion until she makes an irritated noise and says, "It's a coupon book, dumbass. You can redeem them when you need a night off and want me to babysit."

"You're her aunt," Stiles points out. "Aren't you supposed to do it gratis anyway?"

Cora flips him off.

By the time everything's been opened, Stiles is feeling overwhelmed by everyone's generosity; not only are there presents for the baby, but for him, too—books, and a hoodie he won't be able to wear until after he's had the baby. He just wants to talk to Derek, who's sitting so quietly next to him, his grip on Stiles' knee almost painful, but they get separated again when Stiles rises to use the bathroom and gets caught in conversation with Melissa on the way back. When he looks over at Derek, Laura's leaning in close to talk to him, and the next time he glances over, Derek's gone.

Stiles' heart skips a beat. He looks around the room, but Derek's nowhere to be found. Stiles tries to tell himself that maybe Derek needed to use the bathroom too, but he watches the room obsessively, and Derek's still not back after five minutes.

"Sorry," Stiles says to Melissa, and abruptly ducks away to approach Laura, his stomach tightening with nerves. Laura's the only one in the room he hasn't spoken to yet—he was kind of hoping to do it with Derek at his side. He hasn't spoken with her, or even seen her since that one time at the sheriff's station outside his dad's office, when she hadn't exactly been nice to him, and she still scares him.

"Stiles," Laura says placidly, before he can even get a hello out. "You're stressing out. Why?"

Fucking werewolves and their senses. "Do you—do you know where Derek went?" Stiles asks, trying to keep his voice steady.

Laura frowns at him and then lifts her head, frowning around the room. "Oh," she says, looking confused. "Wait—" She tilts her head, listening, and then her expression clears. "He's in the kitchen," she tells Stiles.

"Thanks," he says breathlessly, spinning off across the living room, firmly avoiding everyone who tries to reel him in for a chat.

The kitchen's quiet and dark, and for a moment Stiles doesn't see Derek, but then he spots him sitting at the small kitchen table, his face in shadow. "Hey," Stiles says determinedly, striding across the
room and sinking down into the chair next to Derek. "What's going on?"

Derek doesn't say anything for a while. He's sitting defensively, shoulders hunched, his body radiating tension.

"Derek?" Stiles presses. He hesitates, unsure whether or not he's going to be rebuffed, and puts his hand over Derek's. Derek's fingers immediately curl around his, clutching at him like a lifeline. "Talk to me."

Derek closes his eyes. "I think—me coming here was a mistake."

Stiles sucks in a sharp breath. "Why?"

"They don't want me here," Derek says quietly.

Stiles draws himself up. "Did someone say—"

"They don't have to say it," Derek interrupts. "I know how to read people. I know when I'm not welcome."

"That's not true," Stiles protests. "They just don't know you!"

"They don't want to know me," Derek says, gently, like he's afraid of hurting Stiles' feelings. "It's all right, Stiles. It's like your dad. I don't expect them to like me."

"Dad doesn't hate you," Stiles says stubbornly. "He just doesn't know how to control his temper. Look, they just don't know you, seriously. Don't give up. We need to talk to Laura and Scott, remember?"

Derek sighs quietly. Feeling lost, Stiles scoots his chair closer and leans in, nuzzling against Derek's jaw until Derek sighs again and turns, pressing their cheeks together, one of his hands sliding up to grasp the back of Stiles' neck.

"I don't want you to feel uncomfortable," Stiles says quietly. "We can leave."

"No," Derek says. "I'll be fine. I just—I got overwhelmed."

"Sorry," Stiles says. "I didn't want this to be some kind of torture for you."

"I know," Derek says quietly.

They sit in silence for a moment, still so close their foreheads touch. "Hey," Stiles says after a moment. He's not really keen on making this worse, but he needs to know. "What's the deal with you and Ms. Blake?"

Derek stiffens, but he doesn't move away. "I was seeing her," he says, "earlier this winter."

"Dating?" Stiles asks.

"Of course," Derek says sharply. "I wouldn't—" He makes a frustrated noise. "The last time I saw her, we were going to—my heat—but I backed out. I acted like an asshole, and I left."
“Oh,” Stiles says, quieter, looking down at his hands. He knows he’s got no right to get upset; they weren’t together, and they even had that stupid agreement that they wouldn’t wait for each other if they found someone else first. He knows that, but he still feels...weird. Jealous. He knows it’s stupid, and it’s his fault; if he hadn’t been pushing Derek away that whole time, he never would have—

“That was the night I saw you,” Derek says, “after you went off the road, and I—” He pauses for a moment, jaw working before he continues, “I always wanted it to be you.”

Stiles exhales slowly, lets go of his resentment. “I always wanted it to be you, too.”

Derek leans in close and presses a careful kiss to Stiles’ mouth, which Stiles returns with great relief, curling his fingers in Derek’s shirt.

“You guys are super cute,” someone says, and they jerk apart to see Scott standing in the middle of the kitchen, grinning. He’s got his phone out, taking a picture of them. “That one’s going to Allison.”

“Hey, privacy,” Stiles says, his cheeks heating up.

“This is my house, man,” Scott says cheerfully. “You make out in my kitchen, I get blackmail material; that’s the rule.”

“I’m not sure it is,” Stiles says. He looks at Derek speculatively. “Hey, since Scott’s here, do you want to talk to him?”

“Sure,” Derek says, and Stiles gestures at Scott to come join them at the table. “So,” he says, when Scott’s sitting, “we wanted to ask you something.”

“Okay,” Scott says, looking between them. “Is everything all right?”

“Yeah,” Stiles says, grinning. “We want you to be the godfather.”

Scott’s face goes slack in surprise. He looks between them rapidly, mouth open. “Seriously?”

“Seriously,” Stiles confirms.

He’s not expecting the way Scott’s eyes go big and wet, tears spilling down his cheeks when he blinks. “Dude,” he says hoarsely.

“I think you broke him,” Derek says dryly. Stiles kicks him and gets to his feet; Scott meets him halfway around the table, hugging him so hard he nearly lifts Stiles off his feet. Stiles laughs, but his throat’s aching when Scott sets him back down.

“You’re my brother, man,” Stiles tells him, his eyes burning.

“This is the best day of my life,” Scott declares, wiping at his cheeks.

“Is that a yes, then?” Stiles asks, grinning.

“Definitely,” Scott beams. He turns to look at Derek. “Get up, man. I need to hug you too.”

Derek rolls his eyes, but he gets to his feet and allows Scott to hug him.

“Thanks, you guys,” Scott says feelingly. “I promise I’ll take good care of her if you guys die horribly somehow.”

Derek makes an indignant noise, but Stiles just says, “Only if we die horribly?”
Scott grins as Derek says, “Stop encouraging him. Let’s talk to Laura.”

Stiles finger-guns at Scott as Derek pulls him out of the kitchen, though he grows sober as Derek draws Laura from her spot on the couch and into a quiet corner of the room.

“You guys get everything settled?” she asks, crossing her arms over her chest. “You were both giving off major unhappy vibes.”

Stiles and Derek glance at each other. “I think so,” Stiles says, slipping his hand into Derek’s, and Derek surprises him with a smile before turning his gaze back to Laura.

“We’d like you to be the godmother,” he tells her, his voice steady.

Laura smiles. “I’d be honored,” she says softly. “I’m really happy for you two.”

Derek stands a little straighter, looking pleased, and Stiles squeezes his hand, pleased himself.

“Stiles,” Laura says, looking at him intently. “I know the last time we spoke I wasn’t exactly pleasant, and I’m sorry. All I know about you is what Derek and Cora have told me, but I’d like it if you’d come over the house sometime so I can get to know you better. You’re welcome any time.”

“Oh,” Stiles says, a little surprised. He knows Derek mentioned dinner at the Hale house, but he wonders if he’d mentioned it to Laura yet—if this is her idea, or Derek’s. “Thanks.” He hesitates and then, because Laura is the alpha, offers, “Do you want to, uh, feel her?”

Laura’s face lights up. “May I?”

“Yeah,” Stiles nods. “She’s kind of dancing around over here right now.” He pats one side of his stomach and, after a moment’s hesitation, Laura gently places her hand there, a look of concentration on her face.

“Oh,” she says after a moment, tucking her hair behind her ear with her other hand. “She’s lively.”

“Yeah,” Stiles agrees, grinning at Derek. “Sometimes she’ll only calm down when Derek sings to her.”

“Mom’s song?” Laura says, a wicked light glinting in her pale eyes. “Der, you don’t.”

Derek glowers at both of them. “You want her to punch you in the bladder all night instead?”

Laura laughs, her hand still pressed to Stiles’ stomach. “Well, she feels happy, anyway.”

“Can you tell if she’s a werewolf?” Stiles asks with interest.

Laura shakes her head with a smile as she pulls her hand away, straightening. “We won’t know until she’s a couple months old. Only pain or extreme stress can make a baby of our kind shift—and let’s hope that doesn’t happen.” Laura looks at Stiles seriously. “Werewolf or not, she's pack, and so are you. I know that's a weird thing for humans to wrap their heads around, but it doesn't mean you have to come run in the woods with us on full moons—all it means is you've got an extended support system. We'll always be there for you; pack takes care of pack.”

“Oh,” Stiles says quietly. “Um—” He looks at Derek, who's watching him carefully. "Thank you.”

Laura smiles.

Things go better after that; Derek sticks close to Stiles’ side, and everyone seems willing to talk to
him with Stiles standing there. Stiles can feel him relaxing as time passes, his confidence growing with every successful conversation. It occurs to him, watching Derek talk to Kira’s dad, who used to be a history teacher just like Derek wants to be, that Derek’s not really like any alpha-type he’s ever known; he doesn’t really meet any of the alpha stereotypes, and Stiles wonders if that has anything to do with the way he’s a beta werewolf, or if that’s just who he is. Not that Stiles minds; he bucks the omega stereotypes as viciously as he can. Maybe that’s what makes them work together.

“Do you feel better?” Stiles asks later, after the party’s dwindled down to him and Derek and Scott and Scott’s mom. They’re carrying gifts out to Derek’s car, loading them into the back.

Derek doesn’t say anything, but he bumps their shoulders together, the corners of his eyes crinkling up in a faint smile. Stiles leans against the side of the car as Derek heads back in for the last load, and he reappears a moment later with Scott at his side. Stiles watches them pause on the front porch to talk, and Scott does most of the talking, but whatever he says makes Derek look toward Stiles, a speculative look on his face. Stiles scowls at them, wishing he had werewolf hearing. Scott turns his way and grins, waving as Derek steps off the porch.

“What were you guys talking about?” Stiles asks suspiciously, as Derek draws near.

“None of your business,” Derek says loftily, shoving the rest of the gifts in the back of the car and slamming the hatch shut. “Ready to go?”

Stiles nods and waves to Scott, who’s still standing on the porch, and hauls himself into Derek’s car with a grunt. His stomach’s really starting to get in the way of things, noting with half-amusement, half-annoyance at how far he has to stretch out the seat belt in order to click it, although at the same time it’s a nice place to rest his hands. He snorts to himself; so this is what it’s come to, huh? The highlight of being pregnant is he’s got a nice hand rest.

Derek glances over at him when Stiles snorts, his mouth twisting wryly. “What’s so funny?”

“You wouldn’t understand,” Stiles says haughtily. “You’re not pregnant.”

Derek scoffs. “Fine.”

Stiles grins and extends his hand over the center console; Derek takes it without complaint. “Thanks for coming today,” Stiles says. “I’m really glad you came. I know it started out a little rough, but—I think we recovered okay.”

Derek looks over at him briefly, the corners of his mouth curling up. “I’m glad I came too,” he says quietly.

The rest of the drive passes in silence, but it’s not uncomfortable; Stiles has grown accustomed to it, being around Derek so much, and he likes that it’s fine with them, not talking. They don’t break the silence, but they keep hold of each other’s hands, and Stiles rests his other hand on the firm swell of his stomach, feeling their daughter kick around. He feels stupidly happy, content and safe.

Derek pulls the car up in front of Stiles’ house, but neither of them move for a long moment, until Derek squeezes Stiles’ hand before letting go. Stiles exhales slowly, suddenly tired as all the excitement of the day hits him. He rubs his hands over his face, sighing again before unbuckling his seatbelt, and he’s got his hand on the door before he realizes Derek’s still not moving; he’s just sitting in the driver’s seat, watching Stiles.

“What?” Stiles says suspiciously.

“I want to give you something,” Derek says.
“What?” Stiles says again, even more suspiciously. “I already agreed you could take care of the nursery.”

Derek shakes his head a little, reaching into his pocket. “That’s not—what’s the point if you can’t see it whenever you want?” He holds up his hand; between his fingers he holds a key.

Stiles stares at him, his mouth falling open. “Is that—to your place?”

Derek nods, watching him intently. “It’s always unlocked when I’m home,” he says quietly, “but I don’t have to be there if you want to get in. If you want somewhere to study, or sleep—or stay.”

Stiles’ eyes widen. “Stay?” he repeats hoarsely. “You mean, uh—”

Derek seems to realize what he’s thinking, because his own eyes go wide. “No,” he says quickly. “That’s not what I meant—I wouldn’t say no, if you wanted, but…” He eyes Stiles uncertainly now.

“I want that,” Stiles says without thinking, his voice shaking a little. He does, truly; he hasn’t stopped thinking about it since it first occurred to him the other day. The back and forth between his house and Derek’s apartment, Derek sneaking into the house—it’s tiring, and with the baby coming, he just wants life to be a little more simple. Derek’s still holding the key out in front of him and Stiles puts his hand over it and Derek’s fingers.

“Your dad,” Derek says quietly, his eyes searching Stiles’ face intently.

“He’s not going to be happy,” Stiles confirms. “But he’ll understand. I’ll talk to him.” It won’t endear Derek to him, for sure, but he will understand, Stiles thinks. He gets what Derek means to Stiles, even if he’s not happy about it.

Derek lets Stiles take the key from his hand, watching him balance it in his own palm. “Do you want to go on a date?” Derek asks suddenly, and Stiles’ head comes up sharply, a laugh jolting out of him at the shock of it.

“Jesus Christ,” he says. “We never have, have we?” He laughs again, a little dazed. “We’re doing this completely backward.”

Derek frowns a little, defensive. “Is there a right way to do this?”

“Well,” Stiles says sagely, “some might say you should go on a couple dates before moving in together and having a baby, but we’re clearly rule breakers.” He rubs an absent hand over his stomach. Derek’s watching him, waiting for an answer, he thinks. “No,” he says, and Derek’s brow furrows deeper. “Not tonight, anyway. I want a nap.”

“Oh,” Derek says, his shoulder tensing and then relaxing. “Do you want company?”

“Only if said company doesn’t ask me any questions about the baby, my college plans, school—” Stiles pauses, thinking. “In fact, if said company didn’t talk at all, I think that’d be perfect.”

“That can be arranged,” Derek says, finally unbuckling himself. By the time Stiles has gotten his door open and shuffled his body around to get out, Derek’s gotten out of the car and is at his door to help him, carefully pulling him to his feet. He doesn’t let Stiles move immediately though; he leans in close and kisses him carefully, one hand steady under Stiles’ elbow, the other just touching his cheek.

It’s been a long, long, roller coaster of a day, Stiles thinks as Derek pulls back. They begin the slow walk up to the house, Derek’s hand landing on the small of his back and drawing out the aching pain.
he hadn’t even begun to notice, and he thinks about how lucky he is. He’s fucked up a lot of things in the past year, changed his life permanently, but he’s still lucky. He’s got friends and family that love and support him, and he’s got Derek. He didn’t know Derek when they hooked up that first time, and Derek could have turned out to be an asshole, but he’s not. (Well, he is, sometimes, but so is Stiles too, so it probably evens out; at any rate, Derek’s only an asshole about little things, not when it really counts.) He’s really fucking lucky.

Predictably, Stiles’ dad isn’t all that excited about the idea of Stiles moving out. Stiles—probably wisely—carefully broaches the subject the following night, when Derek’s nowhere near the house (as far as Stiles knows, anyway; there’s a slim possibility he’s up on the roof, but Derek’s mostly abandoned that habit at this point). Stiles is tense, ready for another blowout like they’d had a couple weeks prior, that night Derek had come over for dinner, but his dad just puts his hands over his face and Stiles nervously watches him sit there for a good thirty seconds before prodding, “Dad?”

His father sighs and lets his hands drop to the table. “I was waiting for this,” he admits.

Stiles blinks, surprised. “You were?”

His dad nods, looking weary. “I’m not stupid, Stiles. I can see how important he is to you—and I also know he’s been coming here every night you’re not at his place."

“Oh,” Stiles says guiltily. He thought they’d been quiet.

“How—"

“I know people,” his father tells him wryly. “I’ve been doing my job for two decades and I’ve seen the best and worst of humanity, and I know how people work, Stiles. I know my word isn’t going to keep you two apart, and I know it’ll be better for all three of you if you’re not constantly shuffling from place to place.”

Stiles doesn’t know what to say. “I—thanks, Dad,” he says quietly.

His father nods and gets to his feet, clearing their dinner plates from the table. He pauses to press a kiss to the top of Stiles’ head. “I want you both over here at least once a week for dinner, and if he comes over tonight, tell him to use the front door.”

Stiles swallows down a grin. “I can make that happen.”

Scott’s waiting for him at his locker on Monday morning, a pastel gift bag in his hands. Stiles eyes it as he swings his backpack off his shoulder. “You already gave me a gift, man.”

“This isn’t from me,” Scott says, handing him the bag. “Mom found it next to the couch.”

“Oh,” Stiles says, glancing curiously at the tag. “Oh,” he says again. “It’s from Ms. Blake.” He remembers her handing it to him, right before things got really awkward. He must have set it down when he got shuffled into the dining room for birthday cake. He shoves the bag into his locker and
“You want to hear something weird?”

“What?” Scott says, leaning against the bank of lockers.

“Uh.” Stiles glances around the hallway, lowering his voice before he says, “Derek told me he and her dated a couple months ago.”

Scott’s eyes go wide. “He and Ms. Blake?” Stiles nods, and Scott says, “Is that why you were acting weird at the party?”

Stiles nods again, feeling guilty.

“Jeez,” Scott says quietly. He watches Stiles for a moment. “How do you feel about that?”

Stiles shrugs. “Jealous, honestly, but—“ He draws in a deep breath. “But they’re not dating now, obviously, and...I’m moving in with Derek.”

Scott grins. “Seriously?”

Stiles nods, closing his locker. He can feel a similar expression growing on his own face. “It kind of came up after the party, and I talked to Dad last night and—it’s happening.”

“That’s awesome!” Scott says enthusiastically. “Are you excited?”

“Yeah,” Stiles says, his grin widening. “I mean, it’s kind of weird, but it was going to happen soon enough for college anyway, right?”

“Moving into a dorm is not the same as moving in with your boyfriend,” Scott says cheerfully, as they filter into math class.

“True,” Stiles says. “I’m not, like, leaping into it right away though. I’m just going to take some clothes over tonight—I don’t want to have a ton of stuff over there in case it doesn’t work out and I want to get out of there?”

“That’s going to be hard when you have a baby over there,” Scott points out with a grin.

“Yeah, but—” Stiles cuts himself off at the dark look their math teacher throws in their direction. This isn’t over, Scott mouths, and follows it up with a blinding grin. Stiles snorts to himself as he pulls out his textbook.

Class that afternoon with Ms. Blake is kind of awkward; she seems distracted, even when she’s announcing that they’ll be taking a practice AP exam on Wednesday, and if they all get above a 2, they’ll have a pizza party on Friday. She won’t really look at Stiles, and he feels kind of bad. What if she’d really liked Derek? He knows there’s nothing he can do about it now, but he still feels guilty.

The day improves when he goes over to Derek’s—carrying with him a big dufflebag full of his things—to find Derek’s cleared out the former office space and is getting it ready for painting. They argue about what the color should be over Indian takeout and then Stiles blows Derek on the couch, his whole body humming in excitement. The baby seems to pick up on it because she’s all over the place that night, and doesn’t simmer down even when Derek sings his werewolf lullaby.

It’s kind of a weird week. Stiles can feel the days before he gives birth sliding away—according to his app, she’s as big as a stalk of Swiss chard—and he gets false contractions a couple times more—once, awkwardly, in the middle of history class, and Scott has to ferry him upstairs to the nurse’s
office to ride it out. It feels weird not to go home after school, or at all, though he and Derek go home for the promised bi-weekly dinner with his dad and it’s surprisingly not awful.

Derek paints the nursery in the evenings; they’ve agreed on a soft grass green, and Stiles rolls his eyes when Derek refuses to let him help paint because of the fumes, though it’s not like it’d be a good idea for him to be up on a ladder anyway, and he can’t exactly crouch down to do the trim. It’s finished by Thursday, and as they lay in bed that night—in *their* bed, Stiles thinks smugly—Derek says, “I want to take you out this weekend and get the stuff for the nursery.”


“It’s your birthday on Sunday,” Derek says quietly, hooking his chin over Stiles’ shoulder. “I thought—maybe we could go to Sacramento and get a hotel room.”

Stiles shifts around to look at him. “Really?”

“Sure,” Derek says, dragging his nose along Stiles’ shoulder. “Get some time to ourselves.”

Stiles gestures around at the quiet apartment. “What do you call all this?”

“You know what I mean,” Derek says, biting lightly at Stiles’ shoulder—a warning. “Away from here. It might be a while before we can go on vacation again after the baby comes.”

Stiles snorts. “I don’t know that I’d call Sacramento a vacation destination, but all right.”

Friday ends with the promised pizza party from Ms. Blake. She’s proud of them all for doing so well, and it’s catching; everyone’s in a good mood, eating pizza and drinking soda. Things are still weird between Stiles and Ms. Blake, though, so he waits at the final bell, packing his bag slowly so that by the time he’s done, he and Ms. Blake are the only ones left in the classroom.

Scott’s the last one out the door and he looks at Ms. Blake significantly, raising his eyebrows, and Stiles nods in confirmation.

He swings his backpack over his shoulders and walks up the row of desks to where Ms. Blake’s cleaning up empty pizza boxes. “Hi,” he says uncertainly.

“Hi, Stiles,” Ms. Blake says briskly, not looking up at him. “Can I help you with something?”

“Uh,” Stiles says awkwardly. “Um—I’m sorry. About Derek. I didn’t know that you guys had a history. I wouldn’t have—I just don’t want things to be weird.”

“What’s weird, Stiles?” Ms. Blake asks, her voice light. “That you’re my student and I dated your boyfriend? Or that he was fine with fucking a seventeen-year-old?”

Stiles’ head jerks up when she swears, his eyes widening. “Ms.—”

“I should have guessed, I suppose,” Ms. Blake says, still in a light, fake-cheerful voice. She moves around her desk and Stiles takes a step backward. “A pregnant omega who said he wasn’t with his alpha, and an alpha who said it wasn’t planned. I should have put two and two together—but I’m an English teacher, not a math teacher, right?”

Stiles scrambles backward at the way she advances on him, fear rising in him at the manic light in her eyes. “Ms. Blake, you’re—”
“It would have been so much easier if you two had stayed apart,” she says, tone shifting, going patronizing. “A little more persuading, and you would have put that baby up for adoption, and no one would have been hurt. But I knew, the moment you two got back together, you’d never give her up so now—now I have to take her.”

Stiles’ eyes go wide when what she’s saying hits him and he knows; the surrogate she’d been talking about for so long—that was him.

“No,” he mumbles, fingers scrabbling for his phone. They don’t seem to want to work; he feels lightheaded, the room darkening around the edges. The last thing he sees, as his knees crumple under him and he hits the tile floor hard, is Ms. Blake reaching for him, her eyes glowing an unearthly blank silver.
On Friday morning, Derek lets himself sleep in, only vaguely noticing when Stiles gets up and gets ready for school, sleepily submitting to a kiss on the cheek before turning onto his stomach and shoving his face into his pillows and going back to sleep. He’s got class at noon, which he finally drags himself out of bed for, taking a hot shower with a faint smile curving his lips.

He’s never felt so content in his life; he’s finally got Stiles, and things are going well. It’s a matter of days before the baby arrives, and they’re getting the nursery in order, and Derek’s a little scared, but he’s excited, too. He’s met Stiles’ friends and family, and the baby shower might have started off a little rocky, and he’s not particularly keen on ever repeating it, but it ended all right, and dinner with Stiles’ dad the other night went a lot better than the first time. Tonight, when Stiles gets back from school, they’ll head down to Sacramento and enjoy themselves. Things are falling into place.

When Derek gets out of class, he’s got a text from Laura; she wants him to meet her at Deaton’s office. Apparently they’ve been talking about the sacrifices out in the woods, and Deaton’s got some theories he wants to go over. It’s the last thing Derek wants to think about, but he’s Laura’s second, and it’s important he’s there.

Alan Deaton was the druid advisor to their mother—emissary’s the proper term for it, though Deaton’s been with their family so long he’s more like just that—family. He sheltered them after the fire, helped Laura get the foundation running. They don’t see much of him these days, but he’s always available for dispensing advice, even if it comes in his somewhat vague manner.

He’s also a veterinarian, and the outside of his clinic’s completely innocuous apart from the five-fold knot over the front door that certifies him as a registered druid. The mark flares gold as Derek steps through the doorway, recognizing him as a supernatural ally and letting him through.

Laura already inside, leaning against the examining room table. She looks tired and Derek feels guilty; he knows all these murders have been stressing her out, but he’s been letting Stiles and the baby monopolize his time. She gives him a small smile as he comes into the examination room and leans up against the wall. Deaton’s standing next to her, flipping through a sheaf of papers.

“Your sister brought me these,” Deaton says to Derek, not looking up, and Derek raises his eyebrows at Laura.

“Information from the sheriff,” she tells him. “That’s all they’d give me. They wouldn’t have given me anything if it wasn’t on our land.”

“And because you’re the alpha?” Derek asks. She nods.

“Whoever did this is definitely a druid,” Deaton says thoughtfully. “The timeline of these crimes—only a druid could move so quickly.”

“But you know all the druids in town,” Laura says. “Would any of them do this? Why?”

Deaton shakes his head a little. “This is about power,” he says. “These sets of sacrifices—both groups of individuals share themes among them. This first group, they were all healers—a doctor from the hospital, a pharmacist, and an acupuncturist.”

Laura leans in to look at the papers in his hands, frowning. “The second?”

“Teachers,” Deaton says. “A piano instructor, a teacher from the elementary school, and a college
“What’s it mean?” Laura asks. “What’s the purpose?”

Deaton shakes his head again. “I don’t know,” he says, “but these things always come in threes. There will be one more group of sacrifices—you can count on it.”

“Who will it be?” Laura says sharply. “Is there any way to find out? How can we track this person down?”

Deaton shrugs, looking a little helpless. “I’m not sure there is a way to find out.”

Derek, still leaning against the wall, clenches his teeth against the unease rising in his gut. He looks at Laura, at the frustration on her face, angry she can’t protect the land that’s been their family’s territory for decades. He looks at his phone; there’s nothing from Stiles, which makes sense—he would have only just gotten out of school, and he’s got a key to the apartment. There’s no reason for there to be a message, but Derek needs to hear from him, needs to know he’s all right.

Laura runs a hand through her hair, heaving a frustrated sigh. “What could it be?” she asks the room at large. Derek and Deaton don’t have an answer for her, but there’s no time to give one anyway; both Laura and Derek lift their heads at the sound of a commotion outside, and then it’s inside, a flurry of voices and motion coming through the front door. Derek peers around the doorway, his mouth dropping open when he sees Scott and Lydia and the girl Scott’s been dating—Kira, he thinks her name is—shuffling inside, supporting Cora between them. Cora seems to be unconscious, something dark smeared down her chin.

“Cora!” Laura exclaims, horrified, shoving past Derek. “What happened?”

Lydia’s got tear tracks dying on her cheeks, but her voice is steady when she says, “We were walking out of school when she collapsed. She—she said you guys would be here.”

“Bring her in here,” Deaton says sharply, and Laura shoulders Kira and Lydia aside, supporting Cora’s arms while Scott keeps hold of her feet. They bring her into the examination room and carefully lift her onto the table. Derek moves up next to Laura, his heart pounding anxiously in his chest.

Laura presses a hand to Cora’s cheek and pulls at her pain; she moans softly. “She’s hurting,” Laura says, her voice shaking.

Derek leans into her side and puts his hand on Cora’s other cheek, taking a tentative pull of pain; his knees almost buckle at the vast sea of hurt that unfurls before him. He has to jerk his hand away, breathing heavily. “What’s wrong with her?”

“No obvious injuries,” says Deaton, who’s been examining Cora’s limbs. He pulls out a penlight and shines it at Cora’s eyes, then carefully pries her mouth open.

“Tainted blood. She’s been poisoned,” Deaton replies, shining his penlight into her mouth. “Ah. Tweezers, please, Scott.”

Scott spins and grabs the tweezers from a drawer without even looking, and Derek has a vague memory of Stiles telling him that Scott worked at an animal clinic. Scott hands the tweezers to Deaton, who leans in and carefully fishes something out from under Cora’s tongue. It looks like a
small white bead.

“Mistletoe?” Laura says sharply. “Who could have done this?”

Deaton looks at the berry, his face grim. “Possibly the druid we’re looking for.”

“This—Cora’s a sacrifice?” Derek says sharply. On Laura’s other side, Lydia inhales harshly, and Laura winds her free arm around Lydia’s shoulders, drawing her in close. Scott and Kira press in tight at the other end of the table, twin expressions of worry on their face.

“Possibly,” Deaton says, frowning. “It’s important we retrace her steps. What was she doing just before this happened?”

“We were at school,” Kira offers uncertainly. “We had a pizza party in Ms. Blake’s class.”

“Ms. Blake?” Laura repeats, sounding confused, at the same time Derek says, “Jennifer?” Laura looks at him sharply. “You know her?”

Derek nods slowly, unease growing in the pit of his stomach. “We went out a couple times. She—” He cuts himself off, alarm bells going off in his head. “Where’s Stiles?”

Scott blinks, looking confused. “He’s in our class too. When I saw him, he looked like he was hanging back, like—” Scott’s words slow as realization creeps into his voice. “—Like he was going to talk to her.”

Derek snarls out a curse, frantically fishing his phone out of his pocket. He hits Stiles’ number and presses the phone to his ear, but it rings and rings and rings before going to voicemail. He swears again and tries two more times; both times, it goes to voicemail. “Fuck!”

“He’s not—” Scott’s face goes pale. “A sacrifice too?”

Derek makes a wounded noise, looking over at Laura desperately. She stares back at him, a helpless look on her face. “Why?” she says softly. “What’s the pattern? Why Stiles and Cora?”

“Innocents,” Deaton says abruptly.

Scott makes a strangled noise, half horrified, half amused. “Stiles isn’t an innocent!”

“Neither is Cora,” Lydia says hoarsely.

Deaton shakes his head. “Maybe not by the strictest definition, but they’re both still children, legally.”

“Who’s the third sacrifice, then?” Laura asks.

Deaton hesitates before he says, “My guess would be...the baby.”

Derek feels like the world’s falling away beneath his feet. Everyone in the room looks at him, horror on their faces, but he keeps his eyes on Cora’s slack face and the black blood pooling in the corners of her mouth. His heartbeat’s thundering in his ears, so loud he doesn’t hear Laura talking to him until she puts her hand to his arm and he jumps, startled.

“Why?” he asks hoarsely.

“A newborn child’s just about the purest life possible,” Deaton tells him softly. “The power boost from a sacrifice like that would be immense.”
Derek whines, his fingernails growing into claws against his will. It’s all starting to fall into place. She said—“Fuck,” he whimpers, digging his claws into the metal table. “She said she was having a baby. She said a surrogate was carrying it. I could tell she wasn’t telling the whole truth”—He breaks off, breathing hard. Laura squeezes the back of his neck, her expression grim.

“We have to find them,” Scott says firmly. “If Cora’s still alive, then they might be too.”

“Is there any way you can find her?” Laura asks Deaton urgently. “We might be able to track her from the high school, but that could take hours.”

Deaton looks up at the ceiling for a long moment, his brow creasing. “I’d need something that belongs to her,” he says.

Everyone slumps, defeated, until Kira brightens and slings off her backpack. “Would this work?” she asks, fishing out a stapled bundle of papers. “It’s the practice exam we did this week. She wrote notes on it.”

“That may work indeed,” Deaton says. “Just a moment.” He leaves the table and disappears into the back, reappearing a moment later with a scroll of paper in one hand and a length of fine metal chain in the other. The scroll goes on the table and unrolls into a map of Beacon Hills, and the chain turns out to be a pendulum. Deaton places Kira’s exam on top of the map and then holds the pendulum over all of it, swinging the pendulum in a gentle circle that slowly grows wider and wider until suddenly it stops, hanging from Deaton’s hand at an unnaturally sharp angle.

“Beacon Hills Preserve,” Scott says, leaning in to read the map. “Past the reservoir.”

Laura frowns. “There’s nothing out there. Except—oh.”

“What?” Derek asks sharply. He’s itching to leave, needs Stiles safe. “What’s out there?”

“There’s a root cellar,” Laura says thoughtfully.

“That’s got to be it,” Derek says.

He moves to leave, and Scott says, “I’m coming too. He’s my best friend,” he argues defensively, when Derek narrows his eyes at him. Derek jerks his head toward Laura, who hesitates.

“Cora,” she says, and they all watch her draw pain from Cora until she’s gasping. Under her, Cora coughs, more black blood spilling down her chin.

“Laura,” Derek says uneasily. “If you draw too much—”

“I’m not going to die, baby brother,” Laura says. “And neither is she. But I have to stay here.”

“I’ll help with Cora,” Deaton says firmly, and Lydia nods her agreement. Kira looks between Scott and Cora, conflicted, until deciding, “I’ll stay too.”

“Fine,” Derek says impatiently. “Let’s go.”

“Be safe,” Laura says softly. Derek nods, and then he’s out of there, racing for his car with Scott on his heels.

The minute they’re on the road, Derek says, “Call the sheriff.”

Scott goes pale. “But—”
“Do it!” Derek snaps. “If Stiles is—” He cuts himself off, unable to say hurt, can’t even think about saying dead. Scott gets it, though; as Derek goes speeding through town, he calls the sheriff, his voice shaking when he tells the man his son’s missing. He doesn’t say he might be dead, or that the baby might be dead, but they all feel it looming over them. Derek can hear how steady the sheriff’s voice is when he says he’s mobilizing all his units and wonders how the fuck he can be like that. Derek wants to howl, wants to dig his claws into something soft and rend at it until there’s no life left in it. If that thing’s Jennifer Blake, well—all the better.

He drives up into the preserve as far as he can, heading along all the paths than only he and his sisters know, going way too fast—Scott’s holding on to the ceiling grip, gritting his teeth against the intense rattling as Derek barrels down forest trails barely wide enough for the car. A fallen tree means they can go no further; they abandon the car and run through the woods on foot, skirting the edge of the reservoir, speeding through the undergrowth. Scott lets Derek lead, though Derek’s got little idea about where he’s going. He can remember the root cellar; once Laura mentioned it, he could recall finding it as a kid, exploring its dark depths with Peter.

It’s Scott who spots it, a dark square of empty air in the ground off to their right, the door flung open to one side. They slow, approaching cautiously, and Derek bites back a noise of relief when he hears the sound of three heartbeats coming from the cellar, one dim and so much faster than the other two that he knows it’s the sound of the baby. Otherwise, there’s no noise, and he and Scott pause a couple yards from the entrance, glancing at each other uncertainly.

Suddenly, Jennifer’s voice comes floating up from the cellar, warm and inviting. “Come down here, Derek. I’d love to chat with you.”

Derek snarls furiously and throws himself down the stairs. Scott grabs at him, but misses, and Derek barrels down into the darkness, shifting as he goes. Jenn’s standing near the bottom of the stairs, and he doesn’t think she’s expecting him to come down so violently; she’s got a moment to look startled before Derek’s got a hand around her throat. He can see Stiles in the darkness of the cellar behind her, nestled between the roots of a dead tree. Fear shudders down his spine at the way Stiles’ form is so limp, the sound of his heartbeat only vaguely reassuring.

"Stiles!” Scott shouts, skidding down the stairs. He throws himself in Stiles’ direction, only to be repelled just feet away by a bright flash of light that sends him flying backward.

“Mountain ash,” Derek snarls. He shakes Jenn, lifting her off her feet. “Let him go!”

“Let me go,” she retorts hoarsely, hands clawing at his wrists, feet kicking ineffectively at his shins. “Let me go, or I’ll kill your sister too. Her fate’s in my hands.”

Derek hesitates at that, long enough that she’s able to twist out of his grip and go stumbling backward. He grabs at her, but his hand meets an invisible wall of resistance that sparks bright blue where he strikes it. Derek snarls, his eyes going desperately to Stiles, who hasn’t moved. Scott’s back on his feet by now, his eyes glowing bright yellow in the dim light of the root cellar.

“Let him go,” Derek says. “Jenn, please—”

Jennifer laughs harshly. “No amount of sweet-talking’s going to get him back, Derek. You had your choice. I was working him around—he would have given the baby to me himself if you hadn’t shoved your way back into his life. You and I would have been together, and he would have given me the baby, and you would have had your daughter, Derek, for a little while.”

Derek freezes. “A little while?”
Jenn laughs again, sweeter this time. “A little while,” she agrees. “Teachers, doctors, innocents—there are so many possible categories, and our little family would have made a perfect sacrifice.”

Derek stares at her. “You’d sacrifice yourself?”

“Oh, yes,” Jennifer smiles. “There’s great power in rebirth, you know? Of course, this power will be good enough.” She turns toward Stiles with a shrug, and Derek shifts forward, but there’s nothing he can do with this barrier in his way. He can’t touch it, and neither can Scott, and there’s no time.

“Do something!” Scott yells at Derek. Derek shakes his head, his mouth dry, body shaking as he watches Jenn. She’s pulled a knife from somewhere and there’s nothing, nothing he can do. Scott roars furiously, pressing his hands to the barrier, which pulses blue around him.

Jenn pauses to glance at them, and she laughs. “Nice try, sweetheart,” she says. “You’ll kill yourself trying to break it.”

It certainly looks like it; Scott’s got his feet braced against the floor, leaning against the air with all his might, teeth clenched and hair blowing in an invisible wind. Derek can feel the energy coming from the barrier, buzzing against his skin, growing in intensity. Scott shifts his stance, mouth opening in a snarl, and Derek’s mouth drops open as red bleeds into Scott’s eyes, slowly blocking out all the gold. The light around him pulses—and then snaps like a rubber band, all the energy in the room slamming outward. Jennifer’s caught in the wave; she’s thrown backward against the cellar wall, her head meeting the brick with a crack.

Derek stares at Scott, who’s looking at his hands like he’s never seen them before, and then scrambles past him, ducking down between the roots of the tree. Stiles is cold and unresisting, his body unfolding when Derek tugs him out from between the roots.

“Is he okay?” Scott whispers, crouching down next to them.

“I don’t know,” Derek says quietly, pressing his palm to Stiles’ cold cheek. He seems to be unconscious, but when Derek tries pulling at his pain, he’s relieved to find there’s nothing to grab, and his and the baby’s heartbeats are strong. “We need to get out of here.”

Scott nods, but hesitates. “What about her?” he asks, nodding toward Jennifer, who’s crumpled at the base of the wall.

Derek glances over at her with a scowl. She’s still alive—he can hear her heart beating—but if he never sees her again, it’ll be too soon. He knows, though, that they can’t leave her here. What if she wakes up and comes back to cause more trouble?

“Can you carry her?” he asks, scooping Stiles up into his arms. “The sheriff’s going to want to take her in.”

Scott nods again and gets to his feet, gathering Jennifer and throwing her over his shoulder. He and Derek leave the cellar, moving with no less urgency than before. The entire ordeal took just a few minutes, but Derek feels like it’s been hours. He’s starting to get shaky as the adrenaline leaves him, and he presses his nose to Stiles’ temple for comfort, inhaling his scent.

“Was she really going to kill him?” Scott asks as they trot through the woods. Derek’s heading for the reservoir; most of the access roads end up there, so that’s likely where the sheriff’s going to be.

“Yes,” Derek says stiffly. There’s no doubt in his mind. Jennifer would have killed Stiles and the baby without even blinking. His stomach turns when he thinks of the dates they went on.
“How’d I break that barrier?” Scott asks. “Dr. Deaton told me about mountain ash. It’s supposed to be unbreakable.”

“I don’t know,” Derek says sharply. He hesitates, and then says, “Your eyes were red.”

Scott’s eyes—an innocuous brown at the moment—go wide. “What?” he breathes. “Like an alpha?” He looks like he’s concentrating, and then his eyes flash red at Derek, who bares his teeth instinctually. Scott nearly trips over a branch. “It’s still happening?”

Derek draws in a deep breath, but welcomes the distraction so he doesn’t have to think about how Stiles’ dead weight in his arms just feels dead, or how Cora might be dying too. “It’s just something my mom mentioned once,” he says. “Some betas can become alphas without killing another alpha for the power. They’re called true alphas.”

“Whoa,” Scott says reverently.

Derek’s head whips around when he hears someone call through the woods and below that, fainter, is the sound of engines. “This way,” he says, taking off in that direction. It’s not long before they can see flashing lights through the trees, and when they come crashing through the treeline at the edge of the reservoir, a crowd of deputies train their guns on them. Derek skids to a halt, but Scott keeps going, yelling, “Sheriff!”

Stiles’ father comes pushing through the group of deputies, and his face goes pale when he sees Stiles in Derek’s arms. “Stiles,” he says, in the same voice Laura used in the hospital when she came to tell Derek their parents were dead.

“He’s alive,” Derek says, but his throat gets so tight after that it’s all he can say.

While the deputies swarm around Scott, handcuffing Jennifer and bearing her toward a waiting ambulance, the sheriff staggers up to Derek, and his hand’s shaking when he reaches out to touch Stiles’ arm.

“He’s cold,” he says quietly, sounding stunned and looking centuries old. He swallows tightly and says, “He—we better get him to the hospital.”

Derek nods stiffly and follows the sheriff to another ambulance, where the EMT’s help Derek load Stiles into the back, and then he, the sheriff, and Scott, cram themselves in as well, silent as one of the paramedics checks Stiles’ vitals. Derek sits with his hand on Stiles’ arm, slumped forward with his elbows on his knees, head hanging. It’s still light out—that’s the strangest part to him. This is the sort of thing that happens in the dead of night, when no one else can see, but instead it’s just late afternoon, the sky a warm overcast gray. It feels like some sort of very elaborate prank.

After a long moment, the sheriff shifts, reaching over and squeezing the back of Derek’s neck, but otherwise no one moves except the paramedic, who deftly slips an oxygen mask onto Stiles’ face. Derek squeezes his eyes shut and concentrates on the sound of Stiles’ heartbeat. He tries to clear his head, tries not to think about Stiles, or the baby, or Cora. The sound of the sirens hurts his ears.

They’re nearly to the hospital, the ambulance slowing as it navigates the more heavily trafficked streets nearby, when something rends inside Derek’s chest, a visceral, gutting feeling like his heart’s being ripped in two. Derek whines, clutching at his chest in hurt and confusion, and a moment later the hurt’s followed by a mournful howling he can feel right down to his bones.

Scott sits up ramrod straight, his eyes going wide. “What was that?”

“What was what?” the sheriff asks with a frown, not hearing anything with his human ears.
But Derek’s already on his feet, fangs and claws popping as he panics, scrambling over everyone to get to the back of the ambulance, smashing the doors open. It doesn’t matter that the ambulance is still moving; Derek hits the ground running as behind him Scott and the sheriff both yell at him to come back. Derek doesn’t stop, the pain in his chest rising in a terrifying crescendo. *He can’t feel his pack.*

When Derek was fifteen, he lost almost his entire family in a house fire two days before Christmas, two days before his sixteenth birthday. His room was in the peaked attic space; he and Peter had shared it when they were younger, and then Derek had it all to himself after Peter moved to the penthouse. He’d fallen asleep playing video games and woke to the sound of the smoke detectors going off, but it’d been too late to save his family. He’d heard, afterward, that once a house fire starts, the people inside have two minutes to get out, but he spent more than that trying to get downstairs—to save *someone.*

Afterward, the sheriff told him that no one had suffered; they’d all died in their sleep of smoke inhalation before the fire had gotten to them, and Derek knows that’s true. He’d heard no screaming or crying apart from his own, just the overwhelming roar of the flames. He’d made it out the front door, collapsed on the front lawn, and woke up in the hospital three days later. He spent four painful weeks there, slow to recover, and Laura and Cora spent every moment there with him, all three of them crammed into one small hospital bed. Laura had been away at college, and Cora had been at a friend’s house, but the rest of their pack was gone, leaving behind a hollow, aching spot in Derek’s chest where they should have been.

He feels it now, his feet pounding the pavement, and he’s terrified. He can’t lose his pack again, he *can’t.*

Derek heads straight for the animal clinic, and Lydia meets him at the door, her face fresh with wet tears. Derek can’t look at her; he shoves past her, heading straight for the back of the clinic. The examining room’s empty except for Kira, who keeps out of his way, and Derek barges past her into the back, through a room full of animals in cages that hiss and snarl as he passes, and into a storeroom stacked with medical supplies and bags of dry food, where Deaton’s kneeling between Laura and Cora, both of them lying on the floor with their eyes shut.

“Easy,” Deaton says to Derek. “They’re both fine.”

Derek stares at him, unable to comprehend how he could say that when he feels like his heart’s just been ripped out of him.

“Alive,” Deaton says calmly. “Healthy, even.”

“Then what—” Derek rubs a hand over his chest, his heart pounding furiously under his palm.

“Cora took a turn for the worse,” Deaton tells Derek, his tone even. “Laura made the decision to give up her alpha powers to save Cora.”

“She did?” Derek says hoarsely. “Can I—”

Deaton nods and steps hoarsely. “Can I—”

Deaton nods and steps aside so Derek can drop to his knees between his sisters, his eyes burning. If it’s true, if Laura’s really no longer an alpha, that means they’re omegas. Packless.

Cora stirs, her eyes opening, and for a moment she smiles sleepily at Derek like she’s just come out of a pleasant dream. Derek sees it hit her, the loss he feels echoed on her face, and within moments she’s scrambling upright, pressing up against his side, bewildered tears slipping down her cheeks. Laura wakes up not long after, and she turns her face against Derek’s thighs and cries, her whole
body shaking. Deaton watches them from the doorway, his face creased with weariness, but he says nothing. What is there to say?

Lydia drives them home eventually, the three of them huddled together in the back seat, and when they’re back at the house they slink upstairs and collapse into Laura’s big bed.

“We’ll be okay,” Laura murmurs, but they can all hear the hurt in her; they can all feel it, an empty pit in their chests. She pets her hand through Derek’s hair and says, “Derek, where’s Stiles?”

Derek jolts, more guilt pouring through him. He’d forgotten. “Hospital,” he whispers against the lump in his throat. “I don’t—I don’t know if he’s okay.”

“Go to him,” Laura says gently.

Derek lifts his head. “But you—”

“We’ll be fine,” Laura says, looking at Cora, who nods. “Neither of us are hurt.”

“But you’re not—”

“Derek,” Laura says firmly. “He’s still pack. We’re all still pack, whether I’m alpha or not. Go make sure he and the baby are okay.”

Derek nods, numbly pulling himself from their tangle of limbs and staggering downstairs. He’s outside before he realizes that there’s no car for him to take—Cora’s is at the high school, Laura’s is back at the clinic, and his is off in the woods somewhere. Derek sighs and trots off down the road, resigning himself to a long run to the hospital.

He’s surprised to find a sheriff’s deputy just pulling onto their road, and he slows to a walk as the deputy rolls his window down to ask, “Derek Hale?”

“Yes,” Derek says guardedly.

“The sheriff asked me to find you,” the deputy says. “I checked at the animal hospital but Dr. Deaton said you’d gone home. Are you headed to the hospital?”

Derek nods.

“Get in, then,” the deputy says, jerking his thumb toward the passenger’s side. “I’ll give you a ride.”

Derek hesitates, but his general distrust of the sheriff’s department is overridden by the need to see Stiles; now that his center of attention has been flipped from Laura to Stiles, his hands are starting to shake again, worry overwhelming him. “Do you know,” he tries, slipping into the passenger’s seat. “Is he—”

The deputy—Parrish, according to the nametag on his chest—gives Derek a reassuring smile as he whips the car into reverse, doing a rough turnabout that rips up the dirt road beneath the tires. “I don’t know,” he says, heading off down the road—no lights, but going a lot faster than the speed limit. “Sheriff said he’s not critical, though.”

Derek nods tightly, his eyes on the road in front of them. They reach the hospital in a quarter of the time it would have taken Derek to run there, and the deputy gets out of the car to lead Derek through the hospital to a room where the sheriff’s standing by the door, talking with a doctor. He looks up when the deputy leads Derek in, his expression sharpening, but he doesn’t break from his conversation with the doctor, instead jerking his head toward the door. Derek glances at the deputy,
but Parrish is watching the sheriff, one hand on his utility belt. Derek steps around them, quietly opening the door and slipping into the room.

It’s small inside, quiet. Stiles lay in a bed, body still, eyes closed, oxygen hooked to his nose, some sort of drip attached to the back of his hand. He looks tiny and frail in the bed, and Derek’s stomach twists with anxiety.

“He’s going to be okay, they think,” someone says. Derek blinks, and realizes Scott’s sitting next to Stiles’ bedside, clutching his hand. Scott frowns at him. “Where’d you go?”

Derek exhales roughly. “Family emergency,” he mutters. “Laura’s—she’s not an alpha anymore.”

Scott’s eyes widen. “Are you—is everyone okay? Did Cora—”

“She’s fine,” Derek says stiffly. He doesn’t want to talk about this right now; he hasn’t even had time to process it.

Scott seems to pick up on this because he gets to his feet and says, “I’m going to grab a soda—you want anything?”

Derek shakes his head, grateful when Scott just nods and leaves the room. He settles into the chair Scott just vacated, and hesitates for a moment before he touches Stiles’ hand. He’s not sure what he expected, but Stiles’ hand is warm, at least—in the root cellar he’d been ice cold. Derek exhales quietly, curling his fingers around Stiles’ hand and tentatively reaching out with his other to touch Stiles’ stomach. The baby kicks strongly against his hand and he exhales again.

Derek’s alone for a long time—much longer than it would take to grab a soda from the vending machine—but he doesn’t listen to the hustle and bustle going on outside the room. He wishes someone would come by and tell him what’s going on, explain why Stiles isn’t awake, but when the door does open, Derek tries not to wince when he sees it’s the sheriff.

“Relax,” the sheriff says quietly. “I’m not here to pin this on you. You and Scott saved his life.”

Derek nods uneasily, watching from the corner of his eye as the sheriff settles down in a chair across from him. The man watches his son for a long moment, his face drawn and unhappy. It’s the first time since that first awful dinner at the Stilinski house that Derek’s been alone with the sheriff—more or less—and he feels like he should say something—apologize again, maybe, for messing all their lives up—but he’s not brave enough right now, not with everything that’s happened today. Instead he cautiously asks, “Did you talk to the doctor?”

The sheriff nods slowly, his eyes still on Stiles. “Blake drugged him—probably at the school, at the same time she drugged your sister, from what Scott’s told me. She clearly wasn’t concerned about him ever waking up again, so she was pretty heavy-handed with the dosage, but the doctor ran a blood test and says that based on what he was given, he should wake up in about twelve hours—a day, at most.”

“So, he’s okay?” Derek asks quietly.

“He’ll be okay,” the sheriff confirms. “And they did an ultrasound; the baby’s fine too.”

“I know,” Derek says, trying to smile and failing. “She kicked me when I touched him.”

The sheriff smiles wryly. “She’s going to be a handful.”

Derek grits his teeth against the ache in his throat, and the scared little voice at the back of his mind
that says he could have lost both of them today—could have lost Cora and Laura too. “We were
going to go to Sacramento and get furniture for the nursery this weekend,” he says grimly. He
exhales harshly and then he says, “I know you hate me, but—”

The sheriff interrupts him with a sigh. “I don’t hate you, Derek. I was angry, and maybe I still am,
but I’m proud of both of you. Honestly,” he adds at Derek’s startled look. “You’re both in school
and you’ve kept your grades up, and Stiles told me about the Christmas money. You could have
given up on him at any time—you could have avoided this life with him altogether—but you didn’t.
You both stepped up. I’m glad Stiles has you.”

Derek looks down at his hands, cheeks going a little pink. It’s high praise coming from the man who
just weeks ago was yelling at him for fucking up Stiles’ life. “Thank you,” he says quietly.

The sheriff nods, scrubbing a weary hand over his face. “I’ve got to get back to the station and start
taking care of this mess,” he says. “You should go home and get some rest—he’s not going to be
awake for a while yet.”

“No,” Derek says, his throat tightening again. He looks up at the sheriff, pleading. “Can’t I stay? I
heard—I heard omegas heal faster if their alpha’s nearby.” Especially pregnant omegas; he’s sure he
read that in one of Stiles’ pregnancy books.

“He’s not hurt, Derek,” the sheriff says, but all he follows it up with is, “I’ll check back in later.
You’ll need to give a statement, so I’ll have one of the deputies stop by. All right?” Derek nods, and
the sheriff gives Stiles one last, tired look before he heads out the door.

It’s quiet after that, the hospital softly humming outside the room. Laura calls after a while, checking
in, reassuring Derek that she and Cora are still fine. Derek tells her everything that’s happened that
afternoon, and when he’s finished he pauses before he says, “This is what you were worried about,
isn’t it? That bad feeling you had?”

“I think so,” Laura says quietly. “I just never—this isn’t what I expected.”

“You couldn’t have known,” Derek says, his hand tightening around Stiles’ limp fingers.

“I know,” Laura says. “But if I’d known he and the baby would be in danger—”

“You couldn’t have known,” Derek repeats more forcefully. “And even if you had—he was at
school. He was supposed to be safe. So was Cora.” Laura sighs and he gentles his tone. “He’s safe
now. Even if you’re not—” He can’t make himself say the word alpha, but Laura will get it. “—
we’re all safe, Laura.”

He can tell she’s not satisfied with that—she may never be—but eventually they hang up and
Derek’s alone again, sitting silently by Stiles’ side, watching his chest steadily rise and fall. He turns
on the television in the room for something to break the silence, and dozes through several
M*A*S*H episodes, waking the couple of times a nurse and a doctor come in to check on Stiles.
They don’t say much to Derek, though they seem pleased with whatever state Stiles is in.

Scott comes back eventually, soda-less. “Mom made me go home and shower,” he says moodily,
thunking down in the chair opposite Derek, who notes that he does smell clean. “Then I had to go
give a statement at the station—did someone come talk to you yet?” Derek shakes his head and Scott
sighs. “How’s he doing?”

“The same,” Derek says cautiously, and Scott nods, looking a little sad. Derek’s not sure what else to
say to him. “He’s going to be okay,” he tries, and Scott nods again.
“Yeah, he’s tough,” Scott says. “He fell out a tree in ninth grade and broke his arm, and he didn’t even cry when they set the bone.”

“Stiles said you fell down the stairs at school so he could steal a pregnancy test,” Derek points out.

Scott grins. “Yeah, but I’m a werewolf. I heal fast; he doesn’t. He’s tough.”

Stiles is tough, Derek thinks, watching Stiles’ chest rise and fall. He was absolutely determined to do the whole baby thing on his own, and even when he came to Derek’s apartment, even though he was relieved, Derek could tell there was some part of him that was pissed at himself. Derek knows that Stiles hates being an omega; he thinks it makes him weak, and he fights against it with everything he’s got, but he’s wrong. If there’s anything Stiles isn’t, it’s weak.

Derek looks over at Scott, who’s tilted his head up to watch the television. He doesn’t really know Scott—they’ve only met in person a couple of times, so most of what he knows is what Stiles has told him, but he likes Scott. He’s kind and protective and, now, apparently an alpha. Derek’s heart aches a little at this reminder; he and his sisters don’t have an alpha now, and he doubts Laura’s going to want to follow the seventeen-year-old who wouldn’t even join their pack.

But he knows he owes Scott a great deal. Stiles doesn’t really talk about the way people treat him now, but Derek knows it weighs on him—and he knows that Scott protected him when Derek wasn’t there to do it. Derek inhales deeply and says, “Thank you. For always being there for Stiles.”

Scott gives him a startled look, like it hadn’t even occurred to him. “He’s my best friend,” he says with a little shrug. “What else was I gonna do?”

Derek shrugs. Maybe it was already obvious to Scott, but he needed to say it.

“Hey, man,” Scott says, sounding a little concerned. “I know it was a little rough going at first, but you’ve done good things for him too, you know?”

“Thanks,” Derek says quietly.

“I mean it,” Scott says firmly. He hesitates a moment and then he says, “I don’t know if he’s even realized it yet, but he kinda loves you.”

Derek looks at Scott sharply. “You’re just saying that.”

Scott shakes his head. “Nah, man. He really does.”

Derek looks at Stiles, his heart banging in his chest. Love?

Scott lifts his head as there’s a gentle knock on the door, getting out of his seat to let in his mom, who’s wearing scrubs and carrying a tray of food in her hands. Scott grins. “Dinner?”

“No for you,” Melissa scolds, elbowing him aside. “This is for Derek.”

Derek blinks in surprise as she sets the tray down on the bedside table next to him. “You didn’t have to—”

“No arguments,” Melissa says firmly, squeezing his shoulder as her eyes drift to Stiles before snapping back to her son. “Come on, you. My shift’s over, so we’re going to go pick up your bike from Dr. Deaton’s.”

Scott gives her a pleading look. “Can’t I stay?”
Melissa shakes her head. “You’ve had Stiles since kindergarten; you need to start sharing.”

Scott gives Derek a sheepish grin. “Yeah, I guess,” he says. Addressing Derek he adds, “You’ve got my number, right? You’ll text me if he wakes up?”

“I will,” Derek confirms. Scott and his mom give Derek twin smiles and then they’re gone, leaving Derek to slump in his chair and think about what Scott just said.

Derek’s been so busy with everything that’s been going on, molding his life around Stiles and the arrival of the baby that he hasn’t really thought about what’s going to happen after the baby comes. Even Stiles moving in had been spur of the moment—Derek had thought about it, usually when Stiles was heading out the door at night to go back to his dad’s house, but he’d only offered the key first because he didn’t want to rush it; he honestly hadn’t been sure Stiles would even accept it.

Does he love Stiles? Derek hasn’t given that much thought either, too relieved to have Stiles back in his life to question his feelings any further. But now he thinks about how empty he felt when he and Stiles were apart, and how complete he feels now, and how terrified he’d been today not knowing if Stiles was hurt or dead, and how his hands wouldn’t stop shaking on the drive to the hospital. Is that love? Derek thinks that maybe it is, and the realization only makes him press closer to Stiles—he’d climb right into the bed if he didn’t think he’d get told off by a nurse.

As the sheriff promised, one of his deputies shows up a few hours later to take Derek’s statement; it’s Deputy Parrish, the same one who gave him a ride to the hospital in the first place. He patiently watches Derek carefully write down his account of what had happened, but he doesn’t speak until Derek’s finished, nodding his head toward Stiles to ask, “He’s going to be okay?”

Derek nods and asks in return, “Where’s Jennifer?”

“Treated for a concussion here and then taken to the county lockup,” Parrish replies, sticking his notepad into his breast pocket.

Derek swallows back his anger—part of him wishes he’d just ripped her throat out—and says, “Has she said anything? Why she wanted power so badly?”

Deputy Parrish shakes his head. “She’s refusing to talk until we find her a lawyer. The county may not even end up with the case—the Pacific Druidic Council’s already drawing up a claim against her; what she did is a serious breach of druidic law, even if she wasn’t registered. The district attorney may decide that this is their jurisdiction.”

“What if that turns out to be the case?” Derek asks. “Will there be a trial?”

The deputy shrugs. “Could be, I don’t know. I think the council’s got their own methods of determining guilt.”

“Oh,” Derek says quietly, his eyes sliding back to Stiles. “Well. Thanks for stopping by.”

Deputy Parrish doesn’t move, his arms folded across his chest. “So, you’re the alpha, huh?”

Derek looks at him sharply, his shoulders tensing. “Yes.” He doesn’t like the way the deputy eyes him then, like he’s weighing Derek up and finding him wanting.

“Hm,” Deputy Parrish says ambiguously.

Derek bristles. “What?” he asks bluntly, his face heating in anger. “Are you about to tell me not to hurt him unless I want to suffer the wrath of the Beacon Hills Sheriff’s Department?”
Deputy Parrish eyes him, his sleepy green eyes unreadable. “No,” he says lightly. “Though if you do ever hurt him, it’s not us you should worry about—it’s him. He’s more than capable of defending himself.” Derek blinks, and the deputy nods. “Have a good evening, Mr. Hale.”

Derek’s asleep when Stiles begins to wake. It’s very late in the night—so late it might be considered morning—and the only reason Derek wakes before Stiles is because Stiles’ heart starts thundering so loud it wakes Derek with a start, and he has just enough time to lift his head from where he’d slumped against the bed before Stiles jolts awake, his eyes flying open.

“Stiles?” Derek says, but Stiles doesn’t seem to hear him, his eyes flickering around the room wildly, his scent going sharp with panic as the monitor he’s hooked up to goes wild. “Stiles, it’s all right,” he says, hand tightening around Stiles’ as a nurse opens the door.

Derek finds himself pushed aside as the nurse leans in to talk soothingly to Stiles, deftly checking the security of his oxygen tube, tilting his head back so she can see his pupils dilate. Stiles cringes at her touch and Derek tenses, his fangs pushing at his gums at the sight of Stiles in distress. The scent of his panic is growing, sweat breaking out on his skin, and Derek’s not even aware of the protective growl that rumbles out of his chest until the nurse turns around to glare at him.

Stiles looks at him too, his eyes wide with anxiety. “Derek?” he breathes, his breath coming machine-gun fast.

“Stiles,” Derek says softly, moving around the bed, ignoring the dark look the nurse gives him. Stiles reaches for him, his hand gripping at Derek’s forearm with astonishing strength.

“What’s going on?” Stiles asks, his voice going high in panic. “Where—I was at school, and—“ His eyes go even wider, horror creeping over his face. “Ms. Blake, she, she said—”

“It’s okay,” Derek says soothingly. “Just take a deep breath.” Stiles does, albeit shakily, and Derek gives him an encouraging smile. “You’re okay,” he says quietly. “She’s been taken care of.”

“What happened?” Stiles says plaintively.

Derek looks at the nurse, who purses her lips and says, “I’m going to page the on-call doctor.” Derek watches her leave, and as the door swings shut Stiles tugs at him, his breath quickening again. Derek sits on the edge of the bed and leans in, pressing their foreheads together. “Breathe,” he says softly.

Stiles loops an arm around his neck and inhales sharply, holding it for a few seconds before exhaling harshly. He repeats this a couple of times and, slowly but surely, his heartbeat begins to steady, the scent of his panic fading a little. “What happened?” he asks again, more calmly this time. “All I remember is—I was at the school talking to Ms. Blake and she—she was crazy.”

“She’s an unregistered druid,” Derek tells Stiles quietly, pulling back a little so he can watch Stiles’ face. “She was the one sacrificing people. You and the baby were going to be her last sacrifices.”

Stiles stares at him for a long moment before his hands fly to his stomach, pressing against his taut skin. “She’s—”

“Okay,” Derek finishes. “You’re both fine.”

Stiles exhales roughly as Derek puts his hands over Stiles’. “She’s been talking for months about having a surrogate,” Stiles says. “That was me, right? She was talking about me. She wanted my—our baby.” Derek nods, and Stiles tilts his head back, staring up at the ceiling for a long moment,
his brow furrowing. “Three,” he says suddenly, and Derek blinks.

“What?”

“There are always three sacrifices,” Stiles says, looking at Derek. “Who’s the third? Did someone else die?”

“No,” Derek says, his throat tightening. “She tried—it was supposed to be Cora, but she’s okay.”

Stiles keeps watching Derek, his brow still furrowed. “Something’s not right,” he says. “What happened?”

Derek inhales deeply, looking down at his hands. “Laura lost her alpha status saving Cora.”

“Oh, shit,” Stiles says quietly. “Shit, Derek, I’m sorry.”

“It’s not your fault,” Derek says dully. Stiles reaches for him again and Derek sinks against him gratefully, closing his eyes against the burning in them. They don’t speak for a while, Derek gratefully scenting Stiles’ temple while Stiles runs his hands through Derek’s hair over and over, but Derek sits up when he hears someone outside the door. It opens a moment later and the doctor comes in, followed by the nurse. Derek stands to give them room, but he doesn’t go far; Stiles’ hand snakes out and grabs his, holding on a little too tight when they draw a blood sample to check the toxin levels in his blood. They have more detailed results back from the first test; Stiles was poisoned with mistletoe, just like Cora, and an angry shudder runs down Derek’s spine. Part of him wishes they’d just killed Jennifer, left her body in that cellar to rot. Like he heard Derek’s thoughts, Stiles squeezes his hand.

“Well,” the doctor says, as the nurse leaves the room with the blood sample. “Everything’s looking much better. Barring anything coming back in the blood test, I think we’ll be letting you go in the morning.”

“Thanks,” Stiles says quietly.

“Get some rest,” the doctor instructs, and then he’s gone, the door closing quietly behind him.

Derek lets go of Stiles’ hand to pull his phone from his pocket and Stiles makes a strangled noise of alarm. “Are you leaving?”

“No,” Derek says immediately. “Scott wanted to know when you woke up. You want to call your dad?”

Stiles’ eyes drift to the clock by the door as Derek swiftly taps out a message to Scott. “He probably fell asleep with a glass of whiskey,” Stiles says wearily. “Can I use your phone?” He gestures around weakly. “I don’t know where my shit went.”

Derek nods and hands Stiles his phone, watching him deftly dial a number and lift it to his ear. “Hey Dad,” he says after a moment. “It’s me. I’m awake and I—I’m okay. The baby’s okay.” He draws in a slow breath before continuing, “The doctor says I can probably leave in the morning, so if you get this, don’t freak out and rush in. I’m okay. I’ll see you later.” He hangs up and hands the phone back to Derek, a distracted look on his face.

“You okay?” Derek asks quietly.

Stiles closes his eyes, pulling in another long breath before exhaling slowly. “Yeah,” he says eventually. “I’m okay.”
They don’t go to Sacramento that weekend. Stiles is cleared to leave the hospital around nine Saturday morning, and since neither of them have a car at the moment, the sheriff gives them a ride, though first he stops by a diner and treats them to breakfast.

“Early birthday present,” he says to Stiles, who grunts sleepily.

Afterwards, he drives Stiles and Derek to the animal clinic, where Derek’s car is; at some point, Scott went back out into the woods and drove it over here for him. Derek’s quietly touched.

He and Stiles go back to the apartment, where Stiles crawls into bed and sleeps for the rest of the day. The doctor had said he’d be tired, but Derek still sits with him for a while, concerned by the dark circles under his eyes. When it’s clear that Stiles is out for the count, he gets up and goes to stand in the middle of the still mostly-empty nursery, looking around at the bags and boxes they have piled up against one wall, full of items waiting for a home.

He feels suddenly inadequate; Stiles is two weeks from his due date and they don’t even own a crib. What the hell would they do if Stiles gave birth early? Derek sets his jaw and gets to work, unpacking boxes and pulling tags off clothes. While Stiles sleeps, Derek does several loads of laundry, and lines the shelves of an empty bookcase with books and stuffed animals and other various sundries they’ve received.

Derek’s still in there in the late afternoon, folding freshly laundered onesies and tiny socks, when Stiles wanders in, his hair flat on one side, dressed only in boxers and a loose shirt. “Aren’t you cold?” Derek asks him.

“Nnn,” Stiles says ambiguously, worming up against Derek’s side. “You’re hot.” He shoves his hands under Derek’s shirt and Derek shudders.

“Your hands are cold,” he grunts.

“So lemme warm them up,” Stiles says, rubbing his cheek against Derek’s shoulder.

“Are you feeling okay?” Derek asks quietly, stopping the folding for a moment so he can press his cheek to Stiles’ temple.

“Mm,” Stiles says agreeably. He inhales deeply. “Look at you,” he adds, his voice dropping to a near-purr that has Derek shuddering for a wholly different reason. “Getting ready. Taking care of us.”

The way he says us makes Derek’s stomach do an odd flip-flop. “Why are you being so cuddly tonight?”

“Says the guy who’s always rubbing his face all over my stomach,” Stiles retorts without ire. “Maybe I’m happy to be alive. Maybe I really like you. Maybe you just smell really good.”

“Or you’re angling for something,” Derek says.

“Maybe,” Stiles agrees, his hands drifting toward Derek’s waistband.

“Hey,” Derek says, gently catching him by the wrists. “Tell me how you’re feeling first.”

Derek lets him, but only on the condition that Derek can suck him off in return, a condition Stiles gladly accepts.

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Derek wakes abruptly in the early hours of the following morning. He’s kicked all the blankets off in his sleep, and there’s sweat itching between his shoulder blades and at the backs of his knees. “Shit,” he mumbles, swinging himself out of bed. He’s in heat; he hasn’t been paying attention to his schedule, and it might be a couple of days early, but it’s not too far off now.

Derek stumbles into the bathroom and splashes lukewarm water onto his face; it’s not exactly refreshing, but too severe of a temperature change could push his heat on faster, and at least it gets the sweat off his face. He straightens with a sigh, and pauses for a moment in the doorway to the bedroom. Stiles is still asleep, curled on his side with his mountain of support pillows. Derek would like nothing better than to spend his heat with Stiles—this would be the first they’ve ever shared—but Stiles has already gone through so much this week, and he’s so close to giving birth. He should wake Stiles up and tell him to go to his dad’s house, Derek thinks, slowly walking back toward the bed. He crawls back amongst the sheets, brain going a little slow as the close up scent of Stiles hits him. He’s got some time, he thinks. His heat’s not quite upon him. He’ll let Stiles sleep a little bit longer.

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Sometime later, Derek’s shaken awake by Stiles, who’s leaning over him with a concerned look on his face. “Derek?” Stiles says. “You’re burning up. Are you in heat?”

Derek makes a mutinous noise, heat flaring along his spine as he breathes in Stiles’ scent. “Yes,” he manages, his eyes fluttering shut when Stiles touches his cheek. “You—you should go.”

“What?” Stiles says, disappointment sharply spiking through his scent. “Why?”

“The baby,” Derek says through gritted teeth, sweat prickling at his temples. “I don’t want to hurt you—”

Stiles laughs. “You’re not going to hurt us,” he says softly, brushing his nose against Derek’s cheek. “It’s safe. Let me take care of you.”

Derek groans at that and Stiles grins triumphantly, pushing himself up onto his elbows so he can tug off his shirt. Derek groans again at the sight of him, full stomach and swollen breasts. A fierce sense of satisfaction and lust goes arcing through his body; he did that. Stiles is his.

Stiles’ eyes darken as he picks up on Derek’s feelings, his scent sharpening with arousal. “Can’t wait for your dick,” he says, his voice dropping down into that purr that makes Derek’s dick throb with want. “Been craving it for months.”

Derek growls, unable to stand it any longer, and surges forward, pressing Stiles backward into the bed and latching his mouth over one of his nipples. “Oh, fuck,” Stiles sighs, his hand sinking into Derek’s hair, holding him down. Derek makes a rumbling noise of pleasure as he switches to the other side, his lips wet with Stiles’ sweet milk. He’s already hard, mindlessly rutting against the bed as Stiles shakes under his mouth.

It’s been almost a year since he slept with anyone other than Stiles, and months since he slept with Stiles himself. When was the last time he spent a heat with anyone, let alone someone he loved and cherished as intensely as he does Stiles? It’s almost overwhelming how good it feels and he’s not
even inside Stiles yet—they both still have their underwear on—but just being there with Stiles, bare skin to bare skin, Stiles’ hands stroking through his hair and down his spine, it’s incredible.

He has to lift his head then, has to kiss Stiles, has to let him know how much he feels, and Stiles meets him with just as much enthusiasm, clutching at him, pulling him in close. Derek touches him everywhere he can reach, wants him soaked in his scent, wants to be soaked in Stiles’ scent. He bumps his cheek against Stiles’ jaw, rubs at his arms and sides, palms at his ass. Stiles cants into his touch, a desperate noise slipping between his lips, and Derek helps him pull his underwear past his hips and down his long legs. He growls at the sight of Stiles’ dick, red and curving toward the swell of his stomach—and to Derek’s complete surprise, Stiles’ eyes flash omega yellow back at him.

Derek knows it’s possible, but he’s never seen a human do it before, and it means—it means—Derek whines, his hands slipping up Stiles’ thighs, shoulders shaking. It means trust and love and so much more; the wolf in him is howling, and Derek wants to howl with it.

“Derek,” Stiles says softly, pleading, dragging Derek back to earth.

“Shh,” he soothes, leaning in to kiss Stiles as he presses his hand between Stiles’ legs, testing his hole with one gentle finger. Stiles’ breath hitches, the tips of his fingers biting into Derek’s bicep. He’s already slick, his body going into a sympathetic heat in response to Derek’s pheromones. Derek teases at him, circling his rim until he can press inside and Stiles’ back arches off the bed a little, his dick pulsing out a drop of precome. “Can we—”

“Yes,” Stiles says forcefully, shoving himself upright and onto his knees, grabbing at his mountain of pillows.

“What are you—”

“I want you to fuck me on my stomach,” Stiles says, viciously shoving pillows underneath himself. “That all right?”

“Yeah,” Derek breathes, his mouth going dry at the thought. “You’ll be okay?”

“More than,” Stiles says firmly. He bends, bracing himself on his hands and knees, ass in the air. Presenting, Derek thinks, remember some long-ago high school sex ed class. His hand moves on its own, dipping between Stiles’ asscheeks to rub at his hole, even slicker than before.

“You’re sure?” he asks.

Stiles makes a noise of assent, pressing back against Derek’s hand. “Come on,” he says, voice low as he cranes around to look at Derek. “’S probably the last time you’ll be able to mate me without a condom. I want you to mark me.”

Derek snarls at that, and Stiles’ eyes flash at him again as a smile curves his lips. Derek shifts forward and slips two fingers inside Stiles in one fast movement. Stiles moans sharply, canting his hips even further upward as Derek works him open. His scent’s like heaven, lush with heat, ass so wet now that Derek has no trouble getting three, then four fingers in him. He wishes he could get his mouth on Stiles, eat him out until he comes just from that, but he doesn’t have the patience right now—later, maybe, when they’ve both come a couple times.

“Derek,” Stiles says impatiently, hips shoving back against him. “Come on.”

Derek snarls and slaps him reproachfully and hurriedly kicks off his boxers. He’s so fucking hard it hurts, the head of his dick flushed deep red. Stiles moans like he can already feel it. When Derek puts a hand on his hip to steady him, his skin burns under Derek’s touch like he’s the one in heat.
“Fuck,” Derek murmurs, gripping his dick so hard his knuckles are white. “Fuck, Stiles—”

“Fuck me,” Stiles begs. “Come on, please—”

Derek grits his teeth and presses into Stiles, not stopping until his hips are flush against Stiles’ ass. “Oh, fuck,” he groans, slowly pulling out and pushing back in. “You’re so tight, fuck—”

“’Course I am, I haven’t had a dick in me since August,” Stiles pants. “Now—”

But before Stiles can say anything else, Derek puts a hand between his shoulder blades and shoves him into the bed, fucking into him until his hands claw at the sheets, his cheeks bright red. Derek tries, he really does, but there’s no finesse to this round; they’re both just racing toward the finish, and it’s not taking very long. Stiles starts getting noisy in a way he never did when they were sneaking fucks at his dad’s house, keening as his body tightens around Derek, getting off against the pillows stacked underneath him. The smell of his orgasm makes Derek fuck into him harder, desperate to find his own release and the temporary respite from the heat that will follow.

“Derek,” Stiles pleads. “Derek, give it to me, please—”

“Fuck,” Derek pants, shifting from his knees to his feet, driving into Stiles as hard as he can, fingers digging into his hips so much that he’s probably leaving bruises. He can feel the base of his dick starting to swell and it both frightens and exhilarates him. “Stiles, I’m—can I knot you?”

Stiles moans, pressing his face into the sheets. “God, yes!”

Derek’s movements slow as his knot swells; four more thrusts and then that’s it, he’s locked inside of Stiles. Stiles clamps down around him with a whimper—maybe he comes again, but Derek doesn’t know; his eyes are rolling back as he starts to come, lips parting, legs shaking.

The thing is, Derek’s never knotted anyone before. It used to be common—alphas saving their knots for marriage—and that way of thinking changed with the times, but not with werewolves. It’s a little different for them, their instincts more primal. The knot, it’s—it means something special. It means safety and children and comfort, and until this moment, Derek’s never knotted anything other than his hand. He’s not expecting how it feels—not just the physical feeling, but the tidal wave of emotion that floods him, an overwhelming love for Stiles and their unborn child, a fierce need to protect and cherish.

It seems like years pass before Derek’s able to slump, to unbend from his crouch and kneel on the bed again, shaking so much he nearly falls over. It’s only then that he notices Stiles has his face shoved against the bed, his shoulders shuddering. Worry floods Derek; Stiles is crying.

“Stiles?” he whispers, tentatively touching his side. “Did I hurt you? Stiles—”

Stiles hiccups and turns his face so Derek can see him, his cheeks damp and his eyes red. “Whose fucking idea,” he says, fresh tears spilling down his cheeks. “Whose fucking idea was it to fuck like this? I want to see your fucking face.”

That’s the other thing Derek forgot about knotting; he’s not the only one who felt that intense flood of emotion. They call it a heat bond; he and Stiles are linked physically and emotionally. It won’t last long, but they’ll both feel it acutely, and it’s not exactly an easy thing to handle.

“Hey,”” Derek says gently, rubbing his hands up Stiles’ back. He can’t bear him down to the mattress like he’d like to, can’t pin him down with his weight, not with Stiles’ baby bump in the way, but he’ll do his best. “I’m right here.”
Stiles sniffs loudly, his hand sliding around the sheets until it finds Derek’s and holds on tight. “Next time, I want to be on my back,” he says.

“All right,” Derek says softly. “We can do that. Here—” He carefully moves them, helping Stiles turn onto his side and shore up the pillows under him. It’s not easy, but it’s better this way; now he can press up against Stiles’ back and curl his arms around him. “Good?”

Stiles exhales slowly, craning over his shoulder to look at Derek. “Good.”

“Good,” Derek murmurs, leaning in to kiss him gently. “You were so perfect, Stiles.”

Stiles smiles faintly. “That was fun. And intense.”

Derek nuzzles against his jaw. “You okay?”

“I’m fine,” Stiles sighs, sounding content. “You could have given me a heads up it’d feel like that.”

“I—I didn’t know,” Derek says slowly. “I’ve never, uh—”

Stiles looks at him, his eyes widening. “You’ve never knotted anyone before?”

Derek shakes his head, and Stiles’ face softens. “Oh,” he says quietly, and Derek knows he gets what it means. “Thank you.”

Derek presses a kiss to his shoulder. “Happy birthday.”

Stiles grins. “That’s right,” he says. “Happy birthday to me.”

Derek snorts.

“Seriously, though,” Stiles says, going serious. “Thanks. That was—it was really good.”

“You sounded like you enjoyed it,” Derek says.

Stiles eyeballs him. “The things I say when we’re having heat sex don’t leave this room, all right?”

Derek snorts again. “Agreed.”

They spoon until Derek’s knot recedes enough that he can pull out, which he does carefully, bracing one hand on Stiles’ hip as Stiles makes a face, though he flips over readily so he can tuck his face against Derek’s neck with a content sigh. Derek drapes an arm over him, letting himself drift into sleep. His body will be aching to go again in an hour or two, but for now he can just indulge.

The next round goes better; Stiles stays on his back and Derek pulls his ass flush to the edge of the bed so he can fuck him standing. His legs nearly collapse under him when he knots Stiles, and Stiles cries again, but only a little, and this time Derek leans in close and rubs their cheeks together until Stiles gives a watery laugh and pats him on the head. “I’m blaming this on the hormones,” he says hoarsely, digging his heels into the small of Derek’s back.

“I’m not judging you,” Derek says. “This is—new for me, too.”

Stiles sighs softly, dragging the tips of his fingers down Derek’s spine. “Never imagined it’d feel like this,” he says quietly. “I used to think about it all the time.”
“Me too,” Derek confesses, but Stiles shakes his head.

“No, I don’t mean—” He cuts himself off, drawing in a deep breath before he says, “I’ve had a crush on you since ninth grade.”

“I know,” Derek says, before he remembers that Scott made him promise not to tell.


“I can’t say,” Derek says, his cheeks going red.

“Oh,” Stiles says knowingly, his expression clearing. “Scott.” Derek nods, and Stiles gives him a fond look, scratching his fingers through Derek’s hair. “You two are dorks.”

Derek makes a noise of protest, but waits a moment before asking, “Why didn’t you ever say anything?”

Stiles snorts. “What, when I was scrawny ninth grader? You wouldn’t have even noticed me, man. You think you would have dated a freshman when you were a senior?”

“Well,” Derek says dryly, “I knocked you up and you’re still in high school, so I’m probably not the best judge.”

Stiles shrugs. “It was a daydream more than anything, and anyway, it was after the fire, and I thought you probably had other things on your mind.”

Not entirely true, Derek thinks ruefully. Around that time, he did just about anything he could to keep his mind off the fire, up to and including banging everyone that came into his line of vision. Stiles doesn’t need to know that, though—at least, not right now, when they’re tied together so intimately.

When they finally do pull apart, Derek’s heat once more temporarily quelled, he rubs the life back into Stiles’ legs and then watches him waddle off into the bathroom. Derek himself settles back into bed, feeling filthy in the best way, ready for another couple hours of sleep before the next wave of heat hits. Stiles comes out of the bathroom, but instead of coming back to bed he crosses the room and heads into the apartment where, after a moment, Derek can hear him banging around in the kitchen.

When Stiles comes back, he’s carrying a baking tray balanced on top of a stack of some of the kids’ books they’ve received as gifts, and on the baking tray are a couple glasses of water and a bunch of food—Derek sees cheese and crackers and a lot of fruit (Stiles still insists that he’s not getting pregnancy cravings, but Derek sees the amount of fruit he consumes, and it’s way more than a normal person).

“You know,” Stiles says, carefully sliding his burden onto the nightstand, “if you ever want to treat me to breakfast in bed, we need to invest in some nicer trays.”

“Why do you get breakfast in bed, not me?” Derek retorts, rolling onto his stomach.

Stiles gives him a dark look as he climbs back into bed. “Who’s the one carrying your child, buddy?”

Derek rolls his eyes. “Whatever. What’s with the books, then?”

“I figured if we’re going to be in bed all day, I might as well start reading to her,” Stiles replies, lifting the tray and grabbing the stack of books.
Derek lets his eyes drift shut, listening to Stiles rifle through the pile of books.

“Hey,” Stiles says abruptly. “What about Madeline?”

“What about Madeline?” Derek asks, cracking an eye open to see Stiles holding the classic children’s book.

“As a name, dumbass,” Stiles retorts. “We could call her Maddy.”

“Mm,” Derek says. “I don’t know.”

“Well, we need to start thinking about it,” Stiles says. “We can’t put ‘Undecided’ on the birth certificate. All the other kids would make fun of her.”

“We’ll figure it out,” Derek murmurs, his eyes drifting shut again.

“You’re useless,” Stiles says, but he sounds fond when he says it, and his hand starts combing through Derek’s hair as he begins to read. “In an old house in Paris that was covered in vines, lived twelve little girls in two straight lines…”

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Derek’s heat has broken by late that evening. It’s always more intense when he spends it with someone, but it never lasts as long, which is both a curse and a blessing. Stiles seems bummed out, too, though maybe that’s just the heat bond dissipating. Derek feels it too, and they’re both extra touchy that night, reluctant to leave each other’s space. It’s passed by the next morning, when Derek drops Stiles off at school before going to class, and then things are just normal again. With the whole wild weekend behind them—was it really on Friday that Ms. Blake tried to kill Stiles?—it almost feels like a dream.

Derek realizes, with a guilty lurch of his stomach, that he’s been so busy with Stiles that he’s been neglecting his pack. Panic surges in him when he tries calling Laura’s cell phone, only for it to ring and ring and ring before going to voicemail, but when he calls Cora she picks up on the second ring and, sounding bored, tells him that she’s fine, and Laura’s at work. When Derek tries calling the office, the secretary tells him that Laura’s on a phone call and can call him back when she’s done.

It almost doesn’t seem right somehow, to have been so devastated on Friday only to bounce back by Monday—but then, Derek thinks, Laura was the same way after the fire. While Derek was fucking anything that moved to keep his mind off things, Laura was immersing herself in work, building her charity—and the new house—from the ground up. He shouldn’t be surprised that she’s doing the same thing now.

When he gets out of his first class, Derek’s not surprised to see a message from her: Things are fine, I promise. Dinner tomorrow night? Bring Stiles.

See you then, Derek types back, a faint smile curving his lips.

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“Are you nervous?” Derek asks, as he drives up the long long dirt road through the woods.

“Why do you ask that?” Stiles retorts suspiciously.

“Because you haven’t stop fidgeting since we left the apartment,” Derek says, “plus you reek of it.”
Stiles scowls. “Using your nose is cheating.”

Derek gives him a long look. “Why are you nervous? We talked to Laura at the shower.”

“I know,” Stiles says, tugging on the strings of his hoodie. “I just want to make a good impression.”

“You don’t need to worry about that,” Derek says, reaching over and taking his hand. “They already know you.”

“Yeah, but they’re your pack,” Stiles argues.

“So are you,” Derek replies. He brings the car to a stop, shifting into park, and turns to face Stiles. “We’ve had this same exact conversation about your dad, remember?”

Stiles stares at him for a moment before nodding. “Yeah,” he says quietly. “Okay, yeah, you’re right.”

Derek smiles at him encouragingly, and when Stiles leans across the center console, Derek meets him halfway for a kiss that lingers until a car behind them honks. They both crane around to see who it is and Stiles says, “Oh, Lydia?” She waves. Cora, in the passenger’s seat, flips them off.

“Family dinner,” Derek says, shifting back into drive and continuing down the road.

“Oh,” Stiles says, slouching in his seat. “That makes things easier.”

“You sure about that?” Derek asks wryly. “They make a terrifying team.”

Stiles raises a clenched fist into the air defiantly. “Whatever. We’ll come out on top!”

Derek snorts. “Did I miss the part where this became a fight?”

“Love is a battlefield, Derek,” Stiles says very seriously, and then abruptly falls silent. Derek glances over at him and finds him gazing intently out the window, a flush high on his cheeks. It takes him a moment to realize it’s because Stiles said love, and an unfamiliar heat goes twisting through his chest, his smile widening. He doesn’t say anything, but he reaches over and takes Stiles’ hand again, squeezing gently at his fingers as his gaze return to the road. Out of the corner of his eye he sees Stiles glance at him quickly and then away again, a faint smile curving his lips.

Derek pulls up in front of the house, Lydia pulling in next to him just a moment later. As he gets out of the car and heads around to the other side to help Stiles out, Lydia and Cora clamber out of their car, and Cora says derisively, “You drive like an old man, Derek.”

“Hey, hey,” Stiles says defensively, slipping out of the car and grunting when he hits the ground, despite Derek being there to help him. “We’ve got a baby on board.”

Cora rolls her eyes. “You’re just as bad, Stilinski,” she says. “I’ve been behind you walking down the hall. You are slow.”

“Made for each other,” Lydia says, pulling her hair over one shoulder as she and Cora headed for the house.

“Don’t listen to them,” Stiles says soothingly, letting Derek guide him across the muddy driveway. He pats Derek on the cheek. “I’m into older men, obviously.”

“If you weren’t pregnant, I’d trip you,” Derek growls.
“Mm, save it for the next full moon, babe,” Stiles says. He yelps when Derek snaps at him playfully, jumping up onto the first step of the porch stairs. Derek smirks at him, drawing him along to the front door, which Cora’s holding open for them, a long-suffering look on her face.

“You guys are gross,” she says emphatically.

“Pregnant,” Stiles points out haughtily. “I think it’s required.”

Cora curls her lip in disgust and disappears off into the house after Lydia, while Laura comes down the stairs, her eyebrows raised. “Hi, guys,” she says warmly, dipping in to brush her cheek against Stiles’. “Glad you could make it.”

“Hi,” Stiles says a little shyly, his cheeks pink. Laura gives him a soft smile and turns to Derek, giving him a tight hug as she rubs their cheeks together.

“Are you really all right?” he asks quietly.

“I’m fine,” Laura assures him softly, and there’s no skip to her heartbeat. She pulls away and says, “Are you guys hungry? Dinner’s almost ready.”

“You cooked?” Derek asks skeptically.

“I can cook,” Laura says, giving him a dark look.

“He said the same thing to me,” Stiles complains. “I think Derek thinks he’s the only person in Beacon Hills who knows how to open a cookbook.”

“Isn’t he a pain?” Laura sighs.

“Sure is,” Stiles agrees, giving Derek a sweet smile in return for his scowl. “You want any help with the food?”

Derek leaves them in the kitchen cheerfully shredding his character to bits—so much for Stiles’ anxieties about wanting to make a good impression—and goes to hang out with Cora and Lydia, who are watching TV in the living room.

“Isn’t your boyfriend like, ready to pop?” Cora asks him. “Should he even be walking around?”

“He’s still a week and a half from his due date,” Derek says, frowning at her.

“So, he could bust that baby out any time now,” Cora says gleefully.

She squawks when Lydia elbows her and bends forward to ask, “Are you nervous?”

Derek shrugs. He hasn’t been giving it that much thought, kind of intentionally. Those false contractions Stiles gets are terrifying enough.

“He’ll be fine,” Lydia says confidently.

“Derek won’t be,” Cora laughs. “Look at how pale he is just thinking about it.”

Derek gives her another dark look, but then his attention drawn to the kitchen, where he tunes in just in time to hear Stiles say “—Sorry.” His tone’s muted, apologetic, and Derek half-rises from his seat in concern before Stiles continues, “Derek told me you’re not an alpha anymore. It’s my fault.”

Derek sinks back down in his chair as Laura sighs and says, “It’s not your fault, Stiles. If it hadn’t
been you in that root cellar, it would have been someone else. I’m just glad you and the baby are okay.”

“But—it broke your pack bond,” Stiles protests.

“Yes and no,” Laura replies. Derek hears her shift around and open the oven door, lifting something out before continuing. “Packs lose their alphas; it happens. The alpha acts a bit like an anchor, keeping the pack bond strong. Without an alpha, we don’t have that tether, and it can make it easier to drift apart from each other, but that’s not going to happen. We’re family; we won’t ever lose that connection.”

“Oh,” Stiles says wonderingly. He’s quiet for a while, and Laura stops moving around.

“It’s okay, Stiles, honestly,” she says gently. “I know it sounds devastating, and it was in the moment, but it was either lose the alpha or lose a member of my pack, and—well, you know what happened to our family. I did what I had to, and I’m fine with the outcome.”

“Oh,” Stiles says, though he doesn’t sound one hundred percent convinced. “Um. What about Scott, though? You wanted him in your pack, but now…”

“I don’t know,” Laura says honestly. “I’ve got to invest some time in thinking about the whole situation. Anyway, we’ve got more immediate things happening on the horizon, like your baby. Are you excited?”

“Yeah,” Stiles says, and Derek smiles at the smile he can hear in Stiles’ voice. “I know it’s corny, but I can’t wait to meet her.”

“That’s not corny,” Laura says warmly. “That’s life. Now, bring these biscuits to the table for me, would you?”

It’s only another couple of minutes before Laura’s sticking her head into the living room and calling the rest of them to the table. Dinner that night couldn’t have been more different from that first disastrous night at Stiles’ house with his dad; Derek enjoys himself immensely, and he can tell Stiles does too. It’s not often that he and his sisters sit down and eat a meal together, but with them and Lydia and Stiles there, it reminds Derek of the way life used to be before the fire, when the family was so much bigger. They used to have a big family dinner every Wednesday night, though with the number of people living in the house, it was almost guaranteed to eat with four or five people any other night of the week.

“I like your sister,” Stiles says on the drive back to the apartment and, after a moment of thought, he adds, “Both of them, actually, but Laura kind of reminds me of my mom.”

“She’s always been like that,” Derek says. “I think that’s what makes her so good at her job, and at being an alpha. She’s good at understanding what people need.”

“You are, too,” Stiles says, his head turned to look out the window. “You both like to take care of people. You take care of me, and I like that.”

Derek smiles to himself, his chest tight with satisfaction. They don’t talk the rest of the drive home, but Stiles leans into his side as they ride the elevator up to the penthouse and Derek presses his nose to Stiles’ hair, breathing in his familiar scent.

This is it, he thinks contentedly. This is the rest of his life.
A couple days later, they finally go out and buy the furniture for the nursery, and as they head into the store, Derek realizes that it’s the first time he and Stiles have gone out in public together. Stiles is eighteen now, so it’s not like anyone can say anything about them being together, but Derek catches people watching them, their eyes widening as things click into place. Derek doesn’t know any of them, and he doesn’t think they know him, but they know Stiles, the sheriff’s son, and there’s clearly an age difference between them. He can feel their judgement and grits his teeth, knowing that this is how Stiles has felt for the past ninth months.

Stiles, for his part, doesn’t even seem to notice. Maybe he’s used to it, but they’ve got a list of things to get, and he tracks down the items while Derek heaves them into their cart, and it’s only when they’ve joined the line for the only register open that he seems to tense.

“What’s up?” Derek asks quietly.

“Nothing,” Stiles mutters. His heart skips a beat, and Derek elbows him in the side. Stiles sighs. “The girl at the register. She goes to my school.”

Derek looks at the girl, who’s talking with the couple in line ahead of them. “We can leave.”

“No,” Stiles says sharply. “I’m—I’m not ashamed of you, man. I just—” He sucks in a deep breath and loops his arm through Derek’s. “Cat’s out of the bag now.”

Derek nudges him. “Now we can go on that date.”

Stiles snorts as they move up to the head of the line. Derek watches the girl at the register, her eyes widening as she realizes who’s standing in front of her, but she’s perfectly polite to them as she rings them up.

Stiles exhales as they exit the store, pushing their purchases in front of them. “Well, by Monday, everyone in town’s going to know.”

“I know,” Derek says again, swinging the hatch shut. He steps into Stiles’ space. “I wouldn’t change this, though.”

Stiles grins faintly and leans in to give him a slow kiss. “Neither would I,” he says, when they pull apart.

Derek puts the cart away and they drive back to the apartment, where Derek has to get a dolly from the basement to cart the furniture upstairs. Stiles can’t do much to help—he’s banned from heavy lifting, and he can’t exactly do a ton of crawling around on his hands and knees putting everything together, but he sits in the nursery while Derek builds the furniture, reading *Harry Potter* to the baby.

When Derek’s finished, all the furniture pushed to the walls, Stiles gets to his feet and they stand
together in the middle of the room, leaning into each other.

“It’s really happening,” Stiles says quietly, and it’s true; now they have a nursery, and Stiles has a bag ready to go in case they need to leave for the hospital. Soon—literally any day now—they’ll have a daughter, a living, breathing, feeling human being that relies on them for survival.

Derek turns his head so he can brush his lips against Stiles’ cheek. “All we need now is a name.”

“Lucy,” Stiles says, and Derek groans. He’s sitting on the couch and Stiles is kneeling on the floor between his legs, his cheek resting against Derek’s thigh as he jerks Derek off with one hand and pumps two fingers in and out of him with the other. “Or Sarah, maybe?”

“Stiles,” Derek growls. “Is this really the time?” Every time he starts getting close to coming, that’s the point when Stiles slows down, his gaze going distant as possible baby names spring to mind.

Stiles blinks up at him innocently. “What, can’t I multitask?”

“No, you can’t,” Derek says. “I’d like to come before the baby’s born, thanks.”

“Don’t say that,” Stiles says, looking alarmed. “You’ll jinx me.” But that, at least, makes him put aside the baby name creating for now to focus on getting Derek off, which he does deftly, grinning when Derek tenses and spills over his hand with a groan. “God,” Stiles breathes. “I can’t wait until this bowling ball in my stomach is gone and we can fuck in every position ever made up.”

Derek groans again and makes vague grabby motions towards Stiles’ crotch, but Stiles shakes his head with a grin. “I’m good,” he says, delicately licking his hand clean. “But seriously, we need to come up with something. My dad looked at me like I was nuts when I told him we don’t have a name yet.”

He climbs onto the couch and Derek waits patiently for him to arrange himself, his back across Derek’s lap. “Marley?”

Derek makes a face. “What, like that dog movie?”

“Right,” Stiles says. “Um. Rose?”

“I still like Madeline,” Derek says, rubbing his hand over Stiles’ stomach. The baby kicks at him and Stiles grunts, pushing his hand away.

“Okay, so Maddy’s on the short list, but we need other options,” Stiles says. “I mean, what if she comes out looking nothing like a Madeline?”

Derek frowns down at him. “What do you mean? She’s a baby; she’s going to look like a baby.”

Stiles waves this logic away with a ceremonious flip of his hand. “No way. She’s still going to have a personality, and Madeline isn’t a name for everyone.”

Derek rolls his eyes. “Fine, whatever. What names do you want to add to the list?”

Stiles jabs him in the stomach with a surprisingly sharp finger. “Pull your weight, asshat. I want to hear some suggestions from you.”

Derek heaves an irritated sigh. “Can’t we just cut up one of those baby naming books and pull a page out of a hat?”
Stiles jabs him again, harder this time. “Don’t be a dick. Do you really want to choose her name at random?”

Derek catches his hand. “What’s the difference between that and you thinking of names off the top of your head?”

Stiles snorts. “Touché.”

They’re silent for a while, attentions drifting to the TV, which has been playing some movie in the background. Derek watches it absently, running his hand through Stiles’ hair. It’s *The Mummy*; he remembers his dad taking him and Laura to go see it in theaters.


“That’s the wife’s name?” Stiles nods, and Derek rolls his eyes. “We’re not giving her a name from some shitty action movie.”

“I don’t hear you offering up any suggestions, bub,” Stiles retorts. “It’s cute. Timeless.”

“Put it on the list,” Derek sighs. They fall silent again, and Derek listens to Stiles’ heart beating steadily in his chest. “We’ll need a middle name, too,” he points out after a while.

“Shh,” Stiles says. He looks like he’s starting to get sleepy. “Those aren’t required.”

“Do you have one?” Derek asks curiously.

“Do you?” Stiles counters.

“It’s Samuel,” Derek tells him. “My grandfather’s name.” He frowns. “Stiles isn’t your real name, right?”

“No,” Stiles admits moodily. “But I’m not telling you what my real name is.”

“Don’t you think I should know that?” Derek asks. “What if you have to go to the hospital and I’m trying to see you but you’re registered under your real name?”

“Point,” Stiles says grudgingly. “Fine. But this is for emergencies only, all right? You’re never allowed to call me this, and you’re not allowed to tell anyone.”

“I won’t,” Derek promises, and Stiles sighs.

“Okay,” he says. “My full name’s Stanislaw Grzegorz Stilinski. Happy?”

Derek’s quiet for a moment before he says, “You’re right. No middle name necessary,” and then he bursts into laughter. Stiles punches him in the ribs.

Stiles starts getting antsy as the days to his due date grow fewer and fewer. Derek knows better than to tell him to relax, so he does what he can to make things easier—gets him food, rubs his feet, takes his pain—until Stiles gets pissed at being coddled and he backs off. Stiles has an appointment for a c-section on Sunday, but that doesn’t mean that the baby can’t come sooner, a fact that makes them both nervous.

“She’ll come when she’s ready,” the sheriff says wisely on Tuesday, during their bi-weekly dinner. Stiles just groans into his macaroni salad.
Stiles is in a terrible mood on Thursday; when Derek drops him off at school—under the curious stare of all his classmates—he just grunts moodily when Derek says “I’ll see you later.” Derek shrugs it off and heads to class; he’s got a test first thing, which keeps him heads-down until almost noon. He doesn’t get a chance to look at his phone until he’s sat down in the school cafeteria with a tray of food, and when he does he’s startled to see he’s got several missed calls and three voicemails from Stiles. With a looming sense of certainty, Derek listens to them.

“Hey, it’s Stiles,” is the first. There’s a muted chatter of noise in the background that Derek can’t make out. “Um. It’s happening, so could you—if you could meet me at the hospital, that’d be, um. The school nurse is giving me a ride, so don’t worry about that. I’m going to call my dad, so I’ll—I’ll see you when you get here.”

He’s already getting up when the second voicemail begins. Stiles’ voice is a little higher, shaky with anxiety. “Hey, it’s me again. I, uh, I can’t get a hold of my dad—or you, obviously.” He laughs nervously. “Um. This is—I’m starting to freak out a little and it’d be—I’d really like you here, so, okay.”

“Shit,” Derek says under his breath, abandoning his lunch and swinging his backpack over his shoulder.

“Um,” starts the third voicemail. “I’m—I don’t like this. I don’t know where my dad is. I thought we were a team. I thought you’d be here.” Stiles pauses there, and Derek’s skin crawls at the sound of his breathing—short, panicked huffs of air like he’s on the verge of crying. “Please get here soon.”

“Fuck!” Derek snarls, breaking into a run, heading for the parking garage as fast as he can. According to his phone, Stiles left that voicemail twenty minutes ago, but that’s too fucking long. He swings himself into his car and jams it into drive, skidding out of the garage. He tries to call Stiles, but it just rings and goes to voicemail. Derek swears again, panic and guilt rising in his throat. They should have had a plan, he should have left the volume on, fuck school. He calls Laura because he’s freaking out and he needs to hear her calming voice, but her phone goes to voicemail too, and what the fuck is going on today? “Laura,” he says hoarsely. “Laura, it’s happening, Stiles is having the baby. Call me back.”

Derek runs three red lights; it’s a good thing there’s not many people on the road at this time of day. He makes it to the hospital in record time, nearly sprinting from the parking lot into the lobby. “Stiles Stilinski?” he pants at the nurse behind the desk.

She gives him a skeptical look and then gives her computer screen an agonizingly slow scan. “There’s no one here by that name.”

Thank god they talked about this. “Stanislaw Stilinski?” Derek tries.

The nurse nods curtly. “Are you family?”

“I’m his alpha,” Derek says desperately. “He’s waiting—”

“Down the hallway to your left and up two floors,” the nurse says patiently. “Room 305.”

Derek nods his thanks and takes off down the hall—not running, because he thinks he’ll get yelled at if he tries, but a brisk trot that does little to quell his anxiety. He nearly collapses in relief when he reaches the right room, not even knocking before opening the door; he knows Stiles is in there as soon as Derek’s within fifty feet, his scent, sour with fear, clouding the hallway.

Stiles is hunched in a hospital bed with his knees drawn up as far as he can bring them, his face
flushed, an oxygen tube hooked under his nose. He looks up sharply when Derek opens the door, and his face goes slack in relief. “Derek,” he says weakly. His eyes are red and watery, like he’s been crying—or he’s just about to start.

“Hey,” Derek says, swiftly settling down on the edge of the bed, opening his arms so Stiles can tuck himself up against Derek’s chest, anxiously rubbing their cheeks together. “I’m so fucking sorry,” Derek murmurs. “I was in class. I only just got your messages.”

“I know,” Stiles whispers. “I know that, I’m sorry. I just—I freaked out. Turns out that these real-deal contractions are really fucking painful.”

“I’m sorry,” Derek breathes. He presses his hand to Stiles’ cheek and pulls at his pain, watching Stiles’ eyes flutter shut. “They haven’t given you anything for the pain?”

“They said I can’t have anything yet,” Stiles says, opening his eyes partway. “My contractions aren’t close enough together.”

“Are you going in for surgery soon?”
Stiles shrugs. “I don’t know. I guess there’s a wait, and I’m not high priority.” He exhales shakily, his hand seeking out Derek’s. “I’m—kinda scared.”

“You’ll be fine,” Derek says gently.

“I’m really glad you’re here,” Stiles admits.

“Where’s your dad?”

“I don’t know,” Stiles says. “He’s not answering his phone. He’s probably out on a call, but it’s taking forever.”

“What about Scott?” Derek asks. “I’m surprised he didn’t insist on coming along.”

“He wanted to,” Stiles says, “but the lacrosse team’s heading into semi-finals and if he misses class he can’t play in the game, so I told him to stay at school. He wasn’t super happy about it.”

Derek snorts. “I can’t imagine he was. What about his mom? I thought she worked here.”
Stiles nods. “Yeah, but she’s at some all-day training thing in Redding.”

“You want to try your dad again?”


“Just one thing after another, huh?” Derek says, squeezing his hand. “You want me to try?”
Stiles nods, and Derek gets to his feet. “All right. I’ll be right back.”

Stiles almost looks like he wants to stop him, but he doesn’t say anything as Derek leaves the room. He doesn’t go far, leaning against the wall just outside the door, before he realizes that he doesn’t actually have the sheriff’s number. He shrugs; if he’s not picking up for Stiles, he probably won’t pick up for Derek, so instead Derek looks up the number for the sheriff’s station on his phone and calls that.

When a woman picks up and crisply says, “Beacon County Sheriff’s Department,” Derek says, “I need to speak to Sheriff Stilinski.”
“He’s currently out on a call,” the woman tells him. “Do you want to leave a message?”

“I need to talk to him,” Derek says insistently. “It’s about his son.”

“About Stiles?” the woman says sharply. “Is something wrong?”

“Not...exactly,” Derek says. “He’s in labor. We’re at the hospital.”

“You’re Derek?” the woman says, sounding surprised. Derek’s startled, too; he’d forgotten that Stiles had said the whole station’s like family to him. Of course they all know. Deputy Parrish had. “Is he doing all right?”

“He’s okay,” Derek tells her. “But I think he’d like his dad here.”

“Of course,” the woman says understandingly. “But he’s on the scene of a serious pile-up on the highway. I can get him over the radio, but I don’t know if he’ll be able to get to the hospital anytime soon.”

“That’s fine, I think,” Derek says. “As long as he knows.”

“I’ll make sure he does,” the woman says firmly. “Tell Stiles we’re all wishing him the best.”

“I will,” Derek says quietly. After he hangs up, he stays leaning against the wall for a moment, his brain trying to catch up with the day’s events.

He’s still resting there, rubbing at his temples, when he hears Stiles tentatively call “Derek?” from his room.

Derek spins around and jerks the door open. “Yeah?”


“What?” Derek asks, stepping back into the room and carefully closing the door behind him. “Is something wrong?”

“No,” Stiles says, but he smells like anxiety. He hesitates, looking embarrassed before he adds, “I don’t like you not being here.”

“I won’t go anywhere else,” Derek promises, sinking down in a chair next to the bed. He offers Stiles his hand and Stiles takes it gratefully.

“Did you talk to my dad?” Stiles asks hopefully.

Derek shakes his head. “I called the station,” he tells Stiles. “There’s a pile-up on the highway, but the woman who answered said she’d get him on the radio.”

“Oh,” Stiles says, his shoulders slumping. “That was probably Lisa. She and my mom used to go to the gym together.” He rubs his hands over his face wearily.

“Your dad will be here,” Derek says. “I don’t think he’d want to miss this.”

Stiles smiles halfheartedly, rubbing his free hand over his stomach absently. Derek watches him for a moment before asking, “Why are you on oxygen?”

Stiles’ cheeks flush a ruddy red. “I was hyperventilating earlier,” he mutters, not meeting Derek’s eyes. “They didn’t want me passing out.”
“It’s a stressful day,” Derek says understandingly.

Stiles is quiet for a long moment, his jaw working tightly before he says, “I don’t like feeling like this. Like I’m—helpless. Weak,” he spits.

Derek knows; he knows Stiles hates anything he does that could be perceived as an omega stereotype. “You’re not weak,” he says quietly.

Stiles barks out a semi-hysterical laugh. “If you say anything like ‘You’re the strongest person I know,’ I swear to god, I will punch you and ban you from the delivery room.”

“Fine,” Derek says, squeezing Stiles’ hand. “But you’re not weak. You did this on your own for a good chunk of the pregnancy, and even after that you were reluctant to accept help. You’re going to get through this just fine.”

Stiles watches him for a long moment, his face softening. “Thanks,” he says quietly.

Derek gives him a faint, encouraging smile. “You want to walk around a little? I hear that helps.”

“Sure,” Stiles says, his eyes still on Derek’s face. “Yeah. It’s getting boring just sitting here.”

Derek helps him out of bed, watching him unhook the oxygen tube. He’s a little shaky from sitting for so long, but Derek’s happy to support him.

“Is my butt on display?” Stiles asks, craning his head over his shoulder in an attempt to see. The hospital gown they’ve put him in is comically voluminous to accommodate his stomach, but it’s securely tied in the back.

“No butt visible,” Derek confirms, and squeezes it for good measure.

Stiles squeaks in surprise. “Don’t startle me,” he complains, leaning on Derek’s arm as they slowly approach the door. “If I tense up and then relax too suddenly, she might come shooting out.”

Derek eyes his stomach warily. “Let’s avoid that scenario, if we can.”

Stiles snorts, and they make a sedate loop of the floor, pausing by the nursery to look in at all the tiny babies in their cribs. “This time tomorrow, that’s gonna be you,” Stiles tells his stomach, patting it gently. Derek’s curious to find that Stiles doesn’t smell all that anxious anymore; if anything, he smells excited.

They don’t meet many people in their walk around the wing, but most of those they do see smile, and an older woman tells Stiles he’ll be just fine. It’s not until they’re passing the nurse’s station that Derek hears the nurses talking amongst themselves, and they must not realize that he’s a werewolf, because they’re talking about him and Stiles.

“It’s just a shame,” one of them’s say, her voice low. “He’s so young. I can’t believe his father didn’t do something.”

“That’s the problem with so many young alphas,” another says. “No one teaches them self-control and then something like this happens.”

Derek doesn’t even realize he’s stopped walking until Stiles tugs on his arm, saying, “Derek? You okay?”

“Fine,” Derek says woodenly, his eyes darting toward the nurses’ station.
Stiles frowns, looking over there too. “Are they talking about us? What are they saying?”

“Nothing,” Derek says, taking a step forward, but now Stiles doesn’t move.

“Are they being assholes?” Stiles insists. “About me? About you?”

Derek hesitates for a moment before he says, “They...don’t really have progressive opinions.”

Stiles scowls, shooting the station a glare. “Want me to go be a dick? I’m pregnant; I can act like a jerk and blame it on the hormones.”

“Stiles,” Derek sighs. “Don’t worry about it. People are going to talk. You know that.”

Stiles’ scowl doesn’t lessen. “I know,” he says moodily, “but that doesn’t make it right.”

“Don’t worry about it,” Derek says again, gently tugging him forward. “Let’s get back to the room, c’mon.”

But Stiles still digs in his heels. Derek gives him an exasperated look and Stiles says, “Look, I just want you to know, okay? I don’t regret anything, no matter what anyone else says.”

Derek manages to scrounge up a smile. “Same.”

Stiles grins at him. “Come on,” he says. “I bet I can bully a nurse into getting us both jello.”

They get back to the room and Stiles gets settled into the bed and from there it’s just a waiting game. Stiles has a contraction while Derek’s sitting next to him and his face goes pale, his hand clamping down on Derek’s like a vise. For a moment, Derek panics as Stiles’ breathing picks up, whistling harshly between his teeth. “Breathe, Stiles,” he says, and starts pulling at his pain, wincing at the black hurt that goes lacing up his arm.

“Don’t tell me what to do,” Stiles says through gritted teeth, though he sucks in a sharp breath and then another and another, until his grip on Derek’s hand begins to loosen and his body relaxes. Still, there are tears shining at the corners of his eyes when he finally slumps back against the pillows, his breathing unsteady. “This is shitty,” he says moodily. “They better cut this baby out of me soon.”

“I’m sure they will,” Derek says soothingly. “You want me to go check?”

Stiles makes a frustrated, vague gesture that Derek decides to interpret as go for it. He gets to his feet and is just about to leave the room when the door opens and a woman in a doctor’s coat steps in. It takes Derek a moment to recognize her; she’s Stiles’ doctor, Dr. Yukimura, and they met at his shower.

“Oh, hi,” Stiles says weakly.

“Stiles, Derek,” she says cordially. “How’s everyone doing?”


“You’re next in line,” Dr. Yukimura tells him, smiling faintly. Behind her, a couple nurses come into the room. “Let’s get you ready.”

“Oh?” Stiles says, his eyes going wide. “Oh—okay.”

Derek finds himself shuffled off to the side as the nurses and Dr. Yukimura bustle around Stiles, taking readings and hooking him up to an IV and getting him ready for surgery.
“You can have one person with you in the operating room,” one of the nurses tells Stiles. “Do you want your alpha with you?”

Derek can see Stiles bristle. “You mean my boyfriend?” he snaps, and the nurse’s mouth goes thin. “Obviously.” His eyes slip to Derek and he adds, “I mean, if you want to be there.”

“Of course I do,” Derek says.

Another doctor comes into the room and they roll Stiles onto his side for the epidural. Stiles clearly doesn’t like that part; he’s terrified of needles, so Derek’s allowed to squeeze back in and let Stiles grip his wrist so hard he’s pretty sure he hears the bones creak, but it’s over soon enough, and then one of the nurses is pulling Derek out of the room so he can get ready for the surgery. Stiles makes a noise of alarm. “Where are you going?”

“We have to get him suited up,” the nurse tells Stiles soothingly. “He’ll meet you in the OR.”

“Okay,” Stiles says uneasily. Derek gives him what he hopes is a reassuring smile as he leaves the room. His heart’s pounding as he follows the nurse down the hall. This is happening, he thinks frantically, forcing himself to breathe in slowly. The nurse who’s with him is one of the ones who was talking about him behind the nurse’s station, but she doesn’t say a word to him, which Derek’s grateful for. He’s got enough time to check his phone; his screen’s full of missed calls and a couple voicemails, and there’s a text from Laura that says do you want me there? let me know what’s happening!

Derek texts her back: Stiles is heading into surgery right now. I’ll keep you updated.

The nurse passes him off to another nurse Derek vaguely recognizes as one of Laura’s friends from high school, and she’s much friendlier than the first, giving him a bright smile. “Derek, right?” she asks. “Laura’s brother?”

“Yeah,” Derek says, and his voice comes out hoarse, cracking a little over the single word.

The nurse gives him a sympathetic smile. “Nervous?” Derek can only manage a nod, pulling on the scrubs she hands him. “This is the easy part,” she tells him cheerfully. “It’s raising a kid that’s difficult.”

“Thanks,” Derek says dryly, and she laughs as she helps him wash up.

“One tip for you,” she adds, leading him toward the OR. “You might want to breathe through your mouth. Alphas—and particularly werewolves—can find the scents in here a little hard to handle.”

Great, Derek thinks, his mouth going dry as he steps into the operating theatre. Stiles is already there, lying on the table, mouth a thin line as a team works at the other end of him, setting a curtain across his chest. He turns his head when Derek comes in, relief flickering across his face.

“Derek,” he says plaintively. “They shaved off my happy trail.”

One of the nurses laughs. Derek snorts as he settles onto a stool by Stiles’ head. “It’ll grow back,” he says quietly. “Are you doing okay?”

“I’m—okay,” Stiles says haltingly, though he manages to grin up at Derek. “You look like a tool with that hair net on though.”

“Shut up,” Derek says fondly.
Over by Stiles’ feet, Dr. Yukimura says, “We’re ready to begin. All right, Stiles?”

Stiles sucks in a nervous breath and nods. “Go for it,” he says, sounding a little giddy. “Are you ready?” he adds, looking at Derek.

Derek gives him a faint smile, trying to sound as calm as he can over the blood rushing in his ears. “Ready as I’ll ever be.”

Stiles exhales anxiously, his hand snaking out to find Derek’s. Derek makes the mistake of inhaling through his nose as the team works on the incision in Stiles’ stomach and for a moment he struggles not to panic at what he smells in the room—not just blood, but layers of panic and nervousness from countless operations before Stiles. Stiles smells like pain—his body knows it, even if his brain doesn’t—and Derek wants to wolf out and fight those hurting him, his fangs pressing at his gums as he struggles to control himself.

“Are you okay?” Stiles whispers, his eyes fixed on Derek’s face. “Your eyes keep flashing.”

“Instincts,” Derek murmurs, forcing himself to take several deep breaths through his mouth.

He focuses his attention on Stiles’ face, his whole world narrowing to Stiles’ features and his easy breathing, and the way he grimaces when Dr. Yukimura says, “You might feel a little tugging.”

Derek watches him and thinks about how much he loves Stiles and he says, “Thanks for giving me a chance.”

The corners of Stiles’ mouth curve up, his face soft when he says, “Wouldn’t want anyone else here with me.”

Derek smiles, leaning forward to press his forehead to Stiles’. They stay that way for a long time, hearts beating in sync, until Dr. Yukimura says, “Here she is!” and they both lift their heads to see her holding their daughter, red-faced and squirming in Dr. Yukimura’s hands.

“Shit,” Stiles breathes after a moment, “she looks like an Evelyn,” and then as if on cue, he and their baby both burst into tears.
One of the nurses gives Evelyn a quick wipe down and presses her into Stiles’ arms. They lay chest to chest the entire first hour he’s sitting in the recovery room, feeling like he’s in a dream. He stares down at her, touches her soft cheeks and tiny clenched fists, and can’t believe that she came from inside of him. She’s weighs only a little more than seven pounds, which Dr. Yukimura tells him is just shy of average, but she feels miniscule in his arms.

“Sorry,” he says to Derek, who’s sitting next to him in the recovery room. Stiles doesn’t think Derek’s taken his eyes off her since the moment Dr. Yukimura held her up for them to see, but he couldn’t say for sure because he hasn’t either. Objectively, she’s nothing special to look at; she’s got a squished up face that kind of reminds Stiles of a toad, and a patch of dark fuzz on the top of her head, but subjectively, even just looking at her pulls at something deep inside of him that loves her so intensely it’s almost frightening.

“For what?” Derek asks.

“Being so selfish,” Stiles says, and before Derek can argue, he adds, “Do you want to hold her?”

Derek’s eyes widen. “Yeah,” he says hoarsely. Stiles passes her over and Derek takes her carefully, his eyes still wide. Stiles settles back amongst his pillows to watch them, grinning as Derek carefully scents her, touching his nose to her cheeks and forehead. A deep noise almost like a cat purring comes rumbling out of Derek’s chest and to Stiles’ surprise, Evelyn, who hasn’t made a sound since crying right after the doctor pulled her out, makes a tiny noise.

“Whoa,” Stiles says, his eyes widening, and then widening further at the bright smile that breaks over Derek’s face—he’s never seen Derek smile like that. “I think she likes you,” he says, and Derek looks so pleased that Stiles wishes his legs weren’t half dead so he could climb onto his lap and kiss him. “You think she’s a werewolf?”

Derek rolls his eyes. “We’ve had this discussion,” he says, but Stiles thinks he sounds fond.

“Hey, is Evelyn okay?” Stiles asks. “As a name, I mean? I got kind of emotional back there, but—”

“It’s fine,” Derek says simply. “I like it.”

“Okay,” Stiles says, grinning faintly. “You can name the next one.”

“Why don’t we spend some time with the one we’ve got before deciding if there’s going to be more,” Derek says without skipping a beat.

“Yeah, we should probably see if we even like her first,” Stiles says cheerfully.

Derek snorts, brushing his nose against Evelyn’s forehead once more before carefully passing her back to Stiles. “I’m going to call Laura,” he says, getting to his feet and leaning in to rub his cheek against Stiles’ hair. “Okay?”

“Yeah,” Stiles says. He hesitates, then asks, “Can you see if my dad’s wandering around out there somewhere?”

“I’ll take a look,” Derek promises, pressing a kiss to Stiles’ forehead before straightening and leaving the room.
Stiles sighs softly, looking down at the baby in his arms. Evelyn squirms around before settling again, yawning widely. “Same,” he says to her, blinking slowly. His legs are starting to itch as sensation returns to the lower half of his body, and he feels a little nauseous, which one of the nurses told him was to be expected. Mostly, though, he wants to go home and sleep for about a thousand years, but he’s got to spend at least the next day at the hospital.

He still can’t quite believe that this is his baby; that this tiny, living, breathing thing came out of him. If he hadn’t been there, he might think it was all some kind of elaborate prank. “I’m your dad,” he tells Evelyn, who blinks her dark eyes sedately. He rubs his cheek against the top of her head; as a human, his senses are much weaker than Derek’s, but he can smell how Derek’s scent clings to her, and wants to add his scent to the mix, chest filling with warmth at the way she smells like family. A nurse comes in after a few minutes and gently takes Evelyn from Stiles’ arms. “We’ll clean her up while you get some rest,” she tells Stiles with a smile. “You’re going to need as much as you can get.”

“Don’t say that,” Stiles says with a tired groan. The nurse just gives him a bright smile and bustles out of the room.

Stiles exhales, feeling suddenly lonely, and gives in to the urge to close his eyes. It’s barely past three in the afternoon and it already feels like the longest day ever, an emotional rollercoaster starting with his water breaking at school (mortifying), freaking out because Derek wasn’t answering his calls (also mortifying), and then fucking giving birth (simultaneously awesome and terrifying). He wishes Derek would come back, but he ends up falling asleep before anyone else shows up in the recovery room.

When Stiles next opens his eyes, he’s back in his hospital room somehow, and Derek’s sitting next to him, Evelyn tucked into the crook of his arm. Derek’s focused on her; he looks tired too, his eyes half open as he watches her sleep. After a moment his eyes flicker to Stiles and the corners of his mouth curve up when he sees Stiles awake. “Hey,” he says softly.

“Hey,” Stiles replies sleepily, shifting his legs around; they’re hot and itchy, his skin burning. “D’d you talk to Laura?”

“Yeah,” Derek says. “She’s on her way.”

“Cool,” Stiles says, rubbing at his eye. “My dad?”

Derek nods. “He’s on his way, too. The dispatcher called.”

“Good ol’ Lisa.” Stiles yawns until his jaw cracks. “Evelyn’s middle name can be whoever gets here first.”

Derek snorts. “What if it’s your dad?”

“There’s nothing wrong with John,” Stiles tells him, grinning faintly. “I knew a guy in elementary school whose middle name was Cassandra.”

Derek rolls his eyes, then tilts his head curiously. “Someone’s coming,” he says.

“Who?” Stiles demands. “I know you know.”

Derek shoots him a sly look. “Not telling. Where’s the fun in that?”

“Jackass,” Stiles says fondly, as there’s a soft knock on the door. They both look up expectantly, and
after a moment the door opens and Stiles’ dad pokes his head in.

“Heard our family’s grown a little,” he says genially.

“Dad,” Stiles says, his throat tightening as his dad steps into the room.

“Hey, son,” his dad says, leaning down to give him a hug, pressing a gentle kiss to his temple. “I’m sorry I’m so late.”

“It’s okay,” Stiles says weakly. He gestures at Derek, who’s sitting silently, watching them. “Derek was here.”

“I’m glad he was,” his dad says, sucking in a sharp breath through his teeth when he notices Evelyn in Derek’s arm. “This her?”

“No, Dad,” Stiles says sarcastically, as Derek stands to meet his dad at the foot of the bed. “That’s someone else’s baby.”

“Glad to see they didn’t cut out your sarcasm with her,” his dad says dryly, his tanned face softening as Derek places Evelyn in his arms. “Well, now,” he says softly. “Isn’t she beautiful?” He looks at Stiles with a smile on his face, his eyes shining.

“Don’t you start,” Stiles says warningly, his own eyes burning.

His dad looks back down at Evelyn, clearing his throat. “Well,” he says again. “Congratulations to both of you. What’s her name, then?”

“Evelyn,” Derek tells him, shooting Stiles a faint smile.

Stiles, because let no one say he’s not dedicated to a joke, adds, “Evelyn John,” and grins widely at the twin exasperated looks his dad and Derek shoot him.

“Pick something else,” his dad says severely. “No grandchild of mine needs to carry my name.”

“Fine, whatever,” Stiles huffs, rolling his eyes. “You guys are such squares.”

His dad shoots him a dark look before returning his attention to Evelyn. He touches the tip of her nose, an odd look on his face; happy, but a little sad, like he’s remembering something. “You guys have a long road in front of you,” he says. “But I’m very proud of you both for making it this far.”

Stiles looks at Derek, who flushes, a pleased expression on his face. He sits back down next to the bed, his hand seeking out Stiles’ as they watch Stiles’ dad cradle his granddaughter. Stiles can’t help yawning again; having a baby is fucking exhausting. Derek squeezes his hand and quietly says, “Rest if you need to. I’ll be here.”

“Gotta make sure Dad doesn’t leave with her,” Stiles says, blinking tiredly. “He’s got this habit of walking off holding things that don’t belong to him.”

“I am right here,” his father says, sounding aggrieved. “And I don’t do that.”

“You tell that to our collection of stolen diner mugs,” Stiles tells him. “Honestly, you’re a man of the law, Dad. You should know better.”

“I’d ground you if you still lived in my house,” his dad says. “I hope she grows up to be just as much trouble as you are.”
“Oh, come on,” Stiles sighs. “Why would you wish that on Derek?’’

“Keep me out of this,’’ Derek says mildly, and Stiles’ dad laughs. He’s just handing Evelyn back to Stiles when Derek sits up straight, his eyes going to the door. Stiles doesn’t even have to ask why; he’s completely unsurprised when Laura bursts through the door, her cheeks flushed.

“Laura,’’ Derek says reproachfully, but Laura’s not paying any notice to him, all of her attention zeroed in on Evelyn in Stiles’ arms.

“Oh my god,’’ she says weakly.

“You want to hold her?’’ Stiles offers.

Laura nods fervently, but surprises him by wrapping her arms around him first, rubbing her cheek against his hair. Going to go find coffee, his dad mouths, and Stiles grins and nods. Laura finally lets him go after his dad’s left and carefully plucks Evelyn from his arms.

“Oh my god,’’ she says again, her voice softer, reverent. Laura blinks hard, tears spilling down her cheeks. Derek makes a concerned noise and gets up to go to Laura’s side, curling an arm around her shoulder, Laura presses her forehead to Derek’s, her eyes squeezed shut, and it’s only then that Stiles begins to realize just how much having a baby means to them. With almost their entire pack wiped out in one night, to be able to add even just one person back must mean more than he can even wrap his head around. Add to that that Laura loves kids—her foundation proof of that—and he totally gets the tears.

Derek murmurs something to Laura that Stiles can’t hear, but it makes Laura laugh wetly and kiss him on the cheek. “I called Cora,’’ she tells him. “I figured you hadn’t yet. She’s on her way—if you’re up to it,’’ Laura adds, turning to look at Stiles.

“Bring it on,’’ Stiles says. “I mean, I might be asleep, but Derek can entertain everyone.’’

Laura snorts quietly. “That’ll be the day.’’ Derek slugs her in the arm and she grins at him. They settle in the chairs on either side of the bed, Laura still holding Evelyn. She gently brushes her fingers over Evelyn’s face as she asks, “How are you feeling?’’

“Tired,’’ Stiles admits.

“Sleep if you need to,’’ she tells him. “And you know if you guys ever need a break, I’ll be happy to take her for a while.’’

“Dude, do you hear that?’’ Stiles says to Derek, yawning under an oncoming wave of weariness. “Your sister’s the best.’’

Derek gives him another one of his bright rare smiles. “Go to sleep,’’ he says. “You’re talking nonsense.’’

“Hey,’’ Laura says indignantly, as Stiles listens to Derek’s advice and lets his eyes drift shut, letting the sound of Derek and his sister sniping at each other good-naturedly lull him to sleep.

Stiles next opens his eyes to a room that’s washed red and gold with the setting sun. His dad’s sitting next to the bed with a coffee cup in his hand, and Derek’s standing at the end of the bed next to Cora and Laura, who’s teaching Lydia how to hold Evelyn. Stiles watches them sleepily, pleased that so many people have come to visit.
“Scott’s going to be jealous,” he tells his dad, who gives him an indulgent look.

“Why’s that?”

“Because he didn’t get to see her first,” Stiles says, snorting when Evelyn suddenly bursts into tears and Lydia jumps in surprise. They all turn to look plaintively at Stiles, and he sighs. “Give her here.”

Lydia passes Evelyn over quickly, and Stiles cradles her in his arms, brushing a finger against her cheek. “You hungry?” he asks her.

“That’s our cue to leave,” Cora says hastily, grabbing Lydia by the wrist and hauling her out of the room. Laura follows slower, winking at Stiles as she says, “We’ll go find our own dinner. Be back later.”

Stiles’ dad respectfully scoots his chair around to face the television while Stiles helps Evelyn latch onto his chest, though he says, “Scott texted me. Game’s over. He’s on his way.”

Stiles winces as he settles back against the pillows—it definitely does not feel as good as when Derek does it—but he manages to grin nonetheless, heartened by the thought of Scott. “You hear that?” he says to Derek. “Scott’s coming!”

Derek’s not really listening to him; his eyes are soft, his gaze on Evelyn. “That’s fine,” he says absently. “That means I can go home, right?”

Stiles snorts. “You’re not getting off the hook that easily.” He stretches out a hand, reaching for Derek, and Derek takes it, his eyes shifting up to Stiles’ face, his expression more open than Stiles has ever seen it. He likes all the sides of Derek he’s ever seen, but he think he likes this one the most.

Laura and Lydia and Cora return before Scott appears; they drag in chairs from somewhere—Stiles suspects Lydia and Cora probably ganged up on some poor nurse—and form a semicircle around the foot of the bed, talking cheerfully and passing Evelyn around. The room’s got a very festival-esque atmosphere, which Stiles would normally be cool with, except that he’s weary to the bone. He feels blessed to be so cared about, of course, but maybe they could all go care about him somewhere else, outside of his hearing range.

Trust his dad, alway sharp on the uptake, to notice; he gets to his feet and pointedly says, “I’m heading out for the night; it’s getting late.” He looks down at Stiles and adds with a wink, “Better put her to bed, son; it’s important you pick a bedtime and stick to it.”

Stiles has to hide a grin; that gets everyone else up on their feet. Within seconds, it’s just Stiles and his dad and Derek in the room. Stiles’ dad leans down to press a kiss to the top of his head. “Proud of you, kiddo,” he murmurs. “I’m going to tell your mom about this.”

Stiles nods, his throat suddenly tight. After the door swings shut behind his dad, Derek leans forward and quietly asks, “Your mom?”

“He means he’s going to the cemetery,” Stiles says hoarsely. Derek’s face softens and he gets to his feet, gently plucking Evelyn out of Stiles’ arms and placing her back in the crib next to the bed. Then he turns and sits on the edge of the bed and folds his arms around Stiles, his cheek pressed to the top of his head. Stiles exhales shakily, holding tight to him despite the discomfort it causes in his torso. He feels so grateful to have Derek there with him, loving him, supporting him. He swallows hard and says into Derek’s collarbone, “What do you think your mom would have thought of all of this?”

Derek’s quiet for a long moment, breathing softly against Stiles’ hair. “I don’t know,” he admits after a while. “She would have been angry, I think—but at me, not you. You would have been welcomed
into the pack right away.” He’s quiet for another long moment before adding wryly, “My dad would have thought it was hilarious.”

Stiles snorts quietly.

“What about your mom?” Derek asks softly.

“Hm,” Stiles says thoughtfully. “I think...she would have been excited. Dad told me a while ago that they always wanted more kids, but it didn’t work out that way.”

Derek doesn’t say anything, but he holds Stiles a little tighter, rubs his cheek against Stiles’ temple. They sit in silence for a while, and then Derek says, “Scott’s waiting out in the hall. He says he doesn’t want to interrupt our moment.”

“What?” Stiles exclaims, pushing Derek away. “Get in here!”

Derek snorts as the door flies open and Scott darts in, grinning widely. “Dude!” he says enthusiastically.

“Shhh,” Stiles says, matching Scott’s grin with one of his own. “She’s sleeping.”

As Scott’s face goes bright red, Derek rolls his eyes and gets to his feet. “I’m going to go find some food,” he says to Stiles. “I’ll let you two have your moment.”

Stiles blows him a kiss as he leaves, and then focuses his attention on Scott, who steps over to the crib with an awestruck look on his face. “Dude,” Scott says again, reverently this time. “She’s tiny.”

“I know,” Stiles says, still grinning as he props his head up on his hand. “It’s unreal, right?”

Scott gives him a concerned glance. “How do you feel?”

“Sore,” Stiles says. “They’re going to make me get up tomorrow, and I’m not looking forward to it.”

Scott sinks down into one of the chairs by the bed, his brow creased with worry. “That was really scary this morning, man,” he says quietly. “I thought you were going to pass out.”

Stiles winces, trying not to remember the gross feeling of his water breaking, or the terrifying realization that it was happening, or the utter panic that set in when he couldn’t get a hold of his dad or Derek. “Good thing you were there,” he says, managing to scrounge up a smile. “You were super chill.”

“Dude, I was freaking out,” Scott protests.

“Yeah, well, it didn’t look like it to me,” Stiles says. “You’re going to do great when you actually have a baby.”

Scott groans. “Never ever. Just making sure you were okay was stressful enough.”

“Speaking of,” Stiles says, a grin widening his face once more. “Where’s Kira?”

Scott’s cheeks go red, but he says, “She wanted to come, but I think her mom told her you’d be too tired. Are you going to be in here for a while? I could bring her tomorrow, if that’s okay.”

“Might be,” Stiles sighs. “I think I can leave as soon as I can walk and eat again. I’d rather be at home.” He narrows his eyes at the way Scott grins. “What?”
“Nothing,” Scott says smugly. “Just—you calling Derek’s place home. It’s cute.”

Stiles can feel his face growing hot. “It’s where I live, all right? It’s not weird.”

“I didn’t say it was weird; I said it was cute,” Scott says, still grinning. “And considering a couple months ago, you only talked about how much you hated him, I think it’s great.”

“Yeah, well, things change,” Stiles says, his face getting even hotter. “I like him a lot.”

“You more than just like him,” Scott says. “Admit it.”

“Just—shut up,” Stiles hisses. “We haven’t—I’m working up to saying it, all right?”

“Sure, sure,” Scott says easily, grinning triumphantly. He seems unable to resist adding, “I knew it.”

Stiles grimaces. “You better keep your mouth shut, or I’ll start telling you all the sordid details of our sex life.”

“I’m cool with that,” Scott says cheerfully. When Stiles glares at him, he laughs and says, “Don’t worry about it, dude.”

Stiles relaxes into his pillows, his eyes drifting to Evelyn, whose scrunched up face is relaxed in sleep. Scott twists to look at her too, his grin softening to a smile. “Seems like you’ve been waiting for this forever.”


“I’m kind of surprised you’re not freaking out,” Scott says, a faint teasing note in his voice.

“I think I’ve circled all the way back around to calm,” Stiles says ruefully. “It’ll sink in in a few days. Expect a panicked phone call from me sometime around midnight.”

Scott shakes his head. “Nah,” he says, still smiling. “You’re not going to call me. You’ve got Derek to help you now.”

“Yean, but—” Stiles pushes himself up onto one elbow, groaning a little; this is serious, and he needs to say it. “You’re my best friend,” he tells Scott solemnly. “You’ve always been there for me, and I’m not going to forget that just because I’ve started dating someone.”

Scott’s eyes go suspiciously wet before he gets up and comes over to wrap Stiles in a hug, squeezing the air out of him. Stiles whines weakly and pats him on the back, his own eyes burning a little.

“You beat up Garrett for me,” Stiles reminds him.

“He’s a tool,” Scott says, knuckling at his eyes as he lets go of Stiles. “Anyone would have.”

“You threw yourself down a flight of stairs so I could steal a pregnancy test,” Stiles points out.

Scott laughs. “I think we could have come up with a better plan if we’d given it a little more time.”

“Probably,” Stiles says with a grin, which fades after a moment. “I love you, man.”

Scott bumps him on the shoulder with his knuckles, smiling gently. “I love you too.” He swipes his hand across his eyes again and heaves out a rough breath. “I should get going. You need rest.”

“Yeah,” Stiles sighs. “You’re probably right. Is Derek out in the hall?”
Scott shakes his head. “Don’t hear him. Want me to wait until he comes back?”

“Nah, you head out,” Stiles says, waving a hand at him. “Go do your homework.”

Scott snorts as he heads for the door. “I’ll take notes for you, man. Kira and I will be back tomorrow, all right?”

“See you then,” Stiles grins. Scott blows him a kiss as he leaves and Stiles snorts, flopping back against his pillows.

The room’s very quiet now; it’s the first time he’s been completely alone since earlier that afternoon, but he doesn’t mind. He’s tired, but he’s happy; he has people who care about him, and Derek, and now, Evelyn. Stiles smiles to himself, reaching over to gently rub his finger against her pudgy cheek. Fucking unreal.

Derek returns five minutes after Scott leaves, sinking back into the chair by the bed like he was made for it. “Hey,” he says quietly.

“Hey,” Stiles echoes, fighting off a yawn.

“Sleep if you’re tired,” Derek tells him, but Stiles shakes his head.

“I’m not going anywhere,” Derek says steadily.

“Well then,” Stiles says, patting the bed next to him. “Join me?”

Derek rolls his eyes, but he gets to his feet, kicking off his shoes and climbing onto the bed behind Stiles, pressing the long warm line of his body up against Stiles’. Stiles sighs quietly, relaxing against him, feeling Derek’s heartbeat against his spine. Derek curls a careful arm over his side and nuzzles against the soft skin behind Stiles’ ear. “How do you feel?”

“ Weird,” Stiles says quietly, folding his arm over Derek’s, curling his fingers around Derek’s wrist. “I kind of got used to her being in there, moving around. Feels empty now.”

“Does it hurt?” Derek asks softly.

“A little,” Stiles admits. “Just—it’s sore.”

Derek moves his hand, very carefully splaying his fingers over the sewn up incision on Stiles’ abdomen, and pulls at his pain. Stiles thumps his head back against Derek’s shoulder as black lines go coursing up Derek’s arm. “Shit,” he sighs. “Thanks.”

Derek makes a soft noise of acknowledgement and goes back to rubbing his face against Stiles’ neck. Stiles lets his eyes drift shut, his body growing heavy against the comforting warmth of Derek’s body. “Stiles,” Derek says softly, right when Stiles is about to slip into real sleep.

“Hm?” Stiles doesn’t bother opening his eyes.

“I just wanted to say...I’m proud of you,” Derek says, almost shyly. “You made it through.”

Stiles opens his eyes, carefully shifting onto his back so he can look at Derek. “We made it through,” he corrects, but Derek shakes his head, his eyes soft.

“No,” Derek says quietly. “You did. You were the one carrying a baby inside you.”
“Yeah, well, I wouldn’t have gotten through it without you,” Stiles says. “Whatever you say.” He lifts a hand, cupping Derek’s cheek in his palm, and his heart tightens with love at the way Derek’s eyes settle half shut, content, trusting him. “Are you happy?”

Derek looks at him from under his dark lashes, a warm smile curving his lips. “Yes,” he says softly. “More than I’ve ever been.”

Stiles can’t help the grin that splits his face then, despite the stress and weariness of the day. “Me too,” he admits, almost whispering, and he is, it’s true.

Derek leans forward and kisses him—not a deep kiss, not rough or impatient, but firm and lasting. It feels like the way Derek kissed him just before he left for school, when they’d decided they’d become a real couple when Stiles turned eighteen. It’s a kiss that’s a promise Stiles never wants to break.

The next day, a stern nurse makes Stiles walk a lap around the room while she supports him on one side and Derek supports him on the other. He’s stiff, and it hurts, and he complains the entire time, but then he’s rewarded with food, so it’s not all that bad. Scott and Kira come to visit during their lunch period. Evelyn’s awake, so Scott holds her for the first time and Stiles is never going to let him live down the fact that he cries. Stiles wants to make a joke to Derek about how it must be an alpha werewolf thing, since Laura cried too, but one, Laura’s not an alpha anymore; two, Stiles cried too; and three, Derek disappeared when Scott and Kira showed up.

Derek’s still not back when Laura comes in as Scott and Kira are getting ready to leave, and it’s hard to tell who’s the most startled when Scott jerks around to face Laura with a vicious snarl, his eyes suddenly burning bright red. Laura freezes, raising her hands as if to say I come in peace, see? even as her own eyes flare yellow. Just as quickly though, Scott’s face goes bright red with embarrassment, leaving the rest of them staring at him.

“Sorry,” he breathes, sounding horrified. “I didn’t mean—“

“It’s okay, Scott,” Laura says lightly, dropping her hands. “Being an alpha comes with heightened instincts.”

Scott looks completely mortified. “Yeah, but—you’re not an enemy!”

“I’m not in your pack, either,” Laura says gently. “It’s fine, Scott. It just takes a little getting used to.”

Scott looks down at his hands like he’s never seen them before, and then gives Laura an anxious look. “Should we—”

“We can talk later,” Laura says with a faint smile. “You guys should get back to school.”

“I guess,” Scott says with a rueful look at Kira, who beams at him, and then at Stiles. Stiles grins back. Scott looks dispirited, but he says, “I’ll see you later, man.”

“See you, dude,” Stiles says with a grin. “Thanks for coming, Kira.”

Kira gives him a cheerful wave and heads for the door, followed by Scott, who gives Laura an apologetic look before following Kira out. Laura finally moves, sinking into the chair next to Stiles’ bed with a sigh.

"Is it weird?" Stiles asks her. Laura gives him an enquiring look, and he clarifies, "To be around
Scott? Since you used to be the alpha?"

"It's not easy," Laura admits quietly. She rubs a hand over her face, a gesture that reminds Stiles of his dad.

"You look like you need to hold a baby," he says, offering her Evelyn, who's fast asleep.

"I do need to hold a baby," Laura agrees with a faint smile, taking Evelyn from him and closing her eyes for a moment, rubbing her nose against Evelyn's soft hair. "Where's Derek?"

Stiles shrugs. "Dunno. Getting lunch, maybe."

Laura nods, her gaze falling to the baby in her arms. The room falls silent, and Stiles shifts a little awkwardly, not sure what to do with himself. He knows Laura a little now—better than he did a couple months ago, at least—but he's never really been alone with her; they hung out in the kitchen at the Hale house, but Derek was only a couple feet away. She still kind of intimidates him, even though she's not the alpha anymore.

It's Laura who breaks the silence first, however; she lifts her head and asks, "So, do you know what you're doing about school yet?"

Stiles nods. "I get next week off," he says, "and then the county's got a school program for—for people like me. With kids. You know."

Laura nods slowly, watching him intently. Unlike Derek, her eyes are dark brown and difficult to read; Stiles isn't sure what she's thinking. "Derek says you're smart," she says. "You're taking AP classes. They offer those in this program?"

"Well—no," Stiles admits a little unhappily. "It's really just so I can finish high school."

"What about college?" Laura asks, her expression not changing.

Stiles shrugs. "I have offers," he says. "Decision day is next Friday."

Laura smiles faintly. "But you're going somewhere."

"Somewhere," Stiles says firmly.

Laura nods again, a thoughtful expression on her face. "Is there any reason why you're going to the alternative program instead of going back to your high school?" she asks. "If you're worried about paying for childcare, you know—money's not an issue."

Stiles hesitates. "I know. I just..." It's not like he doesn't want to finish out the rest of the year at the school he’s familiar with, where all of his friends are, taking the classes he’s spent all year in, but if he goes to the alternative program, he’ll have Evelyn at his side all day. And sure, he knows the Hales would help pay for a babysitter, but the thought of leaving her with a stranger doesn’t sit right with him.

"Fair enough," Laura says when he tells her this. She leans back in her chair, cradling Evelyn in one arm so she can tuck her hair behind her ear with her free hand. They sit in silence for a long moment, Laura with a thoughtful look on her face, before she abruptly says, “I could watch her for you.”

“What?” Stiles says, startled.

“I could take her to the office during the day,” Laura says. “And you and Derek can go to school.”
“Oh, no,” Stiles says immediately. “No, I couldn’t ask you to do that—”

“You’re not asking,” Laura says, smiling. “I’m offering. You’re going to have to make a lot of sacrifices for her, Stiles, but this isn’t one.”

Still, Stiles hesitates. Laura gives him a patient look and says, “Look, it’s not a big deal; she’ll be with pack all day, and it’ll only be for a month or two until you guys are done with classes. I don’t mind.”

“You’re sure?” Stiles asks slowly.

Laura nods. “I wouldn’t be offering if I didn’t mean it,” she says firmly. “Talk to Derek. Think it over.”

“Okay,” Stiles says. Derek will probably be all for it, he thinks; he’d trust Laura with his life.

Derek himself reappears ten minutes later in fresh clothes, his hair damp. He’s got a bag in his hands, which Stiles recognizes as the one he’d packed for the hospital days ago, and the baby carrier from the car in the other. “You went home?” Stiles asks. Derek nods, depositing the bag at the foot of the bed and plucking Evelyn out of Laura’s arms. Evelyn wakes with a noise of complaint, waving her fat arms around; Stiles grins at the low rumbling noise Derek makes, and the way Evelyn stills, seemingly awestruck.

“Are they releasing you soon?” Laura asks.

“By dinnertime, I think,” Stiles nods. He wriggles his toes. “Now that I’ve got my sea legs back, it’s just a matter of time.”

Laura leaves soon after that, kissing all three of them on the cheek before disappearing out the door. Evelyn falls back asleep, lulled by Derek, and Stiles and Derek nap too, cramped together on the small hospital bed. A nurse wakes them a couple hours later and Stiles is made to walk a couple laps around the room to prove he can, and then once he’s shown he can use the bathroom, that’s it—he and Evelyn are cleared to leave.

“Doesn’t it seem strange to you?” Stiles says to Derek, signing the papers a nurse shoves at him. It feels weird to be wearing jeans; his legs itch.

Derek, who’s got his head tilted to watch Evelyn, safely latched into the baby carrier, says, “What’s strange?”

“That this is all there is to this?” Stiles presses, as the nurse gathers her papers and leaves. “No one tells us how to do anything—we can just leave? With a baby?”

Derek gives him a placid look. “People have been doing this for thousands of years without a problem. What did you expect?”

“I don’t know,” Stiles sighs. “Maybe some kind of card, like a driver’s license. Forty hours of practice before you can get it.”

“What, and they give you someone else’s baby to practice with?” Derek retorts.

Stiles grins at him. “Nah, it’d be one of those dolls that won’t stop crying unless you cradle it.”

Derek snorts, bending to grasp the handle of the baby carrier. “I think we’ll be fine. You ready?”
Stiles breathes in deeply and nods, slinging his bag over his shoulder. They walk out to the parking lot together, taking it slow, Derek keeping a steadying hand on his back. Stiles leans against the side of the car while Derek fastens the car seat to its base, breathing in the fresh air. It feels good to be outside; he was only in the hospital for two days, but it felt like weeks.

“I’m going to ride in the back,” he tells Derek, when Derek straightens.

“She’s not going anywhere,” Derek says, but he moves out of the way anyway, waiting for Stiles to lower himself into the back next to Evelyn before closing the door for him.

They’re quiet on the drive to the loft, most of Stiles’ attention focused on Evelyn, who’s sleeping peacefully. Every time he looks up, though, he finds Derek watching him, a serene expression on his face. Stiles turns back to Evelyn, a pleased smile curving his lips.

When they get back to the apartment, Stiles takes Evelyn out of her carrier and gently places her in her crib and then he just stands there, watching her tiny chest rise and fall with every breath. Derek’s moving around in the kitchen, but after a couple minutes he comes into the nursery to check on them, and his face softens when he sees Stiles standing there.

“You okay?” he asks quietly.

“Yeah,” Stiles says softly, swallowing against an ache in his throat. Derek, looking a little concerned, steps up next to him, curling an arm around his waist, nuzzling against his hairline. Stiles exhales shakily and turns into him, pressing his cheek to Derek’s. “We’re parents,” he whispers, awed and scared.

One of Derek’s hand comes up to grip the back of his neck, holding him steady and secure. “I know,” he says. “We’re going to be fine.”

“How are you not freaking out?” Stiles demands. “Aren’t you—doesn’t this scare you?”

“I’m terrified,” Derek admits quietly, “but—we have our families and our friends...and each other. I think we’ll be okay. Don’t you?”

Stiles nods, knowing he’s right, and knowing that things could have turned out so much worse if he hadn’t swallowed his pride and asked for help and forgiveness. If he hadn’t passed out at the track meet, he probably would have kept hiding his pregnancy until it became impossible to keep it from his dad any longer. If he hadn’t come back to Derek, he doesn’t know what would have happened; it would have been a lot more difficult for sure, surviving on his dad’s salary and lacking the emotional support of an alpha he so desperately craved. He doesn’t know what would have happened when Ms. Blake took him. Maybe he would have given the baby up to her, or maybe he’d be dead.

“Come on,” Derek says, stepping back and taking Stiles’ hand in his. “Let’s go rest.”

The next week passes quickly; Stiles spends most of it resting, recovering from the birth. Derek takes the week off from school, though Stiles tries to protest that he doesn’t need to; although he knows it’s not going to last very long, taking care of Evelyn is easy right now—all she does is nurse and sleep. He thinks he’d be fine alone for a couple hours while Derek’s at class, but Derek’s insistent about staying with him, and if he’s being honest, Stiles doesn’t protest all that hard. Spending time with Derek is no hardship and anyway, he’s still sore and stiff, so when Evelyn cries at night, it’s Derek who rises to get her and comforts her, unless she’s hungry, in which case he brings her in for Stiles to nurse.
Stiles feels a little guilty, but he’ll make up for it when he’s able and anyway, he’s discovering he’s got a serious soft spot when it comes to seeing Derek interact with Evelyn. Every time he sees Derek holding her, murmuring to her, or singing softly to her, or laid out on the couch with her on his chest, it’s like his heart melts, so if Derek wants to stick around, Stiles isn’t going to stop him. It’s probably the stupid omega part of him, but he cannot fucking wait to for the soreness to pass so he can jump Derek’s bones and reward him for being such a good father.

They get a lot of visitors that week, after a couple initial days to themselves. Laura and Stiles’ dad both come and go, always bringing food with them. Scott comes over with a bunch of Stiles' homework so he doesn’t fall too far behind, and while Stiles struggles his way through AP Calculus work, Scott lies on the floor, watching Evelyn squirm around on a blanket. It’s the first time he’s ever been in the loft, but he doesn’t even seem interested in looking around, absolutely fascinated by Evelyn.

“She’s not going to do anything interesting, dude,” Stiles says, looking up from his textbook. “Except poop, maybe.”

“I just don’t understand how she’s so small, man,” Scott says. “How does something like this grow into a person?”

Stiles snorts. “I’m glad she’s not any bigger; carrying her would have been an even bigger fucking pain than it was.” Scott gives him a scandalized look and he says, “What?”

“Language,” Scott replies severely.

Stiles rolls his eyes. “She’s not picking up words quite yet.”

Scott sniffs haughtily. “Doesn’t hurt to get in the habit early, dude.”

Stiles rolls his eyes even harder. “Just because you and Allison babysat her aunt’s kid a couple times, that doesn’t make you a parenting expert.”

Scott laughs. “Shut up,” he says good-naturedly. “You shut up,” Stiles retorts. “Get over here and help me with my homework.”

“Lydia’s the math ace,” Scott protests, but like the good friend he is, he bundles Evelyn up into his arms and sits down at the dining table with Stiles, leaning in to see the list of problems. “Oh, easy, you just—” He starts writing on the paper, carefully balancing Evelyn in his free arm.

“Easy, he says,” Stiles mutters. “Just when did you become a calculus pro?”

Scott looks highly offended. “I study!” he says indignantly and then, after a pause, admits, “Kira’s been helping me.”

“Ah, yes, Coach taught us this in Econ,” Stiles says wisely. “Trickle down.”

Scott grins and gently punches him on the arm, then switches his attention back to Evelyn while Stiles goes back to work. In the en suite bathroom, where Derek’s taking a shower, the water switches off, and Stiles can hear the shower curtain being pulled aside. Scott looks at Stiles and makes an exaggerated face, rolling his eyes pointedly toward the bathroom. Stiles scowls at him, not quite sure, but at the same time pretty sure Scott wants to know if he’s said I love you yet. STFU, he scribbles on the side of his worksheet. Scott sticks his tongue out at him.

“What about Kira, huh?” Stiles hisses. “You don’t have any right to go after me.”
“We are taking it slow,” Scott says proudly.


“Oh,” Stiles says, blinking a couple of times. “I don’t have a problem with it, but you should probably ask Derek.”

Scott nods cheerfully and waits for the bedroom door to swing open and Derek to step out before asking the same. Derek freezes, his eyes flickering from Evelyn to Stiles to Scott, a frown beginning to furrow his brow. “You’re—” He begins, and then stops, clearly trying to find the right words. “You’re not pack,” he says eventually, polite but careful.

Scott deflates. “Oh,” he says. “Right.” He gives Derek an apologetic look. “Sorry, I didn’t meant to—I don’t really know much about werewolf politics.”

Derek nods stiffly, but doesn’t move. There’s a tension in the air that wasn’t there a minute ago, and Stiles shifts in his chair uneasily. “Come on, Derek,” he says uncertainly. “He didn’t mean anything by it.” Derek nods again, but he doesn’t seem inclined to move until Stiles reaches over and takes Evelyn out of Scott’s arms. Only then does Derek step out from the bedroom doorway and cross the living room to sit on Stiles’ other side, a frown still on his face.

“I’m really sorry,” Scott says to Derek. “I didn’t know it was that big a deal.” He heaves a sigh, looking down at his hands. “I guess there’s a lot I don’t know about being an alpha.”

“You need to learn,” Derek says seriously. “When you were an unaligned omega, your actions were inconsequential. As an alpha, you’re a diplomat. The things you do and say have consequences; say the wrong thing to the wrong person, and you could lose your rank—or your life.”

Scott looks stricken. Stiles glares warningly at Derek, who looks back at him seriously. “What can I do?” Scott asks helplessly. “I don’t know any of this stuff.”

“Laura will teach you, I told you that,” Derek says, somewhat impatiently. “If you hadn’t avoided her all last summer, you might actually know something by now.”

Scott looks guilty. “Stop being an asshole,” Stiles snaps at Derek.

“I’m not trying to be,” Derek says to him, his mouth thinning.

“Well, you’re certainly not being nice,” Stiles says waspishly. Derek narrows his eyes at him, his jaw tightening.

Scott waves his hands around placatingly. “Guys, hey, stop,” he says plaintively. “Look—I’m sorry. I’ll talk to Laura and get things sorted out, all right? I’m sorry.”

“You don’t have anything to apologize for,” Stiles says, his eyes not leaving Derek’s face. “You didn’t know.”

“...okay,” Scott says after a long, uncomfortable pause. “I, um, told Kira I’d meet up with her, so I’m just going to go.”

“Thanks for stopping by,” Stiles says. Derek doesn’t say anything, and they stare at each other in
stony silence until the door closes behind Scott, at which point Stiles hisses, “What the fuck is wrong with you?”

Derek sets his jaw and says, “He’s not pack. He doesn’t have any right—”

“Who the fuck cares?” Stiles retorts furiously. “I don’t care how fucking possessive you’re feeling; he’s my best friend, and you don’t get to treat him like that.”

“My family spent decades building positive relationships with the packs in this area,” Derek says icily, “and they need to be maintained.”

“Yeah?” Stiles says mulishly. “And why can’t Laura do that?”

“Because this town is no longer under our control,” Derek snaps. “Scott’s the alpha now; it’s his responsibility, but if he doesn’t know how to handle himself amongst other werewolves, he could ruin all that work, or worse.”

“How’s he supposed to know?” Stiles says. “He wasn’t born into this world like you were.”

Derek heaves an exasperated sigh. “That’s what I’m saying,” he says, frustrated. “Laura wanted to teach him, but he ignored her.”

“Can you blame him?” Stiles retorts. “If you were bitten against your will, would you want anything to do with werewolves?”

“No,” Derek says grudgingly, after a long moment. “But I’d at least want to be informed.”

Stiles shuts his mouth, glaring at Derek resentfully. Derek meets his gaze for a moment and then abruptly stands. “I’m going for a walk,” he announces grimly.

“Whatever,” Stiles says sourly. When Derek gestures at him for Evelyn, Stiles passes her over without a word and returns his attention to his homework, staring at his textbook a little too fixedly as Derek straps Evelyn into her stroller and leaves the apartment. Stiles gives him a couple extra minutes after the door’s closed to get into the elevator and out of earshot before he sighs, dropping his head to the open page before him.

That was, he realizes glumly, the first time he and Derek have ever fought. He doesn’t feel all that great about it. He feels even worse as his anger wears away, replaced by guilt. The apartment is too quiet, the sound of his pencil too loud against the paper. He realizes that this is the first time he’s been alone—truly alone, without even a baby inside of him—in months. He’s not sure he likes it. Stiles finds himself glancing at the door every few minutes, waiting, hoping, that Derek will be back soon. He’ll apologize; Derek was rude to Scott, sure, but Stiles shouldn’t have blown up at him. He’s tired and on edge, he thinks, or maybe it’s just being cooped up in the loft. He wishes he was outside with Derek and Evelyn, enjoying the late afternoon sunshine.

Stiles sighs again and makes himself finish his homework with all the enthusiasm he can muster, which is zero to none. Derek’s not back by the time he’s done, so he despondently wanders around the apartment for a few minutes, tidying the little mess there is. Then, when Derek’s still not back, he goes and lies down in the their bed, which is big and comfortable and smells like them. It settles him a little, relaxing him enough that he doesn’t even realize he’s fallen asleep until the bed dips beside him and he opens his eyes to semi-darkness. Derek’s sitting next to him, his hand outstretched like he was about to touch Stiles.

“Hi,” Derek says uncertainly.
“Hey,” Stiles replies wearily, grinding the heel of his palm into one of his eyes. “What time’s it?”

“Almost eight,” Derek tells him quietly.

“Evie?”

“Asleep.”

Stiles nods sleepily, pushing himself upright so he and Derek are eye-to-eye. “I’m sorry for earlier,” he says. “I overreacted.”

Derek shakes his head slowly. “No,” he says. “You were right; I was being an asshole. It just—got under my skin. Scenting’s—”

“A big deal,” Stiles finishes quietly. “I get it.”

“I’m sorry,” Derek says. “I do like Scott. I don’t want him to get hurt.”

“He’ll appreciate that,” Stiles tells him. “Someday.”

Derek sighs. “I’m...not good at being a nice person,” he says.

“Are you kidding me?” Stiles asks, staring at him. “If you’re not nice then that makes me—I don’t know, Satan, maybe.”

Derek gives him a weary look. “I’m not,” he says. “I’m impatient, I get angry too easily—”

“You’re human,” Stiles says, and then amends, “or close to it, anyway. You’re good to me, and you’re good to Evelyn. That’s all I care about.” He shifts closer to Derek, close enough that the sides of their thighs touch. “I’m far from perfect. It’s okay.”

Derek watches him for a long moment, his face dark with shadows in the gloom of the room, and lifts his hand to touch Stiles’ face, his thumb brushing over Stiles’ cheekbone. Stiles leans into his touch, closing his eyes as Derek leans forward to press a kiss to his forehead. When Derek’s hand urges him to tilt his chin up, Stiles does without resistance, a thrill of relief running down his spine when Derek’s lips touch his. Stiles sighs quietly as Derek moves to his neck, and when he sinks back against the bed, Derek moves with him, shifting to straddle him.

It’s been months since they could fit together like this, chest to chest, Stiles realizes. Derek doesn’t drop his weight on him, mindful of the still-healing incision below Stiles’ belly button, but it feels so good to be face to face without the swell of his stomach between them. If Stiles wasn’t still a little stiff, he’d hook his legs around Derek’s waist and let him go to town on him.

“Tell me if I hurt you,” Derek murmurs.

“Told you you’re a good person,” Stiles breathes, dragging his lips against Derek’s jaw. “Some people wouldn’t bother asking.”

Derek makes a noise that almost sounds embarrassed as he ducks his head, scraping his teeth over Stiles’ adam’s apple. Stiles sighs happily, stroking his hands down Derek’s back, squeezing at his ass. Derek growls softly, digging his teeth into Stiles’ neck a little harder in retaliation, hard enough that Stiles will probably bruise—not that he cares, since he’s not going back to school for a few more
days, and it’s not like he has to hide Derek from his dad anymore. Stiles grins up at the ceiling, trailing his fingers through Derek’s hair. He doesn’t have to hide anything anymore.

Derek pulls back to look at him, smiling when he sees Stiles smiling. He brushes his fingers against Stiles’ cheek, his thumb swiping over Stiles’ lips. Stiles likes the way his face goes soft when he smiles, but he likes even more the way yellow bleeds into his eyes when Stiles sucks Derek’s thumb into his mouth. Derek exhales shakily and says, “You’re sure you want to go down that path?”

Stiles nods fervently. Derek sits back, his eyes fixed on Stiles as he pushes down his sweatpants. He’s just got them halfway down his thighs when he lifts his head and pauses. Stiles is about to ask him what’s wrong when Evelyn starts crying in the nursery.

“You heard her?” Stiles asks Derek.

“Yes,” Derek sighs, pulling his sweatpants back up.

Stiles can’t help but laugh at how disgruntled he looks. “I have a feeling this isn’t going to be the only time we’re interrupted.”

Derek gives him a dark look that fades into fondness as he climbs off the bed. “Yeah,” he says. “I bet you’re right.”

Stiles sits upright as Derek leaves the room, scooting back to lean against the pillows. He closes his eyes as Evelyn’s crying continues; if he had werewolf hearing, he’d probably be able to hear Derek talking to her, or maybe singing his growly lullaby. Instead, he just hears Evelyn’s cries grow louder and nearer, and he opens his eyes to see Derek carrying her into the bedroom. She looks tiny in his arms, flailing her fists around angrily as she wails.

“Hungry,” Derek says with a wince, handing her over. “I think.”

“Is that so?” Stiles asks Evelyn solemnly. She blinks and stops crying abruptly. “No? Did you just miss me?” He sighs when she screws up her face, on the verge of tears again. “Guess not. Hungry it is.” He tugs at the loose collar of his shirt until he can pop a nipple out, wrinkling his nose when she latches on. “Doesn’t feel as good as when you do it,” he says to Derek, who snorts.

“I’d hope not,” he replies, sinking back down on the bed. Derek stretches out next to Stiles, his head on Stiles’ hip, watching them. Stiles gives him a faint smile, reaching out to run his free hand through Derek’s soft hair, heart swelling with fondness as Derek’s eyes drift shut.

The next day is Thursday, and Evelyn is officially one week old. Stiles celebrates by bullying Derek into driving him to the sheriff’s station, where he shows her off to all of the deputies and staff. Derek stays in the car; Stiles thinks he’s a little afraid of cops, which is kind of adorable. Not that Stiles blames him in this case; anyone who can do simple math can figure out that Stiles was underage when he and Derek first got together, and even if his dad’s decided he’s not going to do anything about it, Stiles knows Derek has every right to still be wary.

At any rate, they all love Evelyn, who doesn’t put up a fuss about being passed around from person to person. She’s a very solemn baby; she makes little noise apart from crying when she’s hungry, and sometimes responding to Derek’s deep rumblings with little grumblings of her own. He can’t wait until she’s old enough to laugh, he thinks, smiling faintly as he watches Deputy Knox tickle Evie’s sides.

His dad emerges from his office after an oddly long amount of time, and he stands proudly with
Stiles for a moment, a smile on his face as he watches his deputies, before he quietly says, “There’s someone I’d like you to meet.”

Stiles gives him a confused glance, but his father’s expression gives nothing away, so Stiles collects Evelyn from Lisa, the daytime operator, and follows his dad into his office. There’s a man Stiles has never seen before sitting by the desk, long-limbed and dark-skinned. He turns when they enter, his gaze serene and knowledgable.

“This is Dr. William Carver,” Stiles’ father says. “He’s the head chair of the Pacific Druidic Council. Doctor, this is my son, Stiles.”

Stiles’ mouth falls open in surprise; according to his dad, the council’s drawing up a case against Ms. Blake. “Hi,” he says, shaking the hand Dr. Carver offers him.

“Stiles,” the doctor says gravely. “I wish to offer you the council’s sincerest apologies. Jennifer Blake should have been caught long before she began her sacrifices.”


“But others did not,” Dr. Carver says grimly.

“No,” Stiles agrees quietly, holding Evelyn a little tighter. “Um—what’s going to happen to her?”

“Dr. Carver’s here to oversee her transfer to their control,” Stiles’ dad tells him. “What happens to her after that is up to them to decide.”

“There will be a trial,” Dr. Carver tells Stiles.

“Am I going to have to testify?” Stiles asks reluctantly. He’s not sure he could do it; he never wants to be in the same room as Ms. Blake ever again.

But Dr. Carver shakes his head. “No, Stiles,” he says. “Your written statement is enough. We have our own methods of discerning her guilt.”

Stiles stares at him. “If—if she’s found guilty, are you going to kill her?” He’s not sure how he’d feel about that; his gut says fuck her, but his conscience fights it.

Dr. Carver meets his eyes for a long moment before he says “No.” Stiles wishes he had werewolf hearing, because he can’t tell if the man is lying or not. “This is your child?” he adds, gaze dropping to Evie.


“Evelyn,” Dr. Carver repeats solemnly. “May I offer her a blessing?”

“Uh…” Stiles says uncertainly, glancing at his dad for reassurance. His dad nods, and he looks back at Dr. Carver. “Okay?”

Dr. Carver bends to rummage in a bag at his feet; he pulls out a small jar and then stands, and Stiles is slightly alarmed by how tall he is. He bends over Evelyn, unscrewing the top of the jar so he can dip in a long finger, which comes out coated in a chalky white powder. He carefully dabs this on Evelyn’s face—Stiles is a little startled to see that she doesn’t even seem to notice—and then says something brief in a soft, rolling tongue. For a moment, the white marks on Evie’s face flare pearly bright and then they fade, leaving no trace of the powder behind. Stiles stares.
“Thank you,” his father says pointedly.

Stiles blinks and says, “Yeah—thanks.” He’s not quite sure what just happened, but he thinks it’s good.

Dr. Carver leaves with a deputy, heading to the county jail to oversee Ms. Blake’s transfer, and Stiles hangs out at the station a little while longer—until his dad gets pulled out on a call.

He walks with Stiles outside, carrying Evie’s carrier for him, and says, “So where’s your boyfriend?”

“Hiding in the car,” Stiles says. “I think he’s afraid of you guys.” His dad doesn’t say anything, and when Stiles looks at him, he’s got a guilty expression on his face. “Did you do something?”

“Of course not!” Dad snaps. He pauses and then says, “I may have pulled him over once or twice and given him a talking-to.”


“I was angry,” his father says sheepishly. “Thought you deserved better.”

“He’s better than anything I deserve,” Stiles say angrily.

His father makes a soothing motion with his free hand. “I know,” he says gently. “I’m coming to understand that.”

“Good,” Stiles says firmly, as they step out the front doors and into the bright morning sunshine.

Derek’s parked in one of the visitor’s spots, but he gets out when Stiles and the sheriff approach, offering the sheriff a polite “Good morning.”

“Morning,” Stiles’ dad returns. Derek takes the baby carrier from him and as he turns to latch it into the back seat, Stiles’ dad says to Stiles, “Don’t forget you’ve only got a day left before you need to make a decision on school.”

Stiles winces; part of the reason he’d wanted to come to the station was to distract himself from the knowledge that by tomorrow afternoon, he’s got to decide where he’s going to college. “I know,” he says glumly.

“Any thoughts?” his dad presses.

Stiles sighs. “Not yet. I’ll pick something, don’t worry,” he adds, at his dad’s pointed stare. “Just—I need to think.”

His dad points a finger at Derek and says, “You make sure he makes the right choice.”

“Yes, sir,” Derek says solemnly.

“Dad,” Stiles says, aggrieved.

“Fine, fine, I’ve got to get going,” his dad says, wrapping an arm around Stiles’ shoulders and pressing a quick kiss to his temple. “You boys stay out of trouble.”

“Unlikely,” Stiles says, shooting a sly grin at Derek, who rolls his eyes in sync with Stiles’ dad.

They get back into the car as the sheriff ambles off to his cruiser, and Derek asks, “Good visit?”
“Good visit,” Stiles confirms, grinning when Derek reaches over the dash to take his hand; he’s such a freakin’ softy.

“You want to go get breakfast somewhere?” Derek asks.

“Fuck yeah!” Stiles says enthusiastically.

“Language,” Derek admonishes, sounding exactly like Scott. “Not in front of the baby.”

They go to a twenty-four hour diner down the road Stiles has visited with his dad many times before, usually in the middle of late night shifts when his dad had been unable to find him a babysitter when he was a kid. All the waitresses there knew him by name, and Derek shifted around impatiently while they all exclaimed over Evie.

“She doesn’t seem to mind people,” Stiles says when they’ve finally been seated in a booth.

Derek frowns vaguely as he looks down at her, her carrier turned sideways to fit on the bench seat next to him. “No,” he agrees.

“Not like you, then,” Stiles says, grinning when Derek turns his frown on him. “What? It’s true.”

Derek sniffs haughtily. “I value quality over quantity,” he says.

“Oh yeah?” Stiles says, resting his chin on his hand. “How does Evie rate?”

“Mm,” Derek says, frowning deeper. “Well, she doesn’t talk at all, so I think that puts her at the top of the list.”

“What about me?” Stiles demands, outraged.

Derek gives him a sarcastic look. “You talk a lot, but you’re good in bed, so you get…third.”


“Laura,” Derek says solemnly. He keeps the serious face on until Stiles huffs, and then his eyes crinkle up at the corners in amusement. A moment later, however, his nose wrinkles, and he turns to look at Evie again. “She smells weird.”

“Diaper change?” Stiles suggests.

Derek shakes his head, frowning for real now. “Kind of—herbal?”

“Oh,” Stiles says, his expression clearing. “I know.” He tells Derek about Dr. Carver and the blessing, ending sheepishly with, “Is that okay? I should have asked you first—”

Derek shakes his head. “It’s fine.”

“Guess I need to get used to making decisions together, huh?” Stiles says ruefully.

Derek smiles faintly, reaching across the table to take Stiles’ hand. “We’ve got time to get it right.”

Stiles squeezes his hand, his throat going a little tight. It’s a welcome distraction when their food arrives, and Stiles is halfway through his stack of blueberry pancakes before something occurs to him and his head shoots up. “Is this our first date?” he hisses at Derek, who chokes on his coffee.

When he’s gotten his breath back, Derek squints at Stiles and says, “I’m not sure it counts if our
daughter’s here.”

Ignoring the secret thrill he gets at hearing Derek say our daughter, Stiles retorts, “Well, if that’s the case, we never would have been able to go on a date, since you knocked me up like ten minutes after we met.”

Derek frowns, but rallies to shoot back, “As I recall, you were the one who approached me.”

“Mmhmm,” Stiles says contentedly. “You’re hot stuff, and I needed to lock that down. Took me eight months, but I did, didn’t I?”

Derek rolls his eyes but doesn’t argue; Stiles counts that as a win.

Stiles spends the early afternoon working on classwork, and then, very reluctantly, turns his attention to the matter of what college he’s going to go to. He got accepted to every single one he applied for, which doesn’t make the choice any easier, and none of them are out of state, which doesn’t help him narrow things down either. Derek’s made it clear that he doesn’t care where Stiles goes—and that money’s no object, not like Stiles is ever going to let him pay for school. Besides, even though some of the schools he’s been accepted to do cost more, the various financial aid packages he’s been offered basically even them all out—so no help there, either.

Stiles sighs and spreads the acceptance letters from each school out over the table. He already made pro and con lists for each of them with Ms. Morrell weeks ago, but nothing jumps out at him as overly positive or negative. Even the few campus tours he and his dad did didn’t really help; when they went, Stiles was in the middle of his pregnancy, angling over Derek, and couldn’t really focus on his surroundings.

Stiles sighs again. He just wants a freakin’ political science degree—maybe; he’s not even sure—and he can go anywhere for that. Maybe he should just pull a name out of a hat. He can always transfer.

As Stiles, giving up for the moment, gathers up his papers, his eyes fall to the letter on top, which is from Humboldt State, and his mind drifts back to the conversation he and Laura had had about making sacrifices. His mouth falls open; suddenly, he knows the answer.

Stiles drops the papers on the table and gets to his feet, eager to tell Derek, but when he rounds the end of the couch and sees the way Derek’s slouched, a pensive expression on his face, he falters.

“Hey,” he says hesitantly. “Everything okay?”

Derek, who’d been staring at, but not watching, the tv, completely in his own world, jolts in surprise.

“I’m—it’s nothing,” he says, looking almost guilty.

“Something’s on your mind,” Stiles says insistently. “Talk to me.”

Derek hesitates and then asks, “Were you really a virgin the night we met?”

Stiles blinks. “That’s what you’re worried about?” Derek frowns at him and Stiles says, “How did you even know that?”

“Cora,” Derek says, still frowning. “When she told me you were pregnant, she—said it was public knowledge.”

“That’s rude,” Stiles says without much venom, because it had been public knowledge somehow.
“And,” Derek says, a little ruefully, “it was kind of obvious when we were together.”

“Rude,” Stiles says insistently, but he’s not angry—how else was he going to learn, except through experience? He climbs onto the couch, straddling Derek’s lap, liking how Derek’s hands move automatically to the backs of his thighs, steadying him. “What’s it matter?”

“I—I wasn’t very careful,” Derek says. “If I had known—”

“What?” Stiles presses, looping his arms around Derek’s neck. “You would have laid down a blanket, lit some candles?”


“Okay,” Stiles says. “Sure, that hurt a little, but you didn’t hurt me. If I hadn’t liked what you were doing, I would have told you to stop. I didn’t, did I?”

“No,” Derek says reluctantly. “But—”

“Stop being a martyr,” Stiles says, leaning in to brush his nose against Derek’s. “If you want to feel bad about something, feel bad that I was wearing Scott’s pants and they ended up with jizz all over them. I think he burned them afterward.”

Derek chokes out what sounds like a horrified laugh.

“Anyway,” Stiles says, scratching his fingers through the short hair at the back of Derek’s neck. “You know I like it kind of rough.”

“I didn’t know that then,” Derek says, but he’s not really protesting anymore, his eyes going dark and half-lidded under Stiles’ touch.

“Mm,” Stiles says peaceably, tilting his head to suck a bruise under the hinge of Derek’s jaw. It flashes through purple and green and yellow to nothing as he sits backs and watches it. “What do you say we pick up where we left off yesterday?”

“Fine,” Derek breathes, his hands drifting toward the hem of Stiles’ shirt. He pauses, shaking his head. “No—did you come over here to tell me something?”

“Oh yeah!” Stiles says brightly. He’d almost forgotten. “I decided where I’m going to school.”

Derek smiles faintly. “And?”

Stiles grins. “Humboldt.”

Derek’s smile fades to puzzlement. “Humboldt?” he repeats, confused. “Why?”

“Because,” Stiles says. “I can get my degree, and you can finish your five-year program.”

“You don’t have to do that for me,” Derek says, frowning.

“No, I don’t,” Stiles agrees. “But you didn’t have to transfer to BHCC for me, either. I want to.”

Derek’s face goes soft and wondering, and not for the first time that day—or that week, or that month—Stiles is seized by an intense love for him. He wants to do good things for Derek forever—and he will if it kills him.

“Come on,” Stiles says, prodding Derek in the ribs with his long fingers. “Get your pants off so I can blow you.”
“You do know how to ruin a moment, don’t you?” Derek says, but he grabs Stiles by the back of the neck to haul him in for a rough kiss before doing as he’s told.

Much later, after they finish what they started, and after Evelyn has been fed and put to bed and they eat their own dinner, Stiles and Derek lay in bed together in easy silence. Stiles, taking advantage of the fact that he no longer has a massive baby bump hindering him, is half on his stomach, one leg hooked over Derek’s, his head resting on Derek’s chest. Derek’s doing something on his phone, his free hand trailing absently through Stiles’ hair. Between Derek’s touch and the sound of his heart beating steadily under Stiles’ ear, Stiles is beginning to drift off to sleep. He feels more content than he ever has in his life, that stupid omega part of him secure in the embrace of his alpha—and Stiles is so happy that he can’t even be annoyed about it.

He sighs softly when Derek drags his fingernails against his scalp, melting even further. Derek makes a soft noise, amused. “Good?”

“So good,” Stiles mumbles. He sighs again happily, and the words tumble out of him before he can even think about reining them in. “I love you.”

Derek goes very still under him. It takes Stiles a few seconds to realize why, and when he does he freezes too, not even daring to breathe. Derek’s heart is suddenly hammering under his ear, but Stiles doesn’t dare look at him, afraid of what he’ll see on Derek’s face.

After what feels like an eternity, Derek’s hand slips down to the back of his neck and stays there, his hand warm and anchoring. “I love you too,” he says quietly.

Stiles exhales shakily in relief, pushing himself up on one elbow so he can see Derek’s face. “Thought you were going to leave me hanging,” he says.

“You don’t have to worry about that,” Derek says softly. He pauses, his cheeks going a little pink before he admits, “I think I’ve been in love with you since last summer.”

Stiles’ lips part in shock. “Seriously?” he breathes, startled and a little overwhelmed. “But—we weren’t even—why me? I’m nothing special.” He’s not; he’s smart, but not super smart like Lydia, and he’s an asshole most of the time, and he’s not even a good omega, mouthy and disobedient and angry.

“That’s not true,” Derek says. He moves, and suddenly Stiles finds himself on his back, Derek bending over him. “I haven’t been able to get you out of my head since the night we met. Even when you didn’t want anything to do with me, I couldn’t stop thinking about you. I love you,” Derek says fiercely, and his eyes flash bright gold.

“Oh,” Stiles says weakly. His eyes burn and he’s not sure why; it’s not like he never expected to ever be loved—it was somewhere off on the horizon after college, maybe—but he never expected it to feel like this. And yet here he is, with his boyfriend in their bed, their baby girl on the other side of the wall. “This isn’t a dream?” he whispers.

“No,” Derek says firmly, and as if to prove it he leans in and kisses Stiles deeply.

“I love you,” Stiles murmurs when they pull apart, a smile beginning to stretch his face at the novelty of saying it aloud. If this is a dream, he never wants to wake up.
Stiles returns to school on Monday a different person than he was a week and a half ago. Now he’s a father, which is weird enough to admit to himself in his head, let alone to other people—and yet he knows that if he was the center of attention and gossip when he was pregnant, it’s not going to get any easier. He’s glad he’s excused from anything sports-related, because he doesn’t think he could stomach the locker room and the stares; it’s not like all the weight he gained has disappeared overnight, and the c-section scar has healed over, but it still looks red and sore—he doesn’t like looking at himself, let alone other people doing it.

Derek drops him off in the morning on the way to his own classes. Evie’s in the back—they decided to take Laura up on her offer—and Stiles blows her a kiss, which she doesn’t even get to see because she’s asleep, but it’s the thought that counts, probably. He gives Derek a quick peck on the cheek and moves to get out of the car, eager to get going, but Derek grabs him by the wrist.

“Hey,” he says seriously. “I’m proud of you.”

Stiles grins. “Don’t you mean proud of us?”

“No,” Derek says. “Of you.”

Stiles gives him a rueful smile. “Hey, I’m still a month and a half from graduation. Don’t jinx me—and don’t say I’m going to be fine,” he adds, jabbing a finger at Derek when he opens his mouth. “That’ll be worse.” Outside, the first bell rings, and he says, “I’ve got to get to class.”

“I’ll see you later,” Derek nods, and as Stiles pushes open the door, he adds, “Love you.”

Stiles shoots him a pleased grin. “Love you,” he echoes quietly.

Scott’s waiting for him at the top of the stairs a couple yards away, a wide grin on his face. “I heard that,” he says triumphantly.

Stiles glances over his shoulder, but Derek’s already at the other end of the parking lot, so he’s safe. He turns back to Scott, grinning. “So what?” he says.

“Knew you had it in you,” Scott says cheerfully as they head into the school. “I’m glad you’re back, man. It’s boring here without you.”

“Don’t you have a girlfriend?” Stiles retorts.

“Yeah, but she’s not you,” Scott says mournfully. “She actually behaves in class.”

“I’m telling her you said that,” Stiles says joyously, and Scott shoves him into a bank of lockers.

Stiles never thought he’d miss being in school that much, but it feels good to be back, good to have a routine, good to see his friends—their lunch table has become an amalgam of him, Scott, and Kira, and then Cora and Lydia and some of their friends, and it feels good to sit and laugh with them.

The novelty begins to wear off after lunch, when he starts to miss Evie, feeling guilty for leaving her with Laura. He checks his phone anxiously, worried there’s going to be some sort of problem. Laura never texts him, but it’s still a relief when Derek comes to pick him up at the end of the day and Stiles can crane around to look in the back seat and see Evie there, contentedly sitting in her car seat.

By the time a week has passed, however, Stiles is over it—it being both having a baby and being back in school. Turns out, Evelyn’s first week in the world was mostly spent adjusting to actually being alive, and now that she’s getting used to it, she’s lively—she’s waking multiple times in the night, often enough that they end up moving the crib into the bedroom to cut down on the time it
takes to get to her when she starts crying, and even though he and Derek take turns getting up for
her, Stiles is exhausted.

School’s not getting any easier; he came back just in time to dive into practice for the AP exams, and
every class is full of practice exams and study sessions. He writes so many practice papers that he’d
probably talking about them in his sleep—or he would be, if he could get any. Stiles finds himself
dozing anywhere he can—nursing Evelyn, in the car in the morning on the way to school (and fuck,
hes not having a car anymore, but he is greedily grateful that Derek drives him everywhere
because it means extra minutes of precious sleep). He knows it’s bad when he falls asleep in
chemistry and Mr. Harris doesn’t even wake him up—Mr. Harris gives him a break.

“I bet the nurse would let you lie down during lunch,” Scott suggests tentatively.

“I bet you’re going to get punched in the mouth if you don’t shut it,” Stiles says crankily. Scott looks
hurt, and it just makes Stiles even crankier because now he’s feeling tired and guilty. It wasn’t like it
was a bad suggestion.

He’s not sure how Derek’s managing to handle all of it; Derek’s got just as much schoolwork as he
does, and he gets up in the night just as often, but there are no dark circles under his eyes, and if he is
tired, he never complains. Stiles starts to resent him a little; he never complains about anything,
whether it’s getting up in the night to take care of Evie, or bringing Stiles to school in the morning
even when it makes him late for his own classes, or when Scott comes over and holds Evie and she
ends up smelling like him. He bears it all silently, works diligently, and Stiles hates him a little for it.

The night before Stiles’ first AP exam—Calculus AB—he’s struggling. Math has never been his
favorite subject, and even with Lydia’s help he’s been fighting to understand integrals since they
were introduced in class. Now, he’s ready to rip this worksheet in half—and maybe rip out some of
his hair for good measure. He writes so hard his pencil tip snaps and he grits his teeth against a
furious noise, instead forcing himself to take a slow breath. It doesn’t help much, and he just gets
angrier and more frustrated when he looks across the table at Derek, who’s typing away at something
on his laptop, his expression relaxed.

They haven’t really talked much in the past week, Stiles thinks uneasily, jerking his gaze back down
to the worksheet in front of him. And certainly, there hasn’t been any time for them to fool around
and even if there was, Stiles isn’t sure how well his advances would be received. Derek hasn’t made
any moves—sexual or romantic—toward him in days, and Stiles has this secret worry that maybe
Derek was never truly interested in him, that maybe it was just instincts that kept him so close while
Stiles was pregnant. Sure, he’d said he thought he’d been in love with Stiles since last summer, but
Stiles had been pregnant then, too, had in fact been pregnant the entire time Derek had known him,
minus about ten minutes at the very beginning. He’s scared that now that he’s had the baby,
whatever effect he’d had on Derek is wearing off and Derek’s going to realize that he doesn’t really
love him—not lanky, weird Stiles, who can’t even figure out freakin’ integrals.

Stiles stares at his worksheet, but he doesn’t really see it now, his eyes fogged, his throat burning.
What if his love for Derek is just some side effect of being pregnant? What if he wakes up a couple
weeks from now and there’s nothing between them? He’s terrified of being alone; last winter was
bad enough. He doesn’t think he could go through that again.

“Stiles?” Derek says quietly. “You okay?”

“Fine,” Stiles says hoarsely, not looking up. He doesn’t want to see Derek’s face. “Just—trying to
get ready for tomorrow.”

“You’re going to do fine,” Derek says placidly.
“I have to,” Stiles says, embarrassed when his eyes start burning again. But he’s got a plan; he needs a good score so he can get college credit for the course and, if all goes well, graduate a semester early.

“You’ll be fine,” Derek says again, and Stiles hates how calm he is.

“Why aren’t you freaking out?” Stiles retorts, irritated. He finally looks up, hating the mildly concerned look he sees on Derek’s face. “Don’t you have exams soon?”

“Tomorrow,” Derek says sedately.

Stiles blinks, startled into silence. It hadn’t occurred to him that Derek was on a different schedule, but colleges usually got out earlier in the summer than high schools, didn’t they? He’s a little hurt; why didn’t Derek say something?

Derek shrugs when Stiles asks. “It’s not important,” he says. “It’s a community college. The classes aren’t hard.”

Stiles snaps his mouth shut, clamping back on the well of hurt. So what if it’s a community college? He still would have offered Derek support, easy exam or not. The fact that Derek didn’t even think it was worth mentioning just heightens his fear that whatever’s going on between them is starting to wear off.

Derek seems to recognize that he’s made a mistake, because he says, uncertain now, “I wasn’t trying to hide it from you.”

“Whatever,” Stiles says, glaring down at his homework, his eyes burning.

Derek’s quiet for a moment before he says, “You have enough on your plate. You don’t need to worry about me.”

“That’s not how this works!” Stiles snaps. Derek gives him a startled look and Stiles says furiously, “If we’re going to be in this together, you have to tell me about things like this. I don’t need you protecting me. I just—I want to feel like we’re a team.”

Derek watches him for a long moment, his expression unreadable, before he nods. “Okay,” he says quietly. “I should have told you. I’m sorry.”

Stiles nods, clenching his jaw tightly. Even though Derek’s apologized, he doesn’t feel any better. Now there’s an uncomfortable tension in the air that he can’t ignore, as hard as he tries to do so. When he sneaks a look at Derek from under his lashes, Derek’s gone back to working on his laptop, but his expression is no longer relaxed, the corners of his mouth turned down. Stiles looks back at his papers miserably. All he wanted to do was finish his homework and go to bed, and now he’s fought with Derek again. He hates how this feels.

When Evelyn starts crying a couple minutes later, Derek softly says, “I’ll get her,” and leaves the table without looking at Stiles, who slumps the minute Derek’s in the nursery, scrubbing his hands over his face. He feels like he should apologize, but he’s not sure why; he’s not the one who fucked up, right? He’s not sure of anything anymore. What if this is another nail in the coffin? What if Derek thinks he’s too demanding, too clingy?

Stiles looks up anxiously when Derek comes out of the nursery a little while later, but Derek just heads into the bedroom without looking at him, and a moment later Stiles hears the water running in the bathroom. Of course, Stiles thinks miserably. Now Derek’s avoiding him.
He forces himself to work on his homework, and he’s in the middle of figuring out the velocity of a baseball at a certain point on the graph when someone touches his shoulder. He jumps, startled, and then looks up to see Derek standing next to him. “What?” Stiles asks, residual anger making his voice come out flat and unwelcoming.

“Come with me,” Derek says.

“What?” Stiles says irritably. “I have shit to do.”

“It can wait,” Derek says.

Stiles sighs, getting to his feet and following Derek through the bedroom and into the bathroom, where the tap is running, slowly filling the bathtub with water. “And?” he says, raising his eyebrows significantly at Derek.

“Get in,” Derek says.


“Get in,” Derek repeats. He hesitates, and then says, “Please.”

Maybe it’s the please, or the fact that for the first time since Evie was born, Derek actually sounds tired, but Stiles takes a couple steps toward the bath. He never actually wanted to be mad in the first place, and it’s hard to shake off the anger now that it’s come to the surface, but he loves Derek and Derek—hopefully—still loves him.

Still, he hesitates before pulling off his shirt, glancing at Derek uncertainly. He’s not comfortable with the way his body looks right now, and he’s been mostly successful in hiding himself from Derek, keeping his back turned when he dresses in the morning, sneaking out of the shower. Maybe he’s being stupid—Derek certainly didn’t seem to mind when he had a stomach as big as a whale, but that was when he was pregnant, and maybe Derek was too hopped up on pheromones to even notice. His hands shake a little when he finally works up the courage to pull his shirt off, but though Derek’s gaze drifts down his body, his expression doesn’t change, no repulsion or disgust there, and Stiles lets himself breathe again.

Stripping off the rest of his clothes, Stiles tests the water before stepping in and carefully lowering himself down. Derek doesn’t move from his spot in the doorway until Stiles is seated, water lapping gently around his bent knees, and then he pads forward, kneeling down beside the tub, leaning in to shut off the water. It’s very quiet suddenly, the sloshing of the water almost as loud as Stiles’ heartbeat. He watches Derek wet a washcloth in the water and then lather it up with soap, but he resists when Derek tries to lift his arm.

“Derek,” he says. “Why—”

“Be quiet,” Derek says without venom. Stiles shuts his mouth, more confused than ever, and doesn’t resist this time when Derek lifts his arm and gently rubs the soapy cloth in circles against his skin. He doesn’t understand why Derek is doing this—it’s not like he’s dirty, or enjoys baths, and he can’t even get anything else done like this. He—

But it hits Stiles as Derek lifts Stiles’ hand from the water and carefully washes each finger, Derek’s face smooth, his pale eyes half-lidded and shaded by his long eyelashes. Stiles can’t go anywhere, can’t do anything; all of his attention is on Derek, and all of Derek’s attention is on him. This—is this an alpha taking care of his omega. Grooming him. Loving him.

Stiles’ eyes start to burn again, the world shifting a hundred and eighty degrees as all the anger drains
out of him. He was being so stupid earlier, worrying that Derek was losing interest in him. Maybe he’s not great at showing it, but Derek loves him; this is proof.

A couple of fat tears go sliding down Stiles’ cheeks. Derek doesn’t say a word, but he dips the washcloth back into the water, swirling it around under it’s free of soap, and then he gently tilts Stiles’ head back, patting the warm cloth against his face, cleaning the tears from his cheeks. Stiles shuts his eyes, unable to bear the look he sees in Derek’s—weariness and sadness and more love than Stiles deserves. And when he’s done, Derek leans in and presses his lips to Stiles’ wet forehead, a kiss Stiles feels there long after Derek pulls away.

He squeezes his eyes shut tighter, fighting back more tears, and whispers, “I’m tired, Derek.”

“I know,” Derek replies softly. “But we’ll get through it. Together.”

Stiles bites down on the inside of his cheek. They don’t speak again; Stiles lets Derek move him as he wishes, washing every inch of him, massaging shampoo into his hair, rinsing him clean with warm water. When Derek’s done, he helps Stiles to his feet and guides him out of the tub, then rubs him down with a clean towel, his touch just as gentle as it had been when he was washing Stiles. Stiles takes it patiently, head bowed as Derek scrubs at his head, and when it seems like Derek’s finally finished, Stiles steps forward and curls his arms around Derek’s shoulders, tucking his face against Derek’s neck. He takes comfort in the smell of him, deep pine woods and basil, and he takes comfort in the sound of Derek’s steadily beating heart, and most of all he takes comfort in the easy way Derek’s arms rise to curl around him, holding him close and safe.

“Come on,” Derek says, after what could have been minutes or centuries, and he guides Stiles into the bedroom and into bed, carefully arranging the blankets around him.

“I’m supposed to be studying,” Stiles protests half-heartedly.

“Cramming only does so much,” Derek replies, heading for Evelyn’s crib. He brings her over to the bed, carefully placing her in Stiles’ arms before climbing into bed next to him, pressed right up against Stiles’ side. Stiles sighs and leans into him, heart warming at the way Evie turns into his body, enough body strength to cuddle.

“I love her,” he says, almost a whisper, “and I love you.”

Derek nuzzles his temple, breath warm against Stiles’ still-damp skin. “Love you,” he echoes, and Stiles smiles. They’re going to be fine.

Stiles and Derek both survive their exams. Derek is done with school now, but Laura still watches Evie a couple days a week, warning, “You guys need breaks or you’ll go nuts.” Stiles still has two weeks left of school, but it’s easy work now that the AP exams are over. Senior class rankings are posted and no one is surprised that Lydia’s valedictorian, but Stiles is pleased to see that he managed to stay in the top twenty-fifth percentile—not fucking bad, considering he’d been pregnant and given birth. What were the excuses for the slackers in the bottom seventy-five percent?

On the night of Evie’s first full moon, nearly a month to the day of her birth, they take her to Laura’s house, and all the werewolves gather around to watch her as the moon rises above the forest. It’s mostly for fun; as Laura’s pointed out multiple times, it’s unlikely that she’ll manifest any signs of being a werewolf until her first birthday or, at the very earliest, six months. Stiles is hoping for an eye flash himself, but instead he gets Evie cooing at him when he picks her up, which is somehow even better.
Stiles is surprised when the three siblings don’t head for the woods, but instead collapse together in the living room, Cora claiming Evie and curling with her in the big armchair, Laura stretching herself across the floor, Derek sitting on the couch and giving Stiles an expectant look.

“You guys aren’t going outside?” he asks. He remembers what Laura said about how being pack doesn’t mean that he has to run with them. He thought it was a thing they did.

“Maybe later,” Laura says unconcernedly, reaching her hand above her and patting around the coffee table until she snags the television remote.

Stiles moves to sit next to Derek, but he’s still a little confused. “I thought the full moon made you guys, um, a little wild?”

“We’re born wolves,” Cora tells him imperiously. “We’ve been working on our control our entire lives.”

“Oh,” Stiles says.

Laura tilts her head back so she can see him, offering him a faint smile, not dismissing his curiosity. “It’s more about being together,” she says. “There’s stability—and control—in numbers.”

Stiles nods; he supposes that makes sense. His only experience with werewolves on full moons were the long nights after Scott was first bitten, when he had no control at all, just a borrowed set of manacles from the sheriff’s station. Stiles still has two long parallel scars down his forearm from where Scott had taken a swipe at him and he hadn’t moved away fast enough. This full moon is way different, almost unsettlingly so in how...normal it is.

Derek shifts around until he’s lying on the couch with his head in Stiles’ lap, and Stiles is content to sink deep into the cushions, carding his fingers through Derek’s soft hair. Laura’s settled on The Princess Bride—an excellent choice, to be sure, but Stiles has seen it a thousand times, so it’s not long before his attention drifts. He looks over at Cora, who’s got her knees drawn up to her chest, Evelyn cradled in her arms in the safe space in between, fast asleep. He looks down at Derek, who’s beginning to blink very slowly, melting under his touch. Stiles gets a little lost watching him even after Derek’s eyes have settled shut, one hand splayed on his chest so he can feel Derek’s heart beating steadily under his palm. Life isn’t exactly easy at the moment—he’s constantly tired and stressed with school and a freakin’ baby—but it’s the slow moments he like these that remind him just how grateful he is. This wasn’t his plan, and it wasn’t Derek’s, and they’re certainly both different people than they were nine months ago, but he couldn’t be happier than he is right now.

When Stiles finally lifts his eyes from Derek, he sees Laura with her head tilted back, watching them, her dark eyes soft, a very faint smile curving her lips. Stiles can’t help but smile back, slouching deep into the couch, content. The peace lasts for almost the entire movie—until Evie struggles awake and sets up a wail because she’s hungry and Derek wakes up with a grumble.

They head home around midnight, despite Laura’s protests that they’re welcome to stay at the house. The only problem with that is that Derek’s bed there is a twin, and Stiles doesn’t relish the idea of squeezing both of them in, especially as he has school the next day and needs to get some rest.

Still, Laura reels him in for a tight hug as they say their goodbyes in the front hall, and under the noise of Derek laughing at something Cora’s just said, Laura whispers, “I’m so glad you have each other.”

Stiles blinks hard, his throat aching a little when he whispers back, “Me too.”
Laura beams as she draws back. “Are you planning on going to prom?” she asks. “I think Cora and Lydia are going dress shopping this weekend.”

Cora rolls her eyes. “It’s stupid,” she says.

“Oh,” Stiles says blankly. Derek’s watching him curiously, and Stiles can feel his cheeks getting warm under the pressure. “I—don’t know. I hadn’t even thought about it.”

“Well, I’ll babysit for you guys if you want to go,” Laura says warmly.

“Thanks,” Stiles says, a little flustered. “Um—we should get home.”

He fully expects Derek to bring it up on the way home, but Derek doesn’t mention it until the next morning while they’re eating breakfast, when Stiles has already forgotten about it. He’s just taken a bite of toast when Derek says, “So, do you want to go to prom?”

Stiles swallows his mouthful. “Are you just asking me if I’m interested in going, or are you asking me asking me?”

Derek tilts his head to one side, considering this. “Both, I guess,” he says.

Stiles scratches a hand through his hair, thinking about it. “I don’t know,” he says finally, and he really doesn’t. He’s seen the posters around school, but he honestly hasn’t given it any thought, too busy with everything else going on in his life. “But I don’t think you can go.”

Derek frowns at that. “Why not?”

“You can bring a date that doesn’t go to our high school, but I think they have to be nineteen or younger,” Stiles tells him. “No elderly creeps like you.”

Derek narrows his eyes at Stiles. “This elderly creep was going to order pizza tonight, but I guess you can forget that.”

“You’re the worst,” Stiles says petulantly.

Derek shrugs and says, “You should go if you want to, even if I can’t come.”

Derek shrugs. “I’ll think about it.” He’s not sure about it; if he does go, he’s just going to end up as a fifth wheel to Scott and Kira and Cora and Lydia, which doesn’t sound all that fun. He reaches down and scoops Evie out of her carrier, cradling her to his chest. “Maybe Evie can be my date.”

She yawns hugely and Derek snorts. “I think you just got rejected.” When Stiles pretends to pout at him, he says, “If you decide to go, I’ll take you out to dinner beforehand.”

Stiles brightens. “Seriously?” he asks. “Like a real date?”

“A real first date,” Derek confirms, a faint smile softening his face.


Derek snorts again. “Anything for food, huh?”

“Not true, jackass,” Stiles says. “I want to go on a date with you.” He pauses, then adds, “But also, food.”

Derek rolls his eyes as Stiles grins, but there’s fondness in his expression. “You’re trouble,” he tells
Stiles, who grins even wider.

“That,” Stiles retorts, “is a well-established fact.”

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On the night of prom, Stiles and all of his friends gather at Lydia’s place to get ready. Their parents and Laura are there too, acting embarrassingly like parents, taking too many pictures, passing Evie around and sharing embarrassing stories about their kids when they were little. The girls disappear into Lydia’s room to get ready, and Stiles and Scott get dressed in the spare room Stiles slept in the night of Lydia’s birthday party. He tries not to remember that night, which was probably the darkest of all the nights of his pregnancy, the lowest he ever got, and it’s easy not to think about then, when the house is full of such a festive atmosphere. He can hear the dim chatter of the parents downstairs, occasionally punctuated with laughter.

It doesn’t take all that long to get dressed, so Stiles sits on the end of the bed and watches Scott struggle to tie his tie until he takes pity on him and waves him over to assist. Scott grins at him. “It’s kind of weird, isn’t it?”

“What’s weird?” Stiles asks, deftly fixing Scott’s tie; it’s bright purple to match Kira’s dress, dotted with multicolored stars because it was the only purple tie they had at Kohl’s. Goofy, Stiles thinks fondly. Just like Scott.

“In a couple of weeks, we’ll be done with high school,” Scott says. “Then it’s time for real life to begin.”

Stiles smiles ruefully. “I think I already skipped to that point, dude.”

“True,” Scott admits. He hesitates and then adds, lowering his voice, “Are you okay with everything? Like—really okay?”

“Yeah,” Stiles says without even stopping to think about it. He’s not saying it to reassure Scott, or because Derek’s somewhere in the house and can probably hear him. He really means it. “You know I never planned on all this stuff happening,” he continues quietly. “I’m not going to sit here and pretend that I don’t wish things had turned out differently, or this hadn’t happened until at least after college, but things could have turned out way worse than they did.” He shrugs. “I got lucky.”

“You didn’t need any luck,” Scott says firmly. “You had this handled from the start.”

Stiles snorts derisively. “Are you deliberately forgetting how you threw yourself down a flight of stairs as a distraction so I could steal a birth control test? Or how I passed out at a track meet because I wasn’t taking care of myself?”

Scott waves a hand dismissively. “You’re not perfect,” he says. “But I just meant—you were determined, you know? Maybe you were scared and freaking out sometimes, but you had goals and you stuck to them. You’re graduating on time, aren’t you?”

“Don’t jinx me,” Stiles warns. “I’ll knock you out if I fail.”

Scott grins at him, sincerity burning in his expression. “You will,” he says confidently. “You made it this far, didn’t you?”

Stiles grins back, buoyed by Scott’s enthusiasm. “I guess you’re right.”

“I’m always right,” Scott says smugly. “I told you to tell Derek.”
“I did!” Stiles protests. “Eventually!”

“And see how it all worked out?” Scott says cheerfully.

“Yeah,” Stiles says, his smile going unconsciously fond as he thinks about Derek. “Lucked out with him, too.”

Scott’s grin widens. “No way,” he says. “He’s like, completely infatuated with you.”

Stiles snorts. “Look at you, using your vocab. Also,” he adds a little sharply, narrowing his eyes at Scott. “I know you told him I’d had a crush on him since ninth grade.”

Scott grins guiltily. "I didn't mean to, man," he says sheepishly. "It didn't scare him away, did it?"

"You're lucky it didn't," Stiles mutters.

Scott grins wider, nudging him in the ribs. "Dude," he says. "You're totally going to end up married with like fifty more kids."

"Shut up," Stiles says, his cheeks going red. He can't think about marriage yet; he's got to at least get through high school first. "Come on," he adds, when Scott opens his mouth to tease him more.

"They're probably waiting downstairs for us." It's not true; the girls are still getting ready, but Scott seems to take pity on him and allows him to escape downstairs. The adults are all gathered in the kitchen, chatting cheerfully, and Stiles slows when he sees Derek standing with them, his lips parting in surprise; Derek's changed too, into a crisp white shirt and dark dress pants. He looks hotter than Stiles has ever seen him look, so unfairly good-looking that Stiles' heart starts hammering in his chest just at the sight of him. It's even more unfair when he turns to look at Stiles, and not only is he holding their daughter, but Derek gives Stiles that soft smile that only seems to exist for him and Evie.

"Dude, save it for after prom," Scott mutters into his ear, and Stiles can feel his face go hot. Derek's smile shifts to a satisfied smirk, but no one else seems to have noticed the near-literal hard-on Stiles has for his boyfriend.

Said boyfriend leans into him when Stiles infiltrates the ring of parents, pressing his shoulder to Stiles'. "You look good," Derek tells Stiles quietly.

"You look better," Stiles retorts, trying to hide his arousal by distracting himself with Evie, who grabs his finger when he prods at her palm. "Why are you all dressed up too?"

"We're going out for dinner," Derek replies. "I need to fit in."

"You look better," Stiles retorts, trying to hide his arousal by distracting himself with Evie, who grabs his finger when he prods at her palm. "Why are you all dressed up too?"

"You clean up way better than Stiles," Scott says cheerfully, and with a laugh ducks the punch Stiles throws at him.

The girls come downstairs around then, and they all get bustled out to the Martin’s immaculately landscaped backyard for group photos. It feels kind of stupid—it’s just a dance, after all—and the way their parents are all there is kind of embarrassing, but at least Stiles can step back to Derek’s side when they start breaking off into small groups for couples photos. He may not be super excited about prom, but he can appreciate the excitement he sees on his friends’ faces; even though she called it stupid, Cora’s giving Lydia that same soft smile Derek gives him, and Scott and Kira are laughing about something that he didn’t hear. He’s glad they’re all happy; Lydia’s ex had been a total asshole, and Scott had been devastated when Allison’s family moved away—not that Stiles had been much better when Malia’s dad sent her out of state to a boarding school a couple months later. He’s glad
they’ve all found good people to love them. He knows, smiling faintly when Derek turns and presses a kiss to his temple, things could have been so much worse.

Laura startles them both by whipping around when she’s had her fill of taking photos of Lydia and Cora, and announcing, “All right, now you two!”

Stiles can feel his face going red. “You don’t need to do that,” he says, at the exact same time Derek says, “Okay.” They both pause and look at each other. “You want to?” Stiles asks Derek.

Derek looks a little embarrassed, but he says determinedly, “We don’t have any pictures together.”

“Oh,” Stiles says blankly. He hasn’t given it much thought, but he supposes Derek’s right. It would be nice to have some pictures of them.

“Don’t worry about that,” Laura says, smiling. “I took plenty in the hospital.”

Stiles and Derek both give her aggrieved looks. “You’re forbidden from ever showing anyone those,” Stiles says, remembering how awful he felt—and how terrible he's sure he looked.

Laura gives him the familiar Hale eyeroll and says, "Just smile for the camera, would you? Or at the very least—try to look like you're enjoying yourselves."

It's Stiles' turn to roll his eyes, but he straightens obligingly as Derek loops his free arm around Stiles' waist, lifting Evie with his other. He tries not to feel embarrassed when he sees his dad pulling out his phone to snag a photo as well, chokes back a snort at the face Scott makes over Laura's shoulder, and makes himself smile when Laura counts down from three to one. He's not sure Derek actually smiles—it's hard to tell from the corner of his eye—but his face is relaxed, at least, his pale eyes soft in the setting sun.

"Now one without the baby," Laura says imperiously, and Stiles' dad steps forward to take Evie from Derek.

Stiles rolls his eyes again, muttering to Derek, "Someone's still wearing their alpha pants."

"I think Scott's got those," Derek mutters back. "They're the ones you came on."

"Not cool!" Scott says indignantly.

"I can hear you," Laura says impatiently. "Now shut up and smile!"

When the picture-taking is finally over, the couples head for their cars; Scott, Kira, Cora, and Lydia are going out to eat together, but Derek's taking Stiles somewhere else, the location and name of which he refuses to divulge. Stiles stops on the way to kiss Evie on her forehead; despite Laura's offer to babysit, his dad's taking her—he called it evoking his grandfather's rights. Stiles isn't too worried about her because his dad is plenty capable of handling an infant for a night, but it's still a little weird; they've been separated during the day while he's at school, but they've never spent a night without her.

"Bye, little lady," he whispers, grinning when she coos at him.

When they get to the car, Derek holds the door open for him—"Didn't realize I'd hired a chauffeur," Stiles simmers at him, and Derek flicks him hard on the arm, but shuts the door gently after Stiles has sat down. Then they're driving, and it's—it's a little strange. Stiles stares out the window as houses and trees flicker past and realizes that this is the first time he and Derek have been alone together in a month, no Evie within crying distance. In a way, it's the first time they've ever been truly alone.
together. Stiles swallows. This is their first date. They have a baby together, they live together, but they've never been on a date. What if he fucks it up? What if he spills water everywhere? Oh god, what if there are candles at the table and he manages to light himself or—worse—Derek on fire?

Derek reaches across the center console and puts his hand on Stiles' knee. "Are you nervous?" he asks, sounding both amused and concerned.

"Shut up," Stiles says. He can feel his face going bright red. Fuck, will the embarrassment ever stop coming? "I don't want to mess it up."

Derek gives him a somewhat exasperated look, but his tone's completely serious when he says, "Nothing you could do could mess this up."

"Oh yeah?" Stiles challenges. He is a pro at disaster scenarios. "What if I poisoned your dinner with wolfsbane?"

"I'd stay to finish the meal," Derek says sedately. "It's only polite; I wouldn't want to insult the chef."

Stiles snorts. "And what about me?" he asks. "Wouldn't you be pissed?"

"Probably," Derek says. "But I could think of some appropriate punishments." His voice drops lower with those words, with intent.

"Hey," Stiles says, only half-managing to suppress a delicious shudder. "You talking like that plus how you're dressed right now is not fair."

Derek glances over at him, a devilish look spreading across his face. "We don't have to go to dinner," he says suggestively.

"Oh no," Stiles says, waggling a finger at him. "We're going to have this date. The other stuff can come later."

"Spoilsport," Derek mutters, but he's smiling.

Dinner is at the fanciest restaurant Stiles has ever seen, let alone been inside. Growing up, when he and his dad had something to celebrate, the fanciest place they ever went was Macaroni Grill or, once, a place where the steaks were twenty-five dollars, and they'd thought that was lavish. Stiles thinks the glasses of water in this place are probably that much at least, and even though he's wearing a nice suit he found on clearance rack at Nordstrom Rack and reluctantly gotten tailored at Lydia's insistence, he still feels underdressed. Yet somehow Derek, who isn't even wearing a suit jacket, fits right in.

That's what being handsome does for you, Stiles thinks a little ruefully as they sit down at a table. He almost, very nearly protests when he sees the prices on the menu, but he manages to bite it back; he knows that Derek likes to treat him, likes to take care of him, and if that means paying fifty dollars for pasta carbonara holy shit, well then, Stiles would make himself enjoy it with a vengeance.

And it's not bad; Stiles isn't sure what he was worried about, because talking to Derek here is just like talking to him at home, except he's eating the best dinner rolls he's ever had. He doesn't spill his water or light anyone on fire, and freakin' Derek is the one who drops his fork, not even his werewolf reflexes fast enough to stop it clattering to the floor. Stiles eyes him suspiciously as he bends over to grab it, nearly smashing his head into a waiter who's dived to grab it first.

"Did you do that to help me relax?" Stiles asks.
"No!" Derek hisses, his cheeks a dull red. Stiles grins; he's not sure he's ever seen Derek blush before.

The food is good—worth it, Stiles assumes, not even bothering to try to sneak a look at the check when the waiter brings it over; it'd only depress him. It's not about the food or the money anyway, he thinks, as they leave the restaurant and step out onto the street. It's about spending time with Derek, and he enjoyed every second of it.

As they walk down the street toward the car, Derek takes Stiles' hand, curling their fingers together. They've never held hands in public—barely been out in public together at all—but when Stiles glances at him, Derek doesn't look concerned. Stiles likes that about him; he does stuff without thinking, and it's not because he's reckless, like Stiles is, but he doesn't care what other people think. Well, Stiles amends silently, as Derek glances at him, a brief smile curving his lips before he looks away again. He cares what Stiles thinks, and somehow that's both the scariest and most reassuring thing about him.

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Prom's not at the school, but in a ballroom at a local hotel, rented for the occasion. Derek pulls the car up to the curb behind several stretch limos. Erica Reyes pulls herself out of the one in front of them, and Vernon Boyd unfolds himself after her; she shrieks with laughter when he scoops her off her feet, carrying her bridal-style toward the hotel lobby. Stiles watches them and other classmates head inside with his brow slightly furrowed, gripping his knees. He's not nervous about this part, he's just not looking forward to it. He wishes he could have pregamed it, but he knows the teachers are on the lookout for anyone who's been seen drinking and anyway, it's been—God, nine months since he got wasted.

"You going in?" Derek asks. Someone behind them honks, and Stiles and Derek both flip them off without turning around.

"Yeah," Stiles sighs, but he still doesn't move.

"Okay," Derek says after a moment. "You don't have to go."

"I know," Stiles says. He catches sight of his friends coming up the sidewalk from the opposite direction. Without looking away from them, he asks, "Did you go to prom?"

"Yeah," Derek says, sounding a little startled.

Stiles turns and looks at him, picturing the soft-faced and unhappy-eyed senior he remembers from ninth grade in a nice suit, maybe even a tux. It's not hard to imagine. "Did you have a date?"

Derek nods after a moment. "Paige," he says slowly. "We dated before the fire. We just went as friends."

"Oh," Stiles says, a little startled. He remembers all the rumors that had gone around that year, about all the people Derek was sleeping with, and he doesn't know if they're true or not, but he'd figured Derek would have gone with one of them. "Were you prom king?"

Derek snorts. "No, thank god."

Stiles grins, swinging his head to look out the window. His friends are almost at the lobby doors. "I'll steal the crown for you; you were robbed."

"Don't you dare," Derek says warningly.
"Spoilsport," Stiles says, in the same voice Derek used earlier. "Okay," he adds. "I'm going to go."

"Have fun," Derek says, and grabs the front of Stiles' shirt to pull him in for a kiss. It's a good one, good enough that Stiles is a little dazed as he heads for the hotel, and nearly jumps out of his skin with Coach Finstock appears in front of him and bellows, "Are you high, Stilinski?"

"No, Jesus!" Stiles yelps, blasted out of his reverie. "I just had a baby, remember?"

"Children are disgusting," Finstock growls. Stiles stares at him, wondering if he's going to retract that statement, considering he's a teacher, but Finstock doubles-down, barking, "All children! Get inside!" and Stiles hustles past him.

Prom's fun; Stiles finds his friends, and they all dance together out on the dance floor. Stiles isn't a particularly good dancer, but he enjoys himself anyway, getting hot enough that he strips out of his jacket. There are drinks, including a punch bowl Finstock's guarding ferociously against anyone who might dare to try and spike it, and basic snacks Stiles fills himself up on, even though he’s just eaten a huge, delicious dinner.

And yet...after a while, Stiles begins to feel bored and out of place, his skin itchy. The first couple of slow songs, when all his friends disappear out onto the floor to dance without him, are bearable, and on the third, Scott whirls him off his feet and around the room until Mr. Harris tells them to cut it out, but after that, Stiles can’t keep himself still during them, jiggling his knee until he’s half driven himself crazy. He knows this whole thing is traditional, or whatever, but he misses Derek, as stupid as it sounds. It’s not either of their faults that Derek’s too old to come.

When the next slow song begins, Stiles slips out of the ballroom and heads down the hall to the nearest bathroom. He locks himself in a stall and sits on the toilet for a moment, running his hands through his hair. He sighs once, quietly, and fishes his phone from his pocket, swiftly dialing a number and pressing the phone to his ear. He only relaxes when he hears Derek’s soft, “Hey.”

“Hey,” Stiles breathes. He can hear the music from the ballroom, just the deep pounding of the bass, but the bathroom is silent; he’s the only one in there for now. “Am I disrupting your evening?”

“Just reading,” Derek says. “You okay?”

“Yeah,” Stiles sighs. “I just—” He shifts around, fiddling with his tie. “Can you come pick me up?”

“You sure?” Derek asks. Stiles can hear him shifting around, then the jingle of his keys.

“Yeah,” Stiles says again. “I know this is supposed to be a classic high school experience, or whatever, but I’ve had my fill.”

“Okay,” Derek says easily. “I’ll be there in ten.”

“Thanks,” Stiles says gratefully.

When he leaves the bathroom, he doesn’t go back into the ballroom, though he does shoot a text off to Scott so he won’t worry. Instead, Stiles goes outside. A teacher he doesn’t recognize warns him that if he leaves the hotel, he won’t be allowed back in, but Stiles just shrugs; that’s fine with him.

There’s a low retaining wall along the sidewalk, and Stiles settles down onto it. The cool night air feels a lot better than the stuffy air of the ballroom, and the only noise is traffic from the street. There’s a deputy sitting in a cruiser by the curb—ready for underage drinkers or anyone who gets too rowdy, probably—and when Stiles squints, he can tell by the squad car number on the side that it’s Parrish’s cruiser. Stiles waves, and the dark form in the car waves back.
He tumbles into the car when Derek pulls up, relief rushing through him. “Thank god,” he sighs.

“That bad?” Derek asks, sounding amused.

“It wasn’t terrible,” Stiles admits. “I just feel like...maybe having Evie has changed what’s important to me, and prom—it’s not one of them.”

Derek has nothing to say to it; he just puts his hand over Stiles’ as they pull away from the curb. After a minute or two of silence, Derek says, “Do you want to go back to the loft, or do you want to do something?”

“What, like date round two?” Stiles asks skeptically.

“Something like that,” Derek says. “I have an idea.”

“Okay,” Stiles agrees curiously.

Derek’s plan involves stopping at Walmart, where he comes out ten minutes later with a couple bags, the contents of which he refuses to show Stiles. Mystery items acquired, Derek drives them out of the city and along the country roads, heading for the preserve. For a moment, Stiles thinks they’re heading to Laura’s house, but Derek turns onto a dirt road well before the road that heads to the Hale house, and they bump along it for a while before it trails away into little more than a path, dead-ending at a clearing in the trees.

“What’s going on?” Stiles asks curiously. “Did you bring me up here to kill me? Is that why we stopped at Walmart? Did you need a tarp and a shovel?”

Derek gives him an exasperated look. “Stay here,” he says, pushing his car door open. “Shut your eyes. I want to surprise you.”

“It’s not a surprise if you tell me you’re going to surprise me,” Stiles argues.

“Not if I don’t tell you what the surprise is,” Derek says, getting out. “Close your eyes.”

Stiles huffs, but does as he’s told, leaning back against the seat as he listens to Derek walk around the back of the car, opening the rear door and riffling through the bags. Then he walks past the car into the clearing, and Stiles can’t really hear him anymore. The night’s loud; there’s a wind rustling the leaves on the trees, and night insects are calling, buzzing loudly around the car. He thinks he hears the occasional clink of glass, but he doesn’t try to figure it out; he trusts Derek. Derek’s ideas almost always pan out all right.

Derek comes back to the car after a moment, his footsteps nearly inaudible, though Stiles suspects he’s making an effort to be noisy for Stiles’ benefit. “Don’t open your eyes yet,” he warns, opening Stiles’ door, helping him climb out.

“No?” Stiles asks, once his feet are on the ground.

Derek turns him, walking him forward a few feet—past the car, probably—and then he says, “Okay.”

Stiles opens his eyes and stares; Derek’s laid candles in mason jars all around the clearing, and in the middle, a blanket is laid out over the grass. “What is this?” Stiles asks, a little bewildered.

“Date round two,” Derek says. He sighs a little. “Too much?”
“You know you don’t have to woo me, right?” Stiles says. “You already caught me.” He’s touched, though, by the thought Derek put into it, spur of the moment as it was, and looks at Derek. “You big romantic.”

He thinks Derek might be blushing again, but it’s hard to tell in the yellow light from the candles. Stiles elbows him cheerfully. “Did you get this idea off Pinterest?”

Derek growls and lunges at him, playfully grabbing him around the waist and lifting him off the ground. Stiles gives a shout of laughter, pretending to struggle as Derek carries him into the clearing and dumps him—rather unceremoniously—onto the blanket. Stiles grins as he sits up, bending over so he can untie his shoes and tug off his socks, curling his toes against the cool grass.

“So, do you come out here often?” he asks.

“Sometimes,” Derek says, settling down next to him and kicking off his own sneakers. “To clear my head.” He pauses for a moment before adding, “I came out here the night I found out you were pregnant.”

Stiles gives him a startled look. “You did?”

Derek nods slowly, gazing absently out at the trees. “Cora told me during Thanksgiving dinner, and I had to get out of the house. Your dad pulled me over because I was driving too fast.”

Stiles’ lips part in surprise. “Did he harass you? He told me—”

Derek shakes his head. “That was after,” he says. “He didn’t know until I showed up at your house a couple days later. He was nice to me. He thought I was on something.”

Stiles snorts, a little horrified. “He meant well, I’m sure.”

“I know he did,” Derek says quietly.

Stiles watches him for a moment, his pale eyes reflecting the flickering golden light from the candles around them. “I’m sorry,” he says after a moment. “That I didn’t tell you about her. That you had to hear it from Cora. I should’ve told you and let you decide what you wanted to do, instead of deciding for you.”

“We’ve been over this,” Derek says, looking at him steadily. “It’s okay, Stiles. I understand why you didn’t tell me. I don’t hold it against you.”

“I know,” Stiles says. “I don’t understand why—but thanks.”

Derek’s gaze doesn’t waver. “I love you,” he says easily. “That’s why.”

Stiles swallows hard against an uncomfortably dry throat. “I love you, too,” he whispers.

Derek smiles faintly and leans in, brushing his nose against Stiles’ before kissing him gently. “You smell like sweat,” he says when they pull apart, looking almost amused. “You were dancing?”

“Why the skeptical look?” Stiles says accusingly. “You think I can’t dance?”

“I’ve never seen you,” Derek says, raising his eyebrows.

“Fuck you, I’m an awesome dancer,” Stiles retorts, pushing himself to his feet. “You just watch.” He kicks their shoes out of the way and busts his worst moves, shimmying around without any rhythm until Derek’s full-on laughing, his head thrown back. Stiles grins triumphantly; he doesn’t care that
he’s a terrible dancer. Being able to make Derek laugh is way better, and so is the way Derek’s eyes go dark watching him—like somehow, even his terrible dance moves have managed to turn Derek on. Stiles did that.

Stiles has a bit of an epiphany as he stands there, still swaying a little, and Derek looks at him, his amused expression shifting into a possessive smile. The dancing reminds him of customs from a couple centuries back; it used to be that there was a whole mating ritual between alphas and omegas. There’d be elaborate costumes and makeup, and the omega would dance for their alpha, drawing them in like a Bird of Paradise.

Those days are long over but, Stiles realizes, he’d do it for Derek. Oh, he still hates being an omega, but the sting of it’s starting to soften a bit, because Derek doesn’t care. Derek doesn’t care that Stiles bucks every omega stereotype he can; he doesn’t expect it, because he doesn’t care about Stiles because he’s an omega—he cares about Stiles because he’s Stiles. And because of that, Stiles would embrace any stereotype or tradition he wanted, because he could, because it’d please Derek and Stiles wants to please him, not because Derek would ever ask or expect it of him.

So maybe Stiles doesn’t mind being an omega, not when it’s only Derek he lets see him that way.

They’re still staring at each other as Stiles has his silent epiphany, and when he’s come to the end of it he lifts his hands, slowly unbuttoning his dress shirt. Derek doesn’t blink, but he sits up straighter, his eyes beginning to burn gold at the edges as Stiles shrugs off his shirt and lets it fall to the grass. He takes off his pants next, letting them drop to his ankles before stepping out of them. His undershirt goes next, and then he’s just in his boxers.

Derek’s watching him intently, eyes bright and gold now, but he doesn’t make a sound or movement, even when Stiles pushes his boxers down his thighs.

It should feel strange, standing naked in the middle of the woods, but Stiles doesn’t care. It feels right; he’s comfortable with Derek, has been since the night they met. Derek’s never made him worry, or made him feel like he needs to act like anything other than himself. Everything’s better than fine.

Stiles walks forward slowly, deliberately, stepping back onto the blanket and straddling Derek’s legs before sinking down on top of him. Still, the only thing Derek does is lift his hands to steady Stiles on the way down, and his hands stay there at Stiles’ waist. For a long moment, they just look at each other, Derek’s eyes liquid gold and half open. When his lips part, Stiles can see his fangs have dropped, and for a moment he has a wild urge to ask Derek to bite him.

He remembers, with great fondness, the bruised bitemark Derek used to leave on his shoulder after every hookup last summer. He wonders if Derek’s going to shift completely; they’ve never had sex like that before. He half expects Derek to flip them over and take control, but then, if Stiles isn’t much of an omega, Derek’s not exactly a typical alpha either—all he does, when Stiles leans forward to press his mouth to his jaw, is tilt his head back to give Stiles better access.

Stiles goes slow; he doesn’t feel like they’re in any hurry tonight, and he likes that. There’s no Evie to start crying, no one at all to interrupt them out in the woods. He lazily kisses his way down Derek’s throat, sucks bruises into his skin that flourish and disappear within seconds, sets his teeth against Derek’s collarbone and bites like he wants Derek to bite him. That gets him a low groan from Derek that he feels in his teeth, still digging in against Derek’s skin.

Derek’s hands rub up his sides, fingers bumping over Stiles’ ribs, slipping around to clutch at his shoulder blades. Stiles sits back with a lazy smile, Derek's hands warm at his back, a comforting juxtaposition against the cool night air.
"You're still wearing clothes," he informs Derek, who raises his eyebrows.

"Am I?" he asks. "Think you could help me with that?"

Stiles' smile widens and he shifts forward to kiss Derek hungrily, nimble hands swiftly unbuttoning Derek's shirt and pushing it open, pressing his palms to Derek's chest. Derek growls low in his throat, nips at Stiles' bottom lip, hands slipping back down his spine to palm at his ass. Stiles arches into his touch with a choked-off noise, and the shift of his hips brings his dick—already hard and leaking; that's how easy he is for Derek—in glancing contact with Derek's, separated by the stiff cloth of Derek's dress pants, and Stiles bites down on another noise.

"You don't need to be quiet," Derek breathes into Stiles' skin, sucking a bruise into bloom in the hollow of his throat. He digs his fingers into the swell of Stiles' ass so hard it hurts in the best way, grinds their hips together, and Stiles whines, clutching hard at Derek's shoulders.

"I keep forgetting," Stiles pants. "We're not going to wake Evie up, so—" Derek smacks him on the ass and Stiles yelps, both sounds loud in the quiet clearing. "What was that for, asshole?"

"Don't talk about our daughter right now," Derek says, voice a little strangled.

Stiles rolls his eyes. "Did you forget about all the sex we had while I was pregnant with her?" He shimmies his hips a little, enjoying the sharp way Derek exhales, and drops his voice lower, tilting his head to brush his lips along Derek's jaw as he murmurs, "I want to feel your knot again."

Derek inhales deeply, and that's all the warning Stiles gets before Derek gets a hand in his hair and jerks him up to smash their mouths together. Stiles pushes back eagerly, giving as good as he gets, pushing up onto his knees for leverage. For maybe the first time ever in his life, he wishes he was in heat; it'd be so good, so easy with Derek. Even as it is, Derek's hands spark fire under Stiles' skin wherever he touches him, brushing over his nipples one moment, gripping at the backs of his thighs the next. When one hand slides over his ass and presses carefully at his hole, Stiles groans into Derek's mouth.

"You better have lube," he hisses.

"Candles weren't the only things I got at Walmart," Derek murmurs. Stiles sits back and looks around before he spots it: a plastic bag at the other end of the blanket. He scrambles to grab it, and by the time he's turned around, Derek's managed to kick off his pants and underwear. He laughs quietly when Stiles straddles him again, warm hands steadying. "We've got all night," he teases.

"We haven't had sex since before You Know Who was born," Stiles says. "Don't tell me you're not eager for this."

"I am," Derek says, but he puts his hand on the long scar on Stiles' abdomen. "This won't hurt you?"

Stiles grins, putting his hand over Derek's. "Dr. Yukimura cleared me for duty last week. I'll be fine—and even better when your dick's in me."

Derek huffs like he's annoyed, but he's smiling when he slicks his fingers up, and he works a finger inside him. Stiles tilts his head back with a pleased noise, tries to urge him on a little faster by pressing back against him, but Derek goes at his own pace, working in a second, and then a third, until Stiles is panting. Sweat's prickling at his spine and the backs of his knees and along his hairline, his dick jumping when Derek curls his fingers inside him, biting at his jaw.

"Please," Stiles breathes, digging his fingers into Derek's shoulders. "C'mon, please—"
“Easy, easy,” Derek says soothingly, but he finally does what Stiles asks, slipping his fingers out of him and twisting to dig through the plastic bag before pulling out a box of condoms.

“What,” Stiles says, a little dazedly. “You don’t want to knock me up again?”

Derek snorts quietly as he rips one open and rolls it on. “Not quite yet. Here—” He grips Stiles’ hip with one hand, using the other to guide his dick inside him.

“Oh, fuck,” Stiles sighs when he’s fully seated. It’s been months since he’s been able to ride Derek like this—the last time was sometime in the summer, probably in the back of his car. “I fucking love your dick.”

Derek snorts again, though the noise trails off into a strangled sort of groan as Stiles slowly pulls himself up and then sinks back down onto him. His hands find Stiles’ hips, following him as Stiles begins to ride him, mouthing at any part of him he can reach, every scrape of his teeth against Stiles’ skin sending pleasure jangling up his spine. Derek mostly lets him control the pace—it’s not as though he has much leverage—but he slows Stiles with his grip on his hips when Stiles starts moving too fast, putting a hand on his spine to steady him. Stiles doesn’t want to slow down; he can feel Derek’s knot starting to grow, thicker every time he bears down on him, and he desperately wants it inside of him. It’s torturous to go so slow, and he almost sobs in relief when finally, finally, Derek cants his hips and locks himself inside Stiles with one last push.

“Shit,” Stiles breathes, pressing his forehead to Derek’s. “That’s so fucking good, Derek, that—”

“Shh,” Derek says soothingly, tilting his head up to catch Stiles in a kiss, one of his hands stroking up and down Stiles’ spine even as the other curls around his dick and starts jerking him off. Stiles groans, rocking up into Derek’s hand and back against his dick, body clenching down against the knot inside him.

He can feel the heat building in him, that delicious tingling starting at the base of his spine, rapidly building in intensity. “Fuck,” Stiles curses as it crests over him, his hands scrambling at Derek’s back, one locking in his hair. “Fuck—“ His spine bows as he comes, and Derek jerks him through it until he’s shuddering, mouth open and panting. Derek waits for his breathing to slow, mouth ghosting along Stiles’ jaw, until Stiles draws in a deep breath and says, “Okay.”

“Okay?” Derek repeats, and when Stiles nods Derek flips them so deftly Stiles hardly realizes what’s happened until he’s on his back and staring up at the starry night sky. He’s got enough time to hook his knees around Derek’s hips before Derek begins rutting into him, grinding in deep with every ragged thrust of his hips. Stiles is light years from being able to get hard again but he’s happy to encourage Derek, dragging blunt fingernails down his back and through his hair, murmuring, “You going to breed me up good, alpha?”

He grins at the strangled noise Derek makes against his throat, at the way his thrusts lose all rhythm as he begins to come. There’s no heat bond when Derek knots him outside either of their heats, which Stiles is grateful for—he was completely unprepared for the way it felt last time—nor will Derek’s knot last as long, but they’re still tied together for the next half hour or so, so he gentles his touch, rubs his hands up and down Derek’s tense back and shoulders.

It’s a while before Derek lifts his head and says, voice still a little strangled, “You can’t say things like that!”

“Why?” Stiles asks, brushing his fingers against Derek’s cheek. “Because it’s true?”

“But because it’s not fair,” Derek says. Stiles can tell he’s trying to be irritated and completely failing at
it, so he takes pity on him and doesn’t try to argue, contenting himself with rubbing their cheeks together. Derek seems to give up; he sighs quietly and drops his weight back down onto Stiles, tucking his head under Stiles’ chin.

They’re quiet for a long time. Stiles can feel Derek’s heart beating against his chest, steadily slowing as he comes down from his orgasm. He likes the feel of it; it’s comforting, like a physical lullaby. He could easily fall asleep there, trapped yet safe under Derek’s warm weight.

“You’re graduating soon,” Derek says after a while. “How do you feel?”

“I don’t know,” Stiles says, staring up at the stars. “Feels like it should have happened years ago. I’m excited for college.”

“You’ll like Humboldt,” Derek tells him quietly.

“Because you’re there,” Stiles says, and he can feel Derek smile against his skin. They fall silent again, Stiles tracing his fingers over the tattoo on Derek’s back. Eventually he says thoughtfully, “We have it easy right now, with all of our friends and family around to help us. When we move in the fall...it’s just going to be us.”

“You think we’re ready for that?” Derek asks.

“I don’t know,” Stiles says honestly. He chews on his bottom lip for a moment before continuing, "But whatever happens, I know we'll get through it together."

Derek picks himself up on one elbow to look at him, and Stiles doesn't need anything other than the soft look of love on Derek’s face to tell him he’s right.

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Stiles graduates high school one sunny Saturday afternoon with a 3.82 GPA, nineteenth place in the class overall, and Evie asleep in a sling against his chest because she wouldn't stop fussing unless he carried her. He gets a smattering of adoring awws from the crowd when he crosses the stage with one hand keeping Evie steady, and he grins; he knows he's got the cutest fucking baby ever.

When the superintendent leans into the microphone and announces, "Friends and loved ones, I give you the Beacon Hills High School Class of 2015!" Stiles surges to his feet with the rest of his class, but he doesn't bother throwing his cap in the air. Instead, he worms his way into the aisle, ducking parents seeking their children, and heads straight for his dad and Derek.

His dad's crying and doing a bad job at hiding it, but Stiles won't call him out on it because his eyes aren't exactly clear either, so he just passes Evie off to Laura and lets his dad wrap him up in the tightest hug he's had in a long time.

"I'm so proud of you," his dad murmurs, pressing a kiss to his temple.

"Cut it out," Stiles mutters, grinning past the ache in his throat. "This is a happy day."

"Oh, I know, kiddo," his dad says, giving him one last squeeze. "I know."

Stiles gives him a watery grin and turns to accept a kiss on the cheek from Laura. Then he looks at Derek, who's waiting for him, hands by his sides, his expression open and glad. "I did it," Stiles tells Derek.

"You did it," Derek agrees, eyes creasing as he smiles.
"I did it," Stiles repeats, then throws himself at Derek, who catches him with a laugh, spins him around. Stiles presses his forehead to Derek's, laughing. He did it; he had Evie, he got his degree—whatever the fuck comes next, he'll get through it, just like this.

"Come on," Derek murmurs, their noses brushing. "There's a party at your dad's house."

"A party, huh?" Stiles says. "When did you put that together?"

"Why do you think your dad was late?" Derek retorts dryly, gently setting him on his feet once more.

Stiles grins at him as Laura passes Evie back to him. "You spoil me."

Derek smiles widely as they work their way down the rows of chairs, reaching out to curl his hand around Stiles' own. "Always," he promises.
“Okay,” Stiles says briskly, glancing between his phone in one hand and the grocery list in the other. “We’ve got two hours. Think there’s time for us to make a cake?”

“You think we can bake, cool, and frost a cake in two hours?” Derek asks dryly.

Stiles scowls at the list. “No, damn it. I’ll have to get a premade one, and you know how much frosting they put on those things. Dad’s going to have a heart attack.”

“He’s going to be in heaven, you mean,” Derek retorts, plucking the list from Stiles’ hand. He scans it, then rips the bottom third off and hands it back to Stiles. “You take care of the cake and this stuff. We’ll do the rest.”

Stiles nods, frazzled. “Fine—thanks.”

Derek catches him by a belt loop as he twists to head to the bakery and presses a quick kiss to his cheek. “Just calm down,” he says. “No one’s going to be upset if we’re late.”

“I’m going to kill Melissa,” Stiles says, grinning reluctantly. “Surprise parties are supposed to be surprises for the guest of honor, not the hosts.”

“It’s all going to work itself out,” Derek says. “Just get the cake.”

Stiles salutes him and trots off into the store, disappearing down an aisle.

“Papa?” Evie says curiously, from where she’s sitting at the front of the cart. “Where’s Daddy going?”

“He’s going to find a cake for Grandpa’s birthday,” Derek tells her, steering the cart toward the produce section.

“Chocolate cake?” Evie asks hopefully.

“We’ll see what he finds,” Derek replies evenly. Knowing Stiles and the luck they have, the only thing the bakery will have is carrot cake with walnuts in it, and the sheriff’s allergic to nuts.

“How old is Grandpa?” Evie asks, after thinking for a moment.

“Fifty,” Derek tells her, leaning over the cart to pick up some apples.

He can see Evie ruminating on this, her dark brows furrowing. “How old are you?” she asks eventually.

“Twenty-eight,” Derek says. It still feels weird to say, even though his birthday was half a year ago. Two years from thirty, Jesus. “And Daddy’s twenty-four,” he adds, before she can ask.

“That’s old,” Evie says.

Derek snorts. “You think so?”

“Very old,” Evie says assuredly. “I’m never going to be that old.”

Derek snorts again, snagging a bunch of bananas off a display. She certainly inherited Stiles’ lack of
filter, as well as many other things—his upturned nose, amber eyes, and scattering of moles—but she’s like Derek in many others. She may have Stiles’ lack of filter, but she’s also got Derek’s disinclination to talk most of the time, content to sit and watch the world with sharp eyes. Evie got the jet black Hale hair and brooding eyebrows, too—from a distance, she’s identical to Cora and Laura when they were her age, but when she smiles, it’s all Stilinski. As to any other traits she might have inherited from Derek, they’re still not sure if she’s a werewolf, but Laura seems to think the signs are pointing toward yes.

They mosey sedately down the aisle, half of Derek’s attention on the grocery list, the other half on Evie. She sits at the front of the cart, calmly eating animal crackers Derek’s got in a ziploc bag, studying every customer they pass.

In the cereal aisle, Derek lets her pick what she wants for the upcoming week and she accepts the task with the solemnity of an Olympic judge, giving each contender equal attention before finally pointing at the Frosted Flakes. Derek’s just dropping it into the cart when Evie’s head whips around and she shouts, “Uncle Scott!”

“Volume, Evelyn,” Derek says automatically, even before he follows her gaze and spots Scott paused at the end of the aisle. Derek waves and Scott waves back, turning his cart to come trotting down the aisle. Evie’s so excited she stands straight up in the cart, and Derek has to lean forward and grab the back of her shirt so she doesn’t fall over the edge. There’s another Stiles trait; Evie loves Scott. She’s told Derek and Stiles many times that she intends to marry Scott when she grows up, and the fact that he’s engaged to Kira doesn’t seem to bother her in the slightest. Stiles had cheerfully said that if anyone was going to murder someone for love, it’d be their progeny, and Derek had reluctantly agreed.

“Hey, Derek,” Scott says jovially. “Hey, Evie!” He bends to press a loud kiss to the top of her head and Evie giggles delightedly. Derek rolls his eyes and tugs at her shirt until she gets the hint and sits down, though her eyes stay set adoringly on Scott.

“What are you doing here?” Derek asks. “Shouldn’t you be helping your mom?”

“That’s why I’m here,” Scott says. “She realized she didn’t have any snacks or drinks. I’m on chip duty—Boyd’s getting the soda.”

Derek sighs. “This party’s turning into a bit of a disaster.”

Scott shrugs. “I think we’re doing pretty well for three hours’ notice. Stiles’ dad is a workaholic. I’m surprised Stiles was able to even convince him to take the afternoon off.”

“He used Evie as blackmail,” Derek says. “He thinks he’s taking her for the afternoon.”

“That would work on me too, to be honest,” Scott says, grinning down at Evelyn. She’s not following their conversation, but she beams back at Scott, happy to be noticed. Derek can feel himself smiling at her happiness, and he doesn’t care that Scott grins when he notices. He never expected to love anyone as much as he loves Evie—maybe even more than he loves Stiles, thought it’s not fair to try to compare the two.

Like he’s heard Derek’s thoughts, Scott says, “So where’s your husband?”

Ignoring the warm thrill that shoots through him at the thought of Stiles being his husband, even after a year of marriage, Derek dryly says, “Trying to find a cake.” Stiles rounds the end of the aisle just as he speaks, his arms laden with items. He grins when he sees them.
“Hey man,” Stiles says to Scott once he’s reached them. “Your mom send you out on errands too?”

“Sure did,” Scott says cheerfully. “You find a cake?”

“And a thousand other things on the list,” Stiles says, giving Derek a piteous glance. “We’re going to have to go back for the toilet paper. It jumped ship halfway down the aisle.”

Derek rolls his eyes and unburdens Stiles, piling items into the cart around Evie. Stiles has managed to find a vanilla sheet cake with chocolate icing, and as he bends to put it under the cart, Evie picks up one of the boxes Derek’s just put in the cart and says excitedly, “Papa, is this a toy? Is this for me?”

“Whoa, no, Evie!” Stiles says, hurriedly plucking the box from her hand as his face goes red. “That’s not a toy, and it’s definitely not for you.”

Scott grabs the box from Stiles, who squawks indignantly, and his eyes go wide when he realizes what he’s holding. “Dude,” he says reverentially. “Are you—”

“No!” Stiles says, snatching the box back and throwing it into the cart. “I mean—maybe, I don’t know; that’s what it’s for!” Scott’s grinning widely, and Stiles makes exaggerated hand-flapping motions at him. “Shut up! You can’t know before my dad this time, all right?”

“My lips are sealed,” Scott says solemnly, then winks at Derek. “I should get a move on. I’ll see you guys in a few hours, all right?”

“See you!” Stiles says cheerfully.

“Bye, Uncle Scott!” Evie calls, waving frantically. “Bye!”

“Don’t worry, Evie-Bee,” Stiles says, smoothing his hand over her hair. “We’re going to see him in a couple hours.”

“And then we’ll have cake?” Evie asks hopefully.

Stiles laughs. “And then we’ll have cake.” When he glances at Derek, though, there’s a hint of worry on his face. “Do you think everyone’s going to know?” he asks quietly. “If I’m—I didn’t want everyone to know right away, you know?”

“You know Scott,” Derek tells him. “He’s not going to say anything, and neither are we. We don’t know anything yet.”

“Yeah,” Stiles chews on his lip for a moment before he shrugs. “You’re right.”

“Hey,” Derek says, stepping away from the cart so he can loop an arm around Stiles’ waist. “It’s going to be fine. Let’s focus on the party for now—everything else comes later.”

Stiles smiles faintly, lifting his hands to cup Derek’s face. “I knew marrying you was the right choice.”

Derek can feel the warm metal of Stiles’ wedding ring pressing against his jaw and he smiles too, leaning in to kiss Stiles slowly. Evie protests that they’re being gross, but they’re still slow to pull apart and when they do, Stiles stays at the back of the cart next to Derek, putting one hand over Derek’s as they walk through the rest of the store, rescuing the fallen toilet paper and grabbing the rest of their groceries.
Stiles leans against him after they unload everything onto the belt, watching the cashier ring them through. She’s an older woman, white-haired and friendly; she talks to Evie as she rings up items, and Evie answers cautiously, glancing at the two of them for reassurance. Derek looks at Stiles, noting the way his eyes have settled half shut, content, as well as the faint flush on his cheeks, which could be one of many things, but two significant things in particular; if the test does come back negative, then his next heat’s a few days off and Derek’s certain they’ll make it stick this time. And if the test comes back positive, that flush on his cheeks means another nine months of ups and downs, tiny clothes and toys and furniture to be dragged out of storage. Derek presses his nose to Stiles’ hair and closes his eyes for a moment, inhaling deeply.

“Papa, can I have another cracker?” Evie asks, and Derek opens his eyes, fishing around in his pocket for the ziploc bag. He pulls one out, but before he can pass it to Evie, Stiles snatches it out of his hand and pops it into his mouth.

Evie stares at him with wide eyes. “Daddy, that was for me!”

“Sorry, sweetpea,” Stiles says with a grin. “Daddy’s hungry too.”

Evie looks at Derek plaintively and he hands her another cracker, carefully shielding it from Stiles. “Thank you, Papa,” she says with great dignity.

As Derek straightens, he sees the cashier do a slight double-take when she rings up the test, her eyes flickering from the box to Derek and Stiles. “Second child?” she says, and Stiles nods, looking a little sheepish. “It’s always the opposite of the first,” she says confidently, dragging a box of cereal through the scanner.

“I don’t know about that,” Stiles says. He turns to look at Evie. “What do you think, Evie? Do you want a brother or a sister?”

Evie gives this the same serious consideration she’d given her cereal choices, and then decides, “Brother.”

Stiles glances at Derek with a faint grin. “Guess that’s decided, then.”

“That doesn’t sound very scientific to me,” Derek says, pulling out his wallet to pay.

“Worked that way in your family, didn’t it?” Stiles retorts, piling bags of groceries around Evie. “Tuck in your legs for me, baby girl.”

Derek watches them fondly as he waits for his change, and as they head out to the parking lot he says, “You know I don’t care what it is, right?”

“I know,” Stiles says, giving him a quick smile. “As long as it’s healthy, right?”

“Right,” Derek says quietly, and Stiles squeezes his wrist. When they reach the car, he says, “Kid or groceries?”

“Kid!” Stiles says enthusiastically, moving around to lift Evie out of the cart. “I like you so much more than food, Ev.”

“Even more than cake, Daddy?” Evie asks.

“Hm,” Stiles says thoughtfully, opening the side door and watching her scramble into her car seat. “I don’t know, baby girl. Cake’s pretty good. Do you like me more than cake?”
“I think so,” Evie volunteers.

“You hear that, Der?” Stiles says, pretending to sound offended. “She thinks so!”

Derek snorts as he slides said cake into the back. “Sounds like you need to do some work to get back into her good graces,” he says, and Stiles laughs.

As he leans in to buckle Evie’s car seat, she says, “Am I going to get a brother, Daddy?”

Stiles pauses, glancing back toward Derek before he carefully says, “We don’t know yet, Evie. Maybe someday.”

“I’d like a brother,” Evie says. “I can share my toys with him.”

“That’s a very nice thing to say,” Stiles says, pressing a kiss to her forehead. “We’ll see what happens. But now we need to go home and get ready for Grandpa’s birthday, all right?”

“Okay,” Evie says agreeably, and Stiles smiles, pulling himself out of the back and closing the door. He comes around to the back of the car, where Derek’s putting in the last bag, and grabs the cart like he’s going to put it away, but Derek stops him with a hand on his wrist. “You okay?” he asks gently.

Stiles gives him a faint smile. “I am,” he says steadily. “I just don’t want to count our chicks before they’re hatched.”

“It’s going to happen eventually,” Derek says firmly, adding, “If I managed to knock you up the first time we ever had sex, I don’t think doing it again is going to take much effort.”

Stiles’ faint smile blooms into a wicked grin. “Hey hey,” he says. “You know I’m not opposed to effort. As much effort as possible, really.”

Derek smirks at him. “If we get things ready quick enough, we might have time for a little effort before we have to leave.”

Stiles’ grin widens. “Why stop there? I know for a fact the laundry room at Melissa’s house has a lock on the door.”

Derek laughs. “You think Scott would forgive us for that?”

“For the purpose of babymaking?” Stiles laughs, beginning to push the cart toward the return area. “He’d forgive anything.”

Derek grins sharply, closing the hatch. Inside the car, Evie’s calling, “Papa, can I have more crackers?” and Derek pulls the bag from his pocket, still smiling. His heart’s light, his body thrumming with a deep-seated contentment. He remembers a similar feeling from six years ago, after the first time he and Stiles hooked up. He never expected that night would lead him here—married, devoted to a daughter, and trying for another kid—but he wouldn’t change a single thing.

End Notes

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