The Pull of the Tide

by miss_aphelion

Summary

Stiles appears alone at the doors of the emergency room the morning after the full moon, covered in blood with a deep slash torn across his left side. He's suffering from hypovolemic shock and barely conscious and he won't tell anyone what happened—not his hospital appointed psychiatrist, not his father. Not even his pack.

The list of suspects is disconcertedly short. There were only seven others in the woods with Stiles that night: Derek, Scott, Boyd, Erica, Isaac, Jackson and Allison. And none of them remember the night in quite the same way.

Notes

The very awesome Rhea has now created a podfic of this story here if you'd prefer to listen to the story instead.

This story has alternating chapters between Stiles being interrogated by his psychiatrist and Sheriff Stilinski interrogating everyone else, so chapters will be a bit short, and actual answers will be coming at a slow build, just to warn you!
"Pretend I'm a mirror," she says, eyes wide and honest, like a Lydia de-clawed.

"Is this like in Yoga?" Stiles asks. "Do I have to be the tree? Because I'm not very good at sitting still. I'd hate for you to be disappointed on our first date."

"This isn't about me," she says. "I don't matter."

"I'm not sure that's a healthy attitude to have," Stiles tells her. "Especially for a psychiatrist."

"Stiles," she says softly, and he wonders how often she's practiced that tone, that perfect pitch between push and pull. "I know you don't want to talk to me. So just talk. If you won't let me help, the least I can do is listen."

"Yeah," Stiles says, glancing away. "Talking's never actually been my problem. It's the one thing I'm good at."

"Maybe too good?" she suggests. "It's definitely a talent. You drive everyone to distraction, to the point they never notice when you really haven't said anything at all. Am I right?"


"I think you're losing the knack for it," she says dryly. "We had to post security at the door just to keep your friends from sneaking in after hours."

Stiles barks out a laugh, and she frowns at him. She doesn't get the joke—but a guard at the door did very little when you had friends that could climb three stories up a wall and the only window had a conveniently broken latch. Stiles hasn't spent a single night in this hospital room alone.

"Stiles, you promised your father you would talk to me," she says, as though that will reach him. It's such a rookie mistake that he wonders if maybe he's her first patient.
Stiles narrows his eyes at her, one hand clenching around the bed rail. No one is allowed to use his father, good intentions or not. He's off limits. "That's the least of the lies I've told him," he snaps. "He has nothing to do with this. My father and I are just fine."

"You're lying to him, but you're fine?" she asks. "How can he help you if he doesn't know what's wrong?"

"Maybe he's the one that needs my help. Maybe I'm the one that needs to protect him," Stiles says, and regrets it the moment he does—not because it isn't true, but because it is. Stiles has been dreading this encounter since he landed himself in the ICU. He's never been very good at censoring himself and the thin tendrils of morphine still running through his system certainly don't help.

"That's not your job," she tells him earnestly, leaning forward to wrap her hand around the bed railing beside his own. She's that rare type of beautiful that downplays their looks instead of playing them up—soft beige eye shadow with no liner, her brown hair pulled up in a loose ponytail. She's too young to be matronly, but the potential is there, and she exploits it.

He remembers his own mother, laughing as they got themselves covered in flour. She always baked everything into the wrong shape, but it had never mattered. Stiles has never tasted anything as brilliant as the things she used to make. They used to keep a photo on the fridge of the leaning three-tiered cake she'd made for his eighth birthday, which she had later tried to claim had been modeled after the Tower at Pisa—but it had gone missing the day that she died. Stiles hasn't seen it since.

"Do you know how to keep a secret?" Stiles asks her suddenly, turning back to face her.

"Of course," she says.

"Really?" Stiles asks. "Because most people don't. They think they do, but they don't."

"Everything between us is confidential," she says. "You're smart, so I know that you know that."

"I'm smart enough to know that if I make any allusions to fantasies of self harm or of harming others that you have every right to have me forcibly committed and put under observation. I know that as a minor you also have certain rights to tell my father what you believe he needs to know for my own good."

She stills, caught momentarily off-guard before settling back in her chair and watching him carefully. "Are you thinking of harming yourself?" she asks.

"That wasn't the point. You're smart. You know that it wasn't," Stiles says, tossing her own words back. "The point is that there's only one way to keep a secret, and that's not to tell it. Not to anyone."

"Not even your friends?" she asks. "They care about you."

"You think I don't care about them?" he asks. "Because I do."

"I think you don't trust them," she says, "and that's not the same thing."

"You're absolutely right," Stiles says. He glances out the window, sucking in air like he's drowning, because it's one of those strange mornings where you can still see half the moon. "It really isn't."
Thanks to everyone for the kudos/reviews! I finally figured out the time setting for this, it takes place in some unknown space of time after season two. So possible spoilers for everything.

Extra thanks to the reviewer who wanted Stilinski feels, cause I'd been planning to jump straight into the Sheriff doing his interrogating, but that got me to want to explore the Stilinski feels a bit more! Hope you enjoy.

Melissa is the one that calls him, because she's there when Stiles walks in. He just comes walking through the doors, she tells him, her breath hitching as she holds a hand to her head. He was covered in blood, a nurse with less tact tells him shakily, he was leaving a trail of footprints behind him like something from a horror film.

Stiles had, they later learned, driven himself all the way there. His Jeep was found parked in the woods behind the hospital, the driver's side seat crusted with blood, the headlights still on. The drivers' side door was missing entirely.

Stiles has gotten into his fair share of trouble, but the Sheriff has never been as terrified as he was that night. He'd watched them work on his son through the paneled glass for hours, with Melissa holding his hand. The biggest trouble is the loss of blood, the doctors tell him when he's stabilized, but nothing vital was hit.

Nothing vital, he thinks, as he sinks into one of those flimsy plastic chairs. Every part of his son was vital.

Stiles' friends show up all together, looking worried and guilty and out of breath. Some the Sheriff recognizes, like Scott, Allison and Jackson, as well as Isaac Lahey and Derek Hale? The rest he didn't even know his son knew. But he can worry about that later.

They finally let him see Stiles at four in the morning. He's drugged and groggy but alive, and the Sheriff grasps onto him like he's never going to let him out of his sight again. Stiles reaches out and places a hand on his neck, and tells him it will all be all right, that he's fine. It should be the Sheriff saying that, but he's known for awhile now that their roles have been unhealthily reversed—Stiles has been taking care of him since he lost his wife.

Nothing is the way it should be.

The Sheriff has pictures taken of every single wound, has the doctors catalogue every single injury. The wound on his side, they tell him, looks like it's from an animal. The bruises on his hips, however, look like they were made by human hands.

He doesn't even ask Stiles anything at first, he's just so glad he's alive. He starts the questions gently, but Stiles claims he can't remember, and the Sheriff can't bring himself to push. He might not be able to interrogate his own son, but he has plenty of others that he can question to try and get to the truth.
He starts with Scott, because he knows he's the weak link. He loves the kid, and has known him since he was five years old, but he was never the instigator of trouble. That was Stiles all the way, dragging Scott along, or at least it had been that way for years. He can't shake the feeling something has changed.

Even now when he thinks of Scott he still remembers that tiny little kid. He met him when he was called to the principal's office that first time, Stiles and Scott just sitting there together, scraped up and conspiratorial, both so small their feet weren't even touching the floor.

Scott was being picked on because of his inhaler, so Stiles had taken a group of three older bullies on. The fight, the Sheriff was assured, did not last long. Stiles and Scott lost pretty much right away, but the two of them had been inseparable since.

"Scott," the Sheriff says, leaning forward, and the concern in his tone is not a ploy—he knows Scott, but he also knows that both Scott and his son have been lying to him for quite awhile now. "Do you realize that my son almost died?"

Scott winces, his eyes shakily pulling away to look at the table. It's a sign of guilt, and while the Sheriff doesn't think Scott would hurt Stiles, he's pretty sure he has some idea who would. "Mister Stilinski—" Scott starts.

"I need to know what happened that night, Scott," the Sheriff snaps. The Sheriff has called Stiles a terrible liar more than once, but the truth was his son was a pro at it in his own way—he might always know when his son is lying, but Stiles always gives him enough truth to keep him from ever getting the whole story.

But Scott can't lie to save his life.

"I need to make sure nothing like this happens again, can you understand that?" he asks. "Not to Stiles. Not to anyone. I need to know what you boys are involved in."

"It was a party, that's all," Scott insists, looking up. "We were celebrating…Jackson's birthday."

"Jackson's birthday is in March," the Sheriff says, having poured over Jackson's file when he'd issued a restraining order on his own son. He has no idea what they were all doing there together, though Jackson had revoked the order the previous month.


"It's September," he says.

"It's been a busy year," Scott says. "Mister Stilinski, you have to know, if I knew who—if I knew who had hurt Stiles, I would tell you. I would do everything I could to make sure he was caught."

"I wish I could believe that," the Sheriff says. "But you've changed, Scott. I hardly see you around anymore. I was starting to wonder if you and my son were even still friends."

"How can you—?" Scott breaks off, looking hurt, before his eyes flash angrily. "Stiles is the best friend I have, and whoever did this will pay for it, you can count on that."

The Sheriff watches him steadily, but Scott's not good enough a liar for that to be anything but the truth. "You really don't know then," he says, running a hand tiredly through his hair. He knows his best shot at getting one of the kids to talk was Scott.

"I really don't," Scott says. "We were just, there together, hanging out, that's all, and then we realized
Stiles was gone and—"

"And?" the Sheriff presses.

"And Derek went to look for him," Scott says reluctantly.

"Derek," he echoes. "Derek Hale. The man you and Stiles accused of murder."

"He was innocent," Scott reminds him.

"What was a twenty-four year old doing with a bunch of high school kids?" the Sheriff demands. 
"And just what is his relationship to my son?"

"He just…he was just looking out for us," Scott says.

"What happened after that?" the Sheriff asks tersely. "After Derek went after him."

"We all split up to find Stiles," Scott says. "I went with Alison, Erica went with Boyd, Jackson and Isaac split off on their own. That's when—" Scott breaks off, with a strange choking intake of breath. It's the sound he used to make when he was having an asthma attack, and the Sheriff frowns because he thought he'd grown out of that.

"Scott?" he asks. "That's when what?"

"That's when we heard Stiles screaming," he whispers.

The Sheriff feels his own heart stutter and he grips the table tight. He knows he should let someone else handle this, he knows that he's too close, but they didn't know these kids like he did.

They didn't know his son.

"We kept looking, I swear that we did," Scott says, looking near tears. "But we couldn't find him anywhere, and then my mom called me and told me he was at the hospital and we all went straight there."

The Sheriff leans back in his chair, watching Scott carefully. "And there's nothing else you can tell me?" he asks.

Scott shakes his head, pulling at the sleeves of his hooded sweater. "He's going to be alright, though, isn't he?" Scott asks, and he sounds the way he used to then, that nervous little kid he first met that let Stiles speak for him and was afraid to ask for anything himself.

"I'll make sure of it," the Sheriff says firmly. He's not going to settle for anything less.
"Why don't you tell me about Derek Hale?" she asks.

"Derek who?" Stiles responds, as he slouches against the raised hospital bed, watching her warily.

"I'm not going to be able to help you if you're not honest with me," she says. "I've spoken with your father already. He told me everything."

Stiles tries to hold in a frown. He doesn't know what his father thinks he knows about his association with Derek Hale—they've never said a word about him since Derek's last arrest. "I'm not sure what you're talking about."

"It's a small town," she says. "You've been seen at his estate, getting in his car. Driving him around in yours. He's quite a bit older, and he's become a bit notorious, so people have taken notice."

"Notorious?" Stiles asks. "Really? You're going with that? Shouldn't you be trying to speak to me on my level or something? How about: he's a bit of a creeper?"

"I've seen your PSAT scores, I think you'll keep up," she says.

"Just how much research have you done on me?" Stiles asks. "Is this normal? Do I have some file on me somewhere with surveillance photos and lists of my favorite things?"

"I think we're getting off topic," she says. "We were talking about Derek Hale."

"Actually, you were," Stiles says. "I was wondering if you were really one of my father's deputies, masquerading as a shrink. This feels like an interrogation."

She leans forward, watching him carefully. "I'm sorry if you feel like that," she says. "I guess in some ways it is. It's my job to get you better, and more often than not we're all our own worst enemy."

"I can assure you, I have plenty of enemies worse than myself," Stiles tells her.

"Is Derek one of them?" she asks.

"No," Stiles snaps. "He's not the one that did this, if that's what you're thinking."

"If you can't remember what happened, how can you be sure?" she asks.

"The doctors told me it was an animal that did it," Stiles says. "So. There you go. Pretty sure Derek's human."

She stays leaning forward, her eyes hardly blinking as she stares him down. "You also had a lot of bruising," she says. "Around your hips, around one wrist. The doctors tell me it's consistent with sexual assault."

"I guess I was pretty busy then, getting assaulted and then mauled, all in one night," Stiles says, falsely careless. "No wonder I've blocked it out."

"This is serious, Stiles," she says.

"I'm well aware of that, thanks," he says. "Derek wouldn't hurt me."
"Are you in a relationship with him?" she asks, slipping the question in as casually as she had when she asked him to tell her about him.

"Define relationship," Stiles says.

"I'm asking if you're romantically involved," she explains.

"Romance, and Derek Hale," Stiles says. "You're quite the good judge of character, I can see why you're in your chosen line of work."

"Okay then, let's skip the euphemisms," she says. "Are you sleeping with him?"

"No," Stiles says. "What does this have to do with anything?"

"Most sexual attacks are perpetrated by someone close to the victim," she says. "If he's hurt you we need to know. We only want you safe."

"Why are you suddenly speaking in the royal 'we'?" he asks.

"Your father, Stiles," she says patiently. "Your friends. They want you safe."

"My friends know Derek would never do this," he says. "So I seriously doubt they'd appreciate being used in your accusations."

"You seem protective of him," she says. "But you must know you can't protect everyone. Sometimes you have to look out for yourself."

"Derek didn't do this," Stiles says. "You really think he would have shown up here that night if he had?"

"I've noticed he hasn't been back since," she says.

Stiles bites his tongue to keep from refuting her. It wouldn't help to let her know that wasn't true.

"If he is innocent," she continues, "then maybe you can explain to me what he was doing in those woods?"

"We're friends," Stiles says. "We've got a secret handshake and everything, but I don't really like to go around shouting it from the rooftops cause as you said, he's a bit notorious and this town is small."

"So he just hangs out with you and the other teenagers?" she asks. "You're all okay with that?"

"Age is just a number," Stiles tells her.

She purses her lips, assessing him carefully. "I don't know what I've done to make you so hostile, Stiles," she says. "I'd like to apologize if I offended you, I want you to understand I'm on your side, I'm here for you."

"You're here because it's hospital policy for amnesia patients, and because my father thinks I'm lying when I say I don't remember," he says. "He's elected you to be bad cop, congratulations. But I can't tell you what happened to me, so this is a waste of time."

"It's been three days," she says. "You haven't spoken a word about what happened, and if you really don't remember, you're obviously not trying to get the memories back. Can you blame your father for being worried?"
"No," Stiles says. "I can't blame him, but I can blame you. What do you people call that? Oh, that's right. *Transference.* I guess I'm a textbook case."

"You're certainly testing your boundaries like something straight out of chapter one," she says. "But you can test them all you want, I'm not just going to go away."

Stiles sighs, running a hand over his eyes, ignoring the tug of the IV needle as he pulls it. "Look, I'm sorry, okay? I'm sore, and I'm tired, and I just want to go home."

"You can go home once I'm sure you're coping," she says. "And right now you're not."

"Not everyone copes the same way," Stiles says.

"But the first step is always coming to terms with what's happened, and I don't think you have," she says.

"I haven't, not yet," he agrees. "But I will. You can count on it."
Lydia

Lydia is waiting for him in the interrogation room when he gets back from handing Scott off to Melissa. Melissa had watched him strangely the whole time, her mouth parting like she wanted to tell him something, but Scott had dragged her outside before she could.

The Sheriff knows more about Lydia Martin than he probably needs to. He knows she's a strawberry blonde and a closet genius, good at almost everything she tries. He knows she likes lilies and lilacs but that she doesn't go near flowers anymore, not these last few months.

He knows his son has loved her since he was six years old.

She doesn't even glance at him now, instead she is staring at her own reflection in a tiny metal compact, smacking her deep red lips.

"Miss Martin," the Sheriff says, as he sits across from her. "Thank you for coming."

"Hmm," she huffs, still not looking at him. "I still don't see why I'm even here, I wasn't at their little hoedown."

The Sheriff tries to smile reassuringly, but it's wasted, because she's still not looking at him. He doesn’t tell her that not being with the others that night makes her as suspect as everyone that was—that she has no alibi other than to say she was home.

"Why is it you weren't with them?" he asks. "You usually are, isn't that right?"

"Jackson and I are what you might call on and off," she says stiffly. "We are, at the moment, off."

"But they're your friends too," the Sheriff says.

" Apparently I lost them in the divorce," she snaps, clicking her compact closed. "Shouldn't you be out looking for whatever is responsible for this?"

"Whatever?" the Sheriff asks.

"It was an animal attack, wasn't it?" Lydia asks. "I hear there are all sorts of strange creatures prowling about our quaint little town."

"It hasn't been confirmed that it was an animal attack," he says.

"Uh huh," Lydia says. "So you're saying it wasn't?"

"I'm asking the questions," he says. "You and my son have grown close."

Lydia shakes back her hair like she's unconcerned, but the Sheriff notices a slight chink in her armor. "He worships me," she says dismissively. "He was bound to wear me down eventually. I wouldn't call us friends."

"He spent three days sleeping in the hospital when you were attacked," he says. "Have you visited him even once?"

Lydia crosses her arms. "I don't think this is appropriate, do you?" she asks. "Unless you have something relevant to ask, I'm going to have to leave."
"You're right," he says, sitting back. "I'm sorry. That was uncalled for."

Lydia relaxes slightly as well, her posture becoming less angry and more defensive. "And I have been to see him," she says quietly. "I brought him a balloon."

"Miss Martin," he says. "I know this isn't easy for any of us, but if you know anything about why they were really out there that night—"

"I don't, because they didn't tell me," Lydia says, and her eyes narrow as she watches him. "Not even Stiles."

The Sheriff perks up at that, because his son was a strange one to single out if they weren't even friends. He would have thought she'd be more focused on what Jackson was or wasn't telling her. "Does Stiles usually tell you what's going on?" he asks.

"Stiles is the only one since my attack that doesn't treat me like I'm made of glass," she snaps. "But that doesn't mean he doesn't try to protect me, just like he tries to protect you. And everyone else."

"From what?" he asks, trying to keep the desperation from his voice.

"You know the attack at the school, the first one, I mean, before the dance? The night that, oh, who did we decide it was again? Kate Argent?" Lydia asks casually. "Anyway, there we were, trapped and terrified, being hunted. And Stiles refused to call you, even when Jackson tried to force him."

The Sheriff freezes. "What?" he breathes.

"I know, right?" she says. "I thought he was crazy, but I sort of get it now."

"Then maybe you can explain it to me," he says.

"If he called you there, and you got hurt, it would have been because of him," she says. "He would have brought you into it. Do you get it? It doesn't matter that it's your job, because you're not the Sheriff to him."

"So why don't you tell me then?" he asks.

"I've already told you all I can," she says, standing to leave and grabbing her purse.

"Miss Martin," he snaps, as she spins towards the door.

She pauses, though she doesn't turn back around. "You're not asking any of the right questions," she says. "So my answers will do you no good."

"Then tell me what I should ask," he says tiredly. "Cause I don't know what's going on here, and you're the first one talking to me about it at all."

Lydia turns back around, watching the Sheriff curiously. "Stiles is loyal, does he get it from you?" she asks, stepping closer and leaning across the desk, as though the power here has shifted so it's entirely in her hands. "If he doesn't tell you something, it's probably for a reason."

"So I should drop this?" he asks. "Is that what you mean?"

"It means I think you're asking the wrong people," Lydia says. "Scott will go along with anything Stiles says, and so will most of the rest of them. And I can't—I'm going to do whatever Stiles wants, because that's what he'd do for me. Maybe Jackson is the one you should be speaking with."
"You think Jackson did this?" the Sheriff asks in disbelief, wondering just how bad their break up was.

Lydia laughs. "Jackson should be the one person you know isn't behind this, because Stiles is obviously protecting whoever did this to him," she says. "If it was Jackson, he'd come right out and tell you."

That almost made sense, but the Sheriff watches her closely anyway, sensing a trap. "I thought you believed it was an animal?"

Lydia flashes a razor sharp grin. "Humans are animals too, Sheriff," she says, and flounces from the room.
I want to thank you all for the response to this! I'm not responding to comments individually at the moment because I'm afraid if I answer your questions I'll give the mystery away. I just wanted to warn you all that there's going to be about another 12 chapters of unreliable narrators and people lying through their teeth, so the real answers are still a bit of a ways off. But all will be answered, I promise!

"Why don't we move onto an easier subject?" she asks, resting her head on one hand. She isn't taking notes, the way psychiatrists always do on television. He wonders if she forgoes that practice to set her patients at ease, or if she just has an eidetic memory or something.

Except the way she's so focused on him is probably more nerve-wracking than watching her scribble on a notebook would be, so maybe those television psychiatrists weren't so inept after all.

"Stiles?" she queries. "How about your father?"

"We already talked about my father," Stiles says.

"We talked about what he wants for you," she corrects. "I want to know what you want for him. Maybe you can explain to me why you feel like you need to protect him?"

"Maybe because he's my father and I love him?" Stiles snaps. "What kind of question is that?"

"It goes a little further than that, though, don't you think?" she asks. "You know, while they were trying to save your life, you kept pulling away, asking for your father."

Stiles lets out a breath, his hands twisting in the sheet. "That seems pretty usual, wanting to see my dad," he says. "Are you going to analyze every little thing I said whilst delusional and/or drugged out of my mind? Cause I would like to be out of here sometime this year."

"Most kids get hurt, and they ask for a parent because they're scared for themselves," she says, ignoring his comment. "But you kept saying you needed to keep him safe. Safe from what?"

"I was in shock," Stiles says. "I have no idea what I was talking about."


"Isn't it sort of a general rule that you're not supposed to project your opinions onto me?" he asks. "If this was a trial I'd be shouting 'objection, facts not in evidence'!"

"Then let's examine the evidence. Did you know they found your phone in your Jeep?" she asks. "Fully charged, fully functional, but you drove eleven miles by yourself while you were bleeding out instead of calling someone to come get you. Instead of calling your father. He would have had an ambulance to you in minutes, you have to know that."

"Again, I was in shock," Stiles says. "Are we really going to analyze my actions when I wasn't
thinking clearly and I can't even remember them? Because that seems counterproductive."

"It wasn't just that night though, was it?" she asks him. "He's the Sheriff, he carries a gun, and you're a sixteen year old kid. Why do you feel like you need to be the one that's protecting him? Sometimes you need to let others take care of you."

"I have people taking care of me," Stiles snaps, turning to glare at her. "But who does he have but me?"

She pauses, a spark lighting in her eyes that's almost as visible as the eyes of a werewolf about to change. She's got her claws in him now, and she's ready to sink them in. Stiles closes his eyes for a minute, taking a deep breath, trying to talk himself down from a panic attack.

She's just some hospital psychiatrist, probably not even a decade older than him. He can handle this, he just needs to think: what would Lydia do?

"I think we need to talk about your mother," she says, her voice all falsely soft, her eyes leaking compassion like a sieve.

Stiles chokes on the air, and he understands then just why his father can't bring himself to even say her name. He doesn't want to taint her memory with the mess their lives have become, and Stiles can't bring himself to do it either.

She is somewhere safe from all of this, and he won't be the one to drag her back.

"No," he says, forcing the word out and catching his breath, his heart monitor steadying out after a skipped beat.

She purses her lips, looking irritated, her mask of professionalism slipping slightly. She strikes him as a perfectionist—someone that doesn't like being told no. She probably would have been happier in a lab somewhere, scrolling through equations and theories that wouldn't talk back.

And what would Lydia do? Lydia would destroy her.

"Stiles," she starts.

"Take a look around. We are not in some swank little office," Stiles snaps. "I'm not paying by the hour so you can psychoanalyze me to your heart's content. I just almost died, and you want me to talk about my mother? Have you ever even done this before?"

"I've been doing this a lot longer than you seem to think," she says, and to her credit her tone stays pitched just right. She doesn't lose her temper anywhere but her eyes. "And I am very good at what I do."

She leans forward, watching him intently, like she's trying to see straight through him. "But it doesn't matter how good I am, because I can't do it alone. You have to want to get better."

"I'm fine," Stiles says. "I've been—"

There's that strange flicker in her eyes again, a shark on a scent. "You've been what?"

"I'm good at taking care of myself," Stiles corrects. "I don't need you to be here. I think I'm doing fine, all things considered. Nurse Ratched even told me I was the Wittiest patient she's ever had."

She leans back, a flicker of amusement around her lips as she fights back a smile. "And does she
know you call her Nurse Ratched?" she asks.

"Of course," Stiles says. "That's why she thinks I'm witty."

"You're also very good at getting a conversation off track," she says, squinting her eyes. "Is it on purpose, or are you going to blame it on the ADHD?"

"That sounds rather judgmental of a legitimate psychological disorder considering you're a shrink," he says.

"Not at all," she says. "It is a serious neurobehavioral disorder and I have no doubts whatsoever that you have it. But you are very smart, and I wouldn't put it past you to have found a way to turn it to your advantage."

"I don't know whether to be flattered or disturbed that you seem to think I'm hiding some grand conspiracy," Stiles says. "Truly, I appreciate the consideration, but I am not the evil genius in my little clique. That's Lydia. I am the wise-cracking sidekick. I know what you're thinking, I should be Batman, not Robin, but Batman really wasn't all that funny, so I think I'll concede that I—"

"Stiles," she interrupts. "You're doing it again."

"Yeah," Stiles says. "That time it was on purpose. If you were wondering."

She bites back a sigh, before looking at him earnestly. "Let's try something different, okay?" she says. "Why don't you pick a subject, any subject, and we'll go from there?"

"Okay," Stiles says. "What are your thoughts on Jersey Shore? Do you find it more disturbing that they're getting a sixth season, or that Barbara Walters apparently finds them fascinating? Thoughts?"

"Batgirl," she says.

"Come again?" Stiles says.


"I'm a little disturbed that you may be right," Stiles says. "I think you've just ruined that metaphor for me forever."

She flashes a wide grin. "Good," she says. "Then we can move on."
The Sheriff sighs as he watches Jackson sit across from him. The teen's arms are crossed and defensive, his eyes catching oddly on the overhead light. He has never quite been able to get a read on Jackson, who plays the part of the spoiled rich kid to perfection, except that instead of skating by on his looks and money, he works harder than any other kid he knows.

Including Stiles, who is smart enough that he gets As without the effort.

"Jackson," he starts.

"Should I be calling my lawyer?" he asks, his voice tightly casual, flashing a grin that might look dangerous in about another ten years. Right now, he just looks like a scared kid putting on an act.

"That depends," he says. "Do you need one? I only called you in here to talk about your friends."

"They're not my friends," Jackson snaps, sitting up straight. He's always been quick to temper, the Sheriff had learned that watching him at Lacrosse. "They all think I did this."

"Lydia Martin doesn't," he says.

Jackson freezes, swallowing before looking away. "She's better off having nothing to do with this, with any of us," he tells him. "And she doesn't know anything, okay? Leave her out of it."

"She doesn't know anything?" he asks. "Meaning that you do?"

"Meaning she doesn't," Jackson says.

"Okay," he says, "So why do the others think you did this?"

"Because they're morons?" Jackson suggests helpfully. "Look, I really couldn't tell you. I don't know what happened that night. I never even saw Stiles."

"Okay," he says.

Jackson lets out a deep breath, and the Sheriff lets him collect his thoughts, trying not to press him. Jackson scrubs a hand through his hair and then leans forward on the table, meeting the Sheriff's eyes. "I mean, yeah, okay, Stiles is annoying, but I don't—I wouldn't hurt him, not like that."

"It's no secret that you and my son don't get along," he says. "But a few months back you drop the restraining order with no explanation, and now you're all hanging out together in the woods?"

Jackson gives a half shrug, trying to look nonchalant as he slides back against his chair. "I owe him, and I don't like owing him, so I'll level with you," he says. "It wasn't a prank, what they did back then. Stiles probably saved more than one life that day, mine included. So as fun as it was lording the restraining order over them, it was getting inconvenient."

"How did locking you up in my prisoner transport save lives?" the Sheriff demands.

"It's complicated," Jackson says.

"You can't tell me something like that and then not explain yourself," he says firmly, watching the boy carefully for some kind of tell.
Jackson gives a little half grin that is his adoptive father through and through, like a living testament for nurture over nature. He gives nothing away. "Actually, I can," he says. "On paper at least I was the victim in that little drama, and Stiles was the aggressor. So it's probably in everyone's best interests if you don't go dragging it all back up."

The Sheriff snorts out a laugh, tapping the fingers of one hand along the table. If he didn't know better, he'd say that Jackson had just confessed to having been responsible for that whole debacle, to clear Stiles' name with him.

But, of course, being Jackson, he's done it in such a way that the Sheriff can take no action against him.

Dollars to donuts, this kid was going to end up a lawyer. He's not looking forward to the day, and he hopes Jackson ends up on the other side of the continent in New York.

"So you're saying you're on better terms with Stiles now? With the others?" The Sheriff asks. "Is that why they were throwing you a birthday party? A kind of olive branch?"

"What?" Jackson asks, looking up at him with a sneer. "What are you talking about?"

"Scott told me you were all celebrating your birthday," the Sheriff says.

"My birthday is in March, and Scott's an idiot," Jackson says. "We were only out there because of Stiles."

The Sheriff tries not to visibly react to Jackson's words, so the teen doesn't realize how much he's given away. "Of course," he says. "That sounds like Stiles, he's the one that called you there?"

"Right," Jackson said. "Like we're all just supposed to jump to it, or something. I wasn't going to go, but—"

"Yes?" he urges.

"Hale was acting…well, like his usual charming self," Jackson says stiffly. "They didn't have enough room in his Camaro for the entire Scobby Gang, so I got elected chauffeur, whether I wanted to be or not."

"Why would you go along with that?" the Sheriff asks.

"Let's just say Hale's a hard man to say no to and leave it at that," Jackson snaps.

"You said you were heading out there because of Stiles?" he says.

"Hale was completely off his head," Jackson says, a flicker of amusement lighting his face before it twists away. "Apparently Stiles was 'disobeying orders,' which, seriously, how does that still come as a surprise? You think he'd be used to it."

"Jackson, you're not making any sense," the Sheriff snaps. "Orders? Why in the hell would Derek Hale be giving orders to my son?"

"I'm referring to his pattern of speech," Jackson says easily. "Hale doesn't ask, or make requests, or small talk—every single thing that comes out of that guy's mouth is an order."

"And you're telling me he was angry with Stiles," the Sheriff says.

"He usually is," Jackson says. "Most people usually are, actually. You've got your work cut out for
"Jackson," the Sheriff snaps. "Why don't we stick to the facts? Start again from the beginning."

"Stiles asked us to meet him out in the woods," Jackson says, his tone condescending as he glances up to trace his eyes along the ceiling tiles instead of facing the other man. "Hale was quite upset about it because Stiles wasn't supposed to go off alone or something. So Hale dragged us all out into the woods to find him. We didn't find him. Obviously, someone else did. End of story."

"You don't think Derek found him then?" the Sheriff asks.

Jackson snorts. "I don't like the guy, so I'd love to tell you he was guilty," he says. "But when we got to the woods and couldn't find Stiles, he wasn't angry anymore, he was distraught."

"Distraught about what?" the Sheriff asks.

Jackson shrugs. "I don't know, okay?" he says. "If I had to guess I'd say he thought something bad was going to happen, but that might be influenced by hindsight, considering."

The Sheriff holds in a sigh, but lets it go. "So what happened when you got there, then, and couldn't find Stiles?"

"We split up," Jackson said. "Scott and Allison, Boyd and Erica, me and Isaac," he says. "Derek went off on his own."

"I thought you and Isaac went your separate ways too?" he asks.

"We might not have been close enough to hold hands like the other two pairs," Jackson says snidely, "but we went off in the same general direction."

"So you were with Isaac the whole time?" he asks.

"I was keeping track of him, yeah," Jackson says. "I think I should call my dad, if you want to keep interrogating me. Isn't there some sort of law about that? I could have sworn that there was."

"One more question, and you can go," the Sheriff says tiredly. "Why did Stiles want you to meet him out in the middle of nowhere?"

Jackson gets to his feet. "Derek is the only one that spoke to him, and he's not exactly the most forthcoming," he says. "Besides, don't you think that's a question you should be asking your son?"
"Why don't you tell me what you were all doing in the woods that night?" she asks.

Stiles closes his eyes and takes a steadying breath, trying to fight past that sudden feeling of being trapped. He wishes his father were here, even if it was only to yell at him. Especially if it was to yell at him, because his father being so understanding and forgiving only makes Stiles feel worse.

But the Sheriff is a total pushover when Stiles is hurt or sick, so he's been putting on an act every time he visits like Stiles is still five years old. All brave smiles and 'you're gonna be fine, kiddo's and Stiles can't enjoy it because he recognizes the lies for what they are.

Stiles knows that he's tearing his father apart, and he wishes he would just yell at him like he deserves. He never yells, anymore. *Maybe I just don't want to feel worse than I already do,* he'd told him before. But Stiles is feeling worse and worse all the time.

"Stiles?" she presses, and he tries to remember what her question even was.

"Yes?" he asks, opening his eyes. She's in the same place she was when he last looked, eerily still with one leg crossed over the other. She's sitting right in line with the door, blocking the only way out, and he feels his heart constrict.

"The woods," she repeats. "Why don't we talk about why you were there?"

"I really don't remember," Stiles says, and he tries to think of it from their side: they think he's protecting whoever did this to him. He'd probably be doing the same thing in their place, trying to get to the truth, because it's painfully obvious that he's lying. He's never been great at deception, and even if he was, the heart monitor beside him is as good a lie detector as werewolf hearing. "The last clear memory I have, I was playing Ghost Recon with Scott."

"Scott," she says, toying around with the name like she doesn't already know who it belongs to. "He's your best friend?"

"Yes, we have matching BFF necklaces and everything. We took a blood oath," Stiles tells her, which is his usual brand of sarcasm, but still laced with truth, because Scott will probably always be his best friend. Stiles doesn't like the idea of ranking them—of stacking one atop another—that wasn't what packs were supposed to do. But Scott will always be different.

"And he was with you that night?" she asks again, apparently resorting to asking questions she knows the answers to, since he won't tell her anything else. "Have you spoken to him?"

"Yes," Stiles says. "He says he didn't see me, so he couldn't really help me figure out what happened."

He leaves out that Scott has been uncharacteristically overprotective of him ever since. Scott had arranged to make sure someone was with Stiles every night—and then he'd stayed every night himself, anyway. Stiles had known there was a leader buried in there somewhere.

Still, at least Stiles doesn't have to lie about what Scott's told him. Scott hasn't told him a thing, because he doesn't know anything.

"Have you spoken to any of the others?" she asks. "How about Derek? Does he know what happened to you?"
"Are you expecting some radically different answer this time or something?" Stiles asks. "You know, they say insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. Maybe you should look into that."

"I'm only asking if you've spoken with him," she says.

"Because you think he might have told me everything that happened, and that it had just slipped my mind the last eight times you asked?" Stiles asks. "I don't know. They don't know. It was dark, and I was alone, and whatever happened, they weren't there for it."

"Stiles—"

"And don't say that I can't know that if I don't remember, because I can. They're my friends, and if they'd been there they'd be in the rooms next to mine," he says. His heart doesn't even stutter as he says it—werewolf healing aside, he knows it's true.

"Okay," she says. "So you don't remember. Let's talk about before, then. You were playing Ghost Recon with Scott. When was that?"

"That afternoon," Stiles says. "We went to my house after school. He needed some cheering up."

"Why was that?" she asks.

"Girl trouble," Stiles says. "Is this relevant?"

"You won't talk about what's relevant, so let's make do," she says. "The girl was?"

"It's Allison, which you know, and I know you know, because if you've memorized my PSAT scores I seriously doubt you didn't bother to learn the names of my friends," he says.

"You got me," she says, grinning wryly. "But everything I know is secondhand. I want to get it from the source. You don't have any other missing memories? It's just from that night?"

"Yes," Stiles says. "That is, I believe, the most common form of amnesia, isn't it?"

"Common doesn't mean much in a town like this," she says. "Why don't we talk about your other injuries?"

"I don't—"

"Already healing bruises, a half-mended cracked rib," she says. "The doctors say they were already a couple of days old when you were brought it. You should remember that, so why don't you tell me about how you got them?"

"I play Lacrosse," Stiles explains, all false patience in his tone even as he's practically vibrating with pent up energy he's too tired to actually use. "Things can get pretty brutal. It's a contact sport."

"Of course," she sighs, like she has some right to his secrets and he's being stubborn denying her; as though he'd tell her anything, when he can't even tell his dad.

He knows what they all want him to say, what everyone is thinking, the easy answer: It was Derek. Derek made for such a convenient scapegoat, what with all the leather and the brooding and the modern James Dean persona—hell, even Scott had used him as one.

But things are different now, and nothing has been the easy answer since Scott was turned.
So much for Occam's razor.
The Sheriff has never seen anyone go through as dramatic of a change as Allison Argent had these last months. Stiles had reacted to his mother's death by becoming even more like himself than he'd been before: talking a little louder, a little faster, never still for longer than it took him to force out a laugh.

Allison seems to have stripped away everything she was, before piecing herself back together into something else entirely. He can see a resemblance now to her father where there hadn't been one before. Something in the way she holds herself, the vacant way she smiles, like she's sliding in a pleasant little veneer in place of a sneer.

He never thought he would describe a seventeen-year-old girl as deadly, but there is something dangerous just beneath this girl's skin—some twisting demon that leaks out around the edges, shines out through her eyes. It's a look the Sheriff has seen any number of times before, in soldiers back home from war.

The Sheriff had been to the Argents right after it happened. Most women preferred to take pills, but Victoria Argent had chosen to gut herself in her daughter's bedroom.

He can see how that might screw her up.

"Hello, Allison," he says.

She's holding herself tightly, wound like a spring, and though she keeps her gaze on him he can see her eyes cataloguing the corners of the room. Chris is pacing somewhere outside, after Allison had asked he leave them alone.

It was strange, the way he'd unquestioningly done as she asked.

She tilts her head back as she slouches in the seat, her hair tied in a braid all down her back. She's wearing mostly black, and he recalls the first time he ever saw her at one of the Lacrosse games, cheering and laughing for Scott in a knitted purple hat.

"Sheriff," she says, her voice still strangely sweet. She sounds sincere enough, and he's glad at least that has't changed. "How can I help?"

"You were in the woods the night Stiles was attacked?" he asks.

"Yes," she says. "I went with the others."

"Forgive me, but—Stiles had mentioned that you and Scott weren't seeing each other anymore," he says, not quite phrasing it like a question. Allison doesn't flinch, but he hears her sneaker squeak as she pushes herself abruptly straight.

"We aren't," she acknowledges. "But we're staying friends."

"That's good," he says, stumbling over himself as he tries to get back on track. Of all the things he's done as Sheriff, interrogating a bunch of kids was probably the hardest thing yet. These are his son's friends and he wants to believe them, but he can't even believe Stiles these days.

Something has woken in his sleepy little town, and he's let it go too long unquestioned.
"Why don't you just tell me what happened?" he asks. "From the beginning."

For some reason, that seems to get a genuine smile. Allison bites her lip to keep back a laugh of surprise, her eyes going to the table. "The beginning?" she asks, composing herself as she leans forward on her elbows. "Well, I guess this all started about a week ago. Stiles has been distracted. I think Derek had asked him to look into something for him."

"What was he looking into?" he asks.

Allison sighs. "Derek Hale and I are not exactly on the best of terms," she says. "I don't ask questions about him, and Stiles doesn't tell."

The Sheriff runs a hand through his hair in frustration. "Why would Derek Hale ask Stiles to look into something for him in the first place?"

"You have to understand, Stiles is really good at stuff like that," she says, smiling fondly. She shakes her head and pushes some stray strands of hair from her eyes. "He's like our very own Veronica Mars."

The Sheriff lets out a breath. "Please tell me he's not doing anything illegal?"

Allison laughs. "It's all above board," she promises. "He doesn't even charge. I think his curiosity gets the best of him."

"That sounds like my son," he says. "So Stiles was basically…what…he's working for Derek Hale?"

"He was doing him some kind of favor," she corrects. "That's all I know. Then he called Derek, the night of the attack, and Derek went crazy. He dragged us all out into the woods to search for Stiles. We found his Jeep, but there was no sign of him."

"Did you speak to Stiles?" the Sheriff asks.

She shakes her head. "He only spoke to Derek," she says. "But…well, it sounded like he'd found something. Derek was more than a little upset that Stiles hadn't come straight to him with what he'd found. He likes to have help, but only on his terms."

"You don't sound like you like Hale very much," the Sheriff says.

"There's really not much to like," Allison says, before looking uncomfortable. She glances back towards the door, as though making sure her father is out of earshot. "I never saw Stiles that night, but I did hear him."

The Sheriff goes still. "Scott…he mentioned that."

"Did he also mention that Stiles cried out Derek's name?" Allison asks.

The Sheriff tenses, locking his eyes onto Allison to determine if she's being honest, or spinning a convenient tale. She looks back levelly, either telling the truth or a hell of a liar. "No, he didn't mention that."

"He could have been calling him for help," Allison says, looking unconvinced. "Or he could have been pleading for him to stop. I'm not sure because that was the last we heard of him until he showed up at the hospital."

"Why wouldn't Scott have mentioned that?" the Sheriff asks, because none of this is making any
sense. He knows Scott cares for his son, he knows Scott was telling the truth when he said he would find who had hurt him. Could something like that have really slipped his mind?

"Scott, he doesn't—" Allison breaks off. "He doesn't always notice the subtler things. He has no reason to think Derek would hurt Stiles, so he wouldn't have thought anything of Stiles calling his name. He's probably right not to, I mean…it's probably not what it seems."

"But?" the Sheriff asks.

"But I don't like the way Derek looks at Stiles…like he has something that Derek desperately wants, and it's all he can do not to just take it," she admits. "The others—he has ties to them, they need him as much as he needs them. It shouldn't be that way with Stiles, but he practically stalks him anyway."

Allison looks stricken the moment the words leave her mouth, like she can't believe what she's just said. The Sheriff can't believe it either, and he tries to think back over the last year: he remembers pulling Stiles from the patrol car when Derek was locked up in the back, all those times he's found him out by the Hale property line when he should have been home. He wonders how many of those times that Stiles has lied to him, he was lying for Derek.

"I'm sorry," she whispers. "That's not true, I'm just—I'm just so angry, at everyone these days. I'm really probably not the best person to talk to about this."

"Just one more question then," he says, trying to keep the growing unease within him at bay. "Do you think Derek did this to my son?"

"Scott and Stiles trust him," she says. "All of them believe in him."

"I'm not asking them right now, I'm asking you," he says. "What do you believe?"

"Let's just say I wouldn't be surprised if Stiles was hurt because of him," Allison says, meeting his eyes steadily. "Not the least bit."
"Can I show you something?" she asks, already reaching down into her briefcase and pulling out a slim manila folder. She does not bother waiting for his response before tossing a photo onto Stiles' lap. "That was taken when you were first brought in. They've all been washed off now. Any idea what they might mean?"

Stiles stares down at the photo. It is a photo of his chest, and he can see the edge of the wound on his side, ugly and bloody and torn—but that is not the purpose of the photo. It is focused instead on the shakily drawn symbols along Stiles' chest. "Those were on me?" he asks, glancing over at her.

"Yes," she says, a curiosity in her voice that seems genuine. This is not one of the questions she asks by rote—this is possibly a question she is asking for herself, rather than for him. "We can't make anything of them. I thought you might know, if not how they got on you, at least what they are?"

Stiles forces a shrug. "I draw on myself sometimes, I don't know," he says. "I may be too young for a tattoo, but you should see what I can do with a Sharpie."

"So you draw stuff like this a lot then?" she asks. "You don't find it all unusual? Don't think it might be a clue?"

He hands the photo back. "I'm sure it doesn't mean anything," he says. "I probably got bored and started doodling on myself. I'm sure no one was supposed to even see them. If I could actually remember doing it, I'd be embarrassed, but as it is I'm just too tired to care."

"They're fairly intricate for doodles," she says. "Are you interested in art?"

"I sculpted a coffee cup for my dad in third grade, and he thought it was an ashtray," Stiles tells her. "Sadly, I was forced to give up my dreams of moving to France to become a starving artist."

"I don't know, maybe it's just sculpture that wasn't your thing," she says. "These symbols are quite fascinating. You think you designed them yourself?"

"I'm sure I copied them from something," Stiles says. "That's about as far as my artistic talents extend."

"Your father had a search done for the symbols online," she says. "Nothing came up."

"Alas, despite appearances, Google doesn't actually know all," Stiles says.

"Where do you think you might have seen them, then?" she asks. "The designs were already half worn off, you should remember drawing them on."

"Maybe my memory loss is more unreliable than I thought," Stiles says. "I don't remember doing it."

"So it might not have been you that did it?" she asks.

"Really don't think I would let anyone draw all over me," Stiles says. "And if it was already wearing off, then it has nothing to do with the night I was attacked, so I don't see why you're bringing it up."

"Your father dismissed it, too," she says, and Stiles holds back a flinch.

Of course his father dismissed it, that made perfect sense. Just another weird quirk in a long line of them—why would he look any closer than that? Stiles had once drawn over an entire wall in his
room with blue permanent marker. He remembers staring at the wall and being certain it was missing something, and then he'd just begun to draw. Forests, birds, and fierce, hulking creatures. When he ran out of space, he had climbed up on his desk to reach the top half, and he'd drawn a large, all-seeing eye, like something out of Mordor.

The next day his father had taken him to see his first psychiatrist, and they'd come home with a stack of pamphlets and a prescription for Adderall.

He'd never gotten in trouble for destroying his bedroom wall, though. Just come home from school one day to find it had been painted over.

His mother had sat him down once to try and explain his father to him. *He punishes people for a living, sweetie,* she'd told him. *I don't think he can bring himself to come home and do it to you too.*

Stiles has tried so hard since they lost her to take care of everything so his father wouldn't have to worry about him, he's tried so hard to be perfect: perfect attendance, perfect grades, healthy home-cooked meals whenever he can, eating all the curly fries himself when he can't.

Because while he can handle his father's anger, he can't take his disappointment.

"Stiles? Stiles, should I call someone?"

Stiles blinks his eyes as he tries to focus back on the room, his breathing leveling out with a startled, choking gasp. He finds her suddenly closer, sitting on the edge of his bed, leaning over him with a frown. "I'm fine," he says. "I'm—"

"You were about to have a panic attack," she says. "Want to tell me what brought it on?"

"Not particularly," Stiles says, his voice still sounding a bit shaky.

"Maybe you remembered something?" she asks.

"Yeah," Stiles says, "but it wasn't something I'd ever forgotten."

She sighs and steps away, pouring him a glass of water without being asked. He takes it gratefully and she drops back into her chair, watching him like she knows more than she should, like he's just given something away.

"Back to the symbols then," she says, holding up the picture offhandedly. "Look again. You're sure you don't recognize them? Were they from a book, maybe? Something you saw on TV?"

"Why are you so interested in them?" Stiles asks, frowning over at her.

"From what I've heard of you, Stiles," she says, "I'm more interested in why you're not interested. I'd think you would want to find out what they mean." She watches him for a moment. "Unless, of course, you already know."

"Still think I'm lying to you?" Stiles asks, and lets out a desperate kind of laugh. "Didn't my dad warn you? I'm a terrible liar."

"He did," she says. "But he also said you were a quick study, and I have a feeling you've been getting in a lot of practice."

Stiles turns to face her, letting his weight slump back against the bed. "You can't help me, you know," he says. "My memories will come back or they won't, but this isn't going to help. I need to
get out of here."

"And where would you go?" she asks.

Stiles thinks that the answer to that question should be simple. "Home," he says. "I'd go home."

He can't tell if she believes him or not, but he is becoming a better liar, that much is true. Lying isn't as hard as it used to be; of necessity, it has become almost routine. Because he knows that he can't give her the real answer, not when everyone has already made up their minds about what happened.

His father would probably have him put under 24 hour watch, if he knew the first place he planned to go when he got out of here was to find Derek Hale.
Sorry for the wait, you guys! It's been a rough week and Boyd was a tough one for me to get a read on. I want to thank you all for your wonderful feedback and support! I'm finding it very hard to resist all your questions, but I must keep my secrets until the end!

The Sheriff has faced hardened criminals that were easier to Intimidate than Vernon Boyd. The young man slouches across from him, steady as anything, like they're out meeting for coffee and not an interrogation. Most of the kids are putting on an act for him—still trying to find out who they want to be, and who they are.

Boyd looks like he already knows exactly who he is, but the Sheriff doesn't have any idea yet who that may be. He knows the rest of them, either personally or through Stiles, but Boyd is an anomaly in more ways than one.

"Boyd," the Sheriff says, after a momentary pause. "How do you know my son?"

"We go to school together," Boyd answers.

The Sheriff frowns, tapping one hand against the table. "According to truancy records, you haven't actually been going to school," he says.

"I'm eighteen," he says, like that's the answer to everything. "But Stiles and I have been going to the same schools since elementary school."

"You know, my son, he talks a lot," the Sheriff responds. "It's usually pretty easy for me to know what's going on with him, just ask 'how was your day' and let the information overload commence. But he's never mentioned you, not once."

"I guess there's not much to say about me," Boyd says.

"You were with the others, though, when they went to look for Stiles?" he asks.

"I was there," Boyd says. "But we couldn't find him."

"Do you have any idea why Stiles would have asked you all to meet him there?" the Sheriff asks.

"He didn't," Boyd says.

The Sheriff pauses, stilling his nervous tapping to watch Boyd carefully. "He didn't call Hale and ask you all to meet him out there?" he asks.

"No, he called him and asked him to meet him there alone," Boyd says, and at the Sheriff's look he shrugs. "I only know because I was close enough to Derek to overhear the call and Stiles isn't exactly quiet. But Derek was worried and thought something might be wrong, so he made us all go."

"You're telling me Stiles asked Derek Hale to meet him out in the middle of the woods, all alone," the Sheriff says, trying to keep the disbelief from his tone. "Why would he do that?"
"He wouldn't say over the phone," Boyd says. "But Derek was the one that wanted us all there, and I doubt he would have done that if he'd been planning to hurt him." Boyd's expression turns serious, and he leans forward slowly. "We didn't do this," he says earnestly. "None of us did."

"Well, Boyd, while I find that refreshingly loyal after the day I've had," the Sheriff says, "it doesn't help me much."

"It should," Boyd counters. "It means you're looking in the wrong place."

"I've been getting that feeling myself," the Sheriff allows. "Only trouble is, I've got no place else to look, and the one thing I'm not going to do here is stop. But if you'd like to steer me in the right direction, I'm all ears."

"The best I can tell you, is to steer away from us," Boyd says. "We've all got our secrets, but you're better off without them, and none of us would hurt Stiles."

"You sound very certain of that," the Sheriff says. "How well do you know the others?"

"Whether I know them well or not, it doesn't matter. Derek would kill anyone who touched Stiles, and they know it," Boyd says. "You really want some advice? Give him free reign, and he'll take care of this problem for you."

"Somehow I don't find that reassuring," the Sheriff says stiffly. "Is Hale in some kind of relationship with my son? Because it sounds like that's what you're trying to tell me. And with what happened to Stiles—"

"It's not," Boyd interrupts. "I don't know if they are or aren't. What I do know is that Derek doesn't trust easy, but he trusts Stiles. Stiles might be the only one he trusts at all, whether he'll admit it or not—and he'd die before he'd hurt him."

The Sheriff presses the heel of his hand to his forehead. "You're gonna have to bear with me here," he says. "Because last week I didn't think Stiles' had ever said more than a few words to this guy."

Boyd stares back easily. "I don't think Stiles has said just a few words to anyone," he says. The Sheriff grins wryly. "Fair point," he says, before turning serious again. "Allison Argent told me she thought Stiles was doing research for Hale. What do you know about that?"

Boyd goes tense at the mention of Allison's name, his eyes flickering inexplicably lighter, before returning to their normal shade. "I wouldn't know anything about that," he says. "But Stiles is usually researching something."

"Why don't you tell me about that night then?" he asks.

"I went off with Erica to try and find him," Boyd says. "We tried to track him, but it was like...well, it was like he'd been everywhere. I got the feeling we were being deliberately led in the wrong direction. By the time we heard Stiles call out, we were already too far away."

"You make it sound like some kind of deliberate trap," the Sheriff says.

"I suppose that would make as much sense as anything else," Boyd says.

Which, the Sheriff reasons, is none at all. "And you were with Erica Reyes the entire time?" he asks, mostly out of necessity. That was one part of the story that had been fairly consistent, and after meeting Boyd, he doubts he had any part in this.
Then again, he's not sure anything would surprise him at this point.

"I was," Boyd says.

"Then you can go," he says tiredly, rubbing a hand across his eyes. "But if you remember anything —"

"Of course," Boyd says, and gets to his feet. He stops at the door, turning back, looking solemn. "Sheriff," he says. "I want you to know, I like Stiles. He was always cool to me, even before all this."

"Before all what?" the Sheriff asks, dropping his hand and glancing up.

For the first time, Boyd seems to hesitate. "Before we all started hanging out," he says, but his eyes won't quite hold his gaze. "I just want you to know, I'm sorry about what happened. I was supposed to protect him."

"It wasn't your job to protect him," the Sheriff assures Boyd.

Because it was his.
Chapter Notes

Thank you again everyone for the reviews and kudos! I really appreciate you all giving this story a chance, and I hope it won't disappoint. After this chapter, we should be going into the home stretch! Things should be picking up straight on into the end--there's just three more interrogations (not counting Stiles) Isaac, Erica, and of course, Derek.

"I think we need to talk about your friends," she says.

"I thought we already covered that," Stiles says tiredly. He doesn't know whether or not to be grateful there's no clock in his room. He feels like he's stuck somewhere out of time—he can't tell if it's been ten minutes or two hours since this meeting began.

"We've touched on some of them individually," she says. "But I find them far more interesting as a whole."

Stiles turns to watch her, taken off guard by the statement. It was strangely insightful for someone outside of the pack to notice that particular anomaly—that few of them should even be friends, but somehow as a group they worked. "Not sure what you mean," he says.

"They were all here together that first night. I was on call, so I saw them, and they didn't quite look like a group of friends," she says. "Friends all lean on each other, but half of them were leaning apart, though they couldn't seem to bring themselves to move too far from each other."

"We're teenagers," Stiles says. "Drama is kinda our thing. We fight, we make up, it happens, but we're not going to abandon each other when one of us in trouble."

"And that's all it is?" she asks. "Because it looked to me like not all of you had chosen one another, but were bound together by something else." She sits back to watch him. "When I first got here, you asked me if I knew how to keep a secret. That's what your friends looked like to me that night, Stiles. People with secrets. What I can't quite figure out is, are they keeping yours, or are you keeping theirs?"

"Okay, you got us," Stiles says. "See, last summer, we were driving home after a party, and we hit this guy in the middle of the road—but I swear, he came out of nowhere, and we thought he was dead, so we swore that we would never tell anyone—"

"Stiles," she chides.

"That's what you want, though, right?" Stiles asks. "Some huge confession so you can make sense of this all and file it away? It's not that simple."

"I'm under no illusion that this is simple," she says. "And I'm not trying to accuse you of anything. What I do think is that you know a lot more about what's been happening in this town than you've been saying. You've been witness to more than one of the attacks, not the least of which is Lydia Martin's brutal attack at the school. Under circumstances rather startlingly similar to yours, I might
"Kate Argent was behind that, and she's dead," Stiles says. "It has nothing to do with this."

"Oh, yes, I read all about it," she says, in a way that implies she didn't believe a word of it. "Then there was her young copycat, Matthew Daehler."

"He wasn't a copycat," Stiles says. "He was a whole new brand of crazy."

"But they both made their victims appear to have been attacked by animals," she says. "You don't think there's any relation there?"

"I wouldn't know. Though I don't know too many animals capable of hitting the release on a vehicle lift, so I don't think Matt was actually keeping to the script," he says. "You're the psychiatrist, if you want a profile, make it yourself."

"If I was going to do that," she says easily, "the first person I'd want to talk to would be you. You were present at more of the crime scenes than anyone else, and you, along with Scott McCall, accused both Kate Argent and later Matt Daehler of the murders. Not to mention your accusations against Derek Hale, which you both recanted."

"Are you writing a True Crime novel or something?" Stiles asks. "What's any of this got to do with what happened to me?"

"You'd be able to answer that question better than I would," she says. "Because I'm at a loss myself. None of this seems to be coming together quite right, and now here we are again, with the doctors telling us that your wound looks like it was caused by an animal. Think we've got another serial killer in the making?"

"Maybe we really do just have a wild animal problem," Stiles says. "Did you think of that?"

"You disproved that earlier yourself," she says. "It's like you said, what animal would know to hit the release on a vehicle lift? Or have the forethought to drop a victim headfirst into a burning barrel?"

"You've certainly done your homework," Stiles says warily. "I didn't think they'd released the details of that murder."

"Really?" she asks, not flinching from his gaze. "Then how is it that you know about it?"

"I was there when they found them," Stiles says. "I saw my dad's patrol car and an ambulance, so I wanted to make sure he was alright. He told me to head straight home because I shouldn't be there, but I heard things."

"You seem to end up lots of places you shouldn't be," she says.

"Are you saying that I brought this all on myself?" Stiles asks, reaching out to brace one hand on the railing of the bed. He tries to give an expression of mock hurt, but probably a bit too much of the real thing sneaks through. "I was asking for it, right?"

"You know that's not what I meant," she says. "I just want you to tell me what's really going on here, so we can try and find a way to stop it."

"You're trying to get inside my head," Stiles protests. "Trying to get me so turned around that I don't see any choice but to talk to you. But I'm friends with Lydia Martin, okay? If I can handle her mind games, you don't stand a chance. You're not going to get to me."
She stares him down, and then she asks, casual as can be:

"Did your father tell you that he arrested Derek Hale this morning?"

Just so she can prove him wrong.
Chapter Notes

Sorry for the cliffhanger last time, guys! Please don't dismember me. I'm going to try and keep updating fairly quickly, because it's pretty much going to be cliffs from here on out. But I kinda have a soul sucking job, so it might take me a few more weekends to get this all finished out. You will have your answers, though, I promise!

What the Sheriff remembers most about the Lahey murder is not the torn and bloodied remains of the man's body, but the padlocked freezer he kept in the basement. He can handle the senseless brutal murders that have been plaguing his town, because he can write them off as the actions of the psychotic.

He used to see Lahey at the local store; they would stop and talk, discuss their kids or the latest basketball scores. The bastard had even coached Stiles one year in little league.

He'd had a nightmare when he got home that night like he hadn't in years, and it was of that freezer —only it wasn't Isaac in it. It was Stiles. His son was pleading with him to be let out, but no matter how many times he tried, he couldn't find the right key for the lock.

He shakes his head, running a hand down the back of his neck to try and dispel the memory. He lets out a breath and finally forces himself to meet Isaac's eyes. He'd hated dragging the kid off that field like a common criminal, had planned to send him for psychiatric evaluation first chance he got.

But his hand had been forced, because there was no way to swing that as self-defense.

Lahey had been torn to shreds.

Sitting across from Isaac now, he has to bite back the urge to apologize. He's done it once already and what's been done is done. He just wishes the kid didn't look so damned young. He's got dark circles under his eyes and he looks jittery. The others have all been putting on brave faces, but Isaac looks like he's hanging by a thread.

The Sheriff sighs and relaxes his shoulders, trying to look less intimidating. "One of my deputies said you went to visit Hale," he says, keeping his tone mild.

It is, perhaps, not the best opening. Isaac's eyes snap to his and narrow. "We're thinking of starting a club," Isaac responds. "For the falsely accused."

"Isaac," the Sheriff sighs. "I know you and Hale are friends, but you have to know how this looks. Hale takes his right to silence more seriously than most, so if he's said something to you, it's in his best interests that you pass that on to me."

"What do you expect that he's said?" Isaac asks, leaning in across the table. "Derek didn't do this."

"I think maybe he did," the Sheriff says tightly, leaning right back. "What I can't figure out is why you're all protecting him."

"Getting arrested, even if you're innocent, it changes things," Isaac says. "Not a lot of people wanted
much to do with me after it happened to me, but these are the people that still did. I guess that's how
you learn who your friends really are, so maybe I owe you my thanks for that. But I owe them a lot
more."

"And how far are you willing to go, to repay Derek Hale?" he asks, and slides an evidence bag onto
the table. Inside is a black shirt, spotted with barely visible dried blood. "The night Stiles showed up
at the hospital, Melissa McCall saw you shove this into a contamination disposal can. It wasn’t a bad
plan, really, thing probably would have been burned within the hour if Melissa hadn't pulled it back
out."

Isaac goes stock still, blinking at the bag. "Derek got a bloody nose," Isaac says. "I got rid of that for
him, that's all."

"You know we have labs to check that sort of thing, right? I thought you kids all watched CSI," the
Sheriff says. "There is one reason and one reason only I'm not bringing you up on charges of aiding
and abetting, and that's that I don't think you would deliberately hurt anyone. I'm not convinced you
knew what you were doing when you did this, but you've got to help me out here, because this
doesn't look good for you."

"Derek was practically in shock that night himself," Isaac says, shifting in his chair to sit up
straighter. "You saw him. He snuck in to see Stiles when he wasn't supposed to, came back covered
in blood. I knew what you'd think."

"Did Derek ask you to help him get rid of it?" he demands. "If you're scared of him, we can protect
you—"

"Derek didn't ask me to do it," Isaac snaps, glaring up at him. "Stiles did."

Isaac steels his expression the moment he says it, trying not to broadcast that he hadn't meant to. The
Sheriff tenses himself, hating that everything seems to keep coming back to Stiles. He wants to trust
his son more than anything, but he's obviously as involved in this as any of them.

The Sheriff still remembers the night that Isaac had escaped—finding his son standing there above a
body that had an arrow coming out of his leg. He wants to ask Isaac to reassure him that Stiles hadn't
helped him escape, only he's not certain he's ready to know the answer to that.

But he needs to find the answers to this.

"Stiles asked you to get rid of evidence," he asks, trying to keep his voice level, and keep out equal
amounts of outrage and disbelief.

"It wasn't evidence," Isaac denies. "He just snuck in to see him—"

"I was watching them work on my son every single second, Hale didn't get near him until the next
day," the Sheriff snaps. "You're not going to blame this on my son."

"Nothing is what it looks like," Isaac says in frustration, pushing away from the table with what
sounds like a low growl. "If you don't want to take my word for it, then trust Stiles'."

"Right now I don't think I can afford to trust anyone," the Sheriff says. "Because each and every
single one of you is lying to me, my son included."

"Maybe," Isaac says. "But maybe you should be focusing on the things we've told you that are true."

"And how will I know the difference?" the Sheriff asks.
Isaac bites absently at a nail, a nervous habit he'd had the last time he'd been here, too. It was strangely reassuring, because Isaac had changed so much. So many people in this little town had.

Scott becoming a Lacrosse star overnight, Lydia Martin's attack, Jackson's death and miraculous resurrection—Isaac, Erica and Boyd's disappearing and appearing with a new penchant for hanging around abandoned buildings like they were the hottest spots around.

And Stiles, right smack dab in the middle of it all.

"After my dad was killed," Isaac starts haltingly, "my life went into a tailspin. Nothing that's happened to me since has been—well, let's just say that none of it has made any sense at all. So if something fits together perfectly for you, if it gets tied up all nice and neat, I'd be wary."

"So what you're saying is, I have too much hard evidence for Derek to actually be guilty?" the Sheriff asks in disbelief.

"It means you're never going to solve this if that's all you're looking at," Isaac says. "Because there are bigger things at work here, and sometimes you have to take things on faith."

"I'll keep that in mind," the Sheriff says tiredly, as he gets to his feet. "I don't think I need to tell you, don't leave town."

"You really want to know when we're telling the truth?" Isaac calls after him. The Sheriff pauses, turning back to look at him, and Isaac continues, "It's all those times you're certain that we're not."

"Like when you tell me that Derek Hale didn't do this?" he asks dryly.

"Yes," Isaac agrees, his bright eyes focused straight on him. "Exactly like that."
You guys are officially the best bunch of reviewers ever! I would be replying to each and every one of you if I thought I could be trusted not to give the game away.

I will answer one question though—yes, I do have this planned to end! I actually wrote bits of the last scenes almost before anything else. I am starting to get a small case of stage fright, though. You guys are so awesome that I don't want to disappoint you! But it is still my goal to have this finished before the end of October, hopefully sooner!

It's as though someone has sucked all the oxygen from the room.

Stiles keeps trying to drag the air in, but it all goes rushing right back out again, and there are ice cold fingers tapping along his arms. He shivers as he tries to pull away. He can't quite get his vision to focus, but he knows who it is.

"Hands off, Snow Queen," he gasps, because mockery is his favorite shield and he can feel himself calming already. He takes another deep breath and the room is spinning back into place. She lets him go, but is still sitting at the edge of his bed, watching him like he should be in some kind of specimen jar.

"I'm sorry," she says, after his breathing finally evens out. "I shouldn't have sprung that on you—but I think it's proven my point."

Stiles bites back reluctantly on a retort, unwilling to waste his breath. They both know she'd gotten exactly the reaction she wanted, but it's a tainted victory. Stiles can't see any glory in causing a trauma victim to freak out. He could do that all on his own, without any help from her.

She just sighs like she expects some heartbroken confession, and then leans away. "You still want to tell me he's just a friend?" she asks, watching him sideways, covertly trying to analyze his reaction.

"Yes," Stiles snaps out. "I happen to care about my friends, and I need to…I need to get out of here—"

"You're not ready to go anywhere," she says. "I think you've just shown that."

"I'm fine. I haven't had a full blown panic attack since I was fourteen," Stiles protests.

"That might have been true, five minutes ago," she says. "You need to work with me here, Stiles. We need to work through this together, because if your memories were to come back to you all at once and you were all alone…"

"You don't understand, I have to speak with my dad," Stiles says. "I've got to."

"He's busy, trying to find out the truth," she says. "If you really want to help him, if you really want to help Derek, then I suggest you start with me. Tell me what really happened that night."

Stiles glances at the table beside the bed, but he already knows his phone is long gone. Confiscated
by his father, and good luck to him in cracking his pin. It's a randomly generated seven digit alphanumeric code—because Stiles is not Scott.

"Can I borrow your phone?" he asks her.

She raises an eyebrow. "What do you think?" she asks.

Stiles drops back against the bed, pressing a hand to his head and closing his eyes. He's not sure what he would say to his father anyway—tell him he remembered everything and give some bogus description of an anonymous attacker? Stiles isn't the best liar but he is creative, and all he needs to do is weave a story with enough truth in it to be believed.

Only this time, he doesn't even know where to begin.

"Stiles," she says gently. "Your father didn't just arrest Derek on some hunch. He has evidence."

"What evidence?" Stiles asks, dropping his hand.

"He wouldn't share that with me," she says. "But it looks like there's very little room for doubt. So maybe it's time you start telling the truth. You're not helping him, by protecting him from this."

The trouble with Stiles' life is that the lies are so much easier to believe—truth being stranger than fiction, and all. He's been crafting lies to make sense of everything for nearly a year, so much so that at times it feels like he has a double life.

But he always knew this would happen eventually, that he'd reach one lie too many and his father would stop trusting him completely. And now he doesn't know how he can get Derek out of this, and his mind is too clouded from the pain medication to think of a back up plan. He can't think of a thing to say that his father might believe, up to and including the truth.

"Maybe there was some reason why he attacked you? Was it drugs?" she asks gently. "We just want to understand what happened."

Stiles turns to glare at her, insulted by the transparent ploy. He'd thought they had developed something of a repartee—that she respected him, at least enough that she wouldn't expect him to be fooled by such childish tricks.

She sighs and stands up to return to her chair. "I know that sounds like a platitude," she says. "But there's a reason they're in such common use. It's the truth."

"There's nothing to understand," Stiles says, "because he didn't do anything but try to save me."

"Save you?" she asks, latching onto the phrase. "Save you from what?"

"I don't know," Stiles says. "But my friends told me that I called him, and he came to find me, and so I know that's what he was trying to do. And now he's being punished for it, because of me."

"And what about you, Stiles?" she asks.

"What?" Stiles asks, turning to glare at her.

"All this time we've been talking, hardly any of it has been about you," she says. "It's all about your father, your friends, about what you need to do for them. But you can't control everything, and you can't protect them all. I want you, just for a moment, to tell me what it is that you want."

"I want Derek not to be arrested," Stiles snaps.
Her eyes light up, like she's won the match, and she slowly crosses her legs. "See, most people, if they were going to make a wish?" she says. "They'd probably wish they'd never been attacked at all."

"I can't wish that away, even in theory, it happened. And shouldn't you be helping me move on?" Stiles asks. "Cause I'm trying to get past it, I'm fine now, moving on, back to our regularly scheduled programming of not being brutally attacked. I don't want to remember."

"That's a common misconception," she says. "That forgetting is the same thing as moving forward. The truth is, in order to move forward, you have to first move through this. Otherwise you'll just be stuck in that same place, amidst those dark woods."

"Wow," Stiles says. "You really took that metaphor and ran with it. Love the imagery."

"I don't think you realize what's really at stake here," she says softly. "This isn't a game."

"Maybe not," Stiles says. "But if it were, I think I'd be winning."
I'm loving the theories, guys, but I will say nothing! I will, however, give you the next part, which should help you along.

The girl looks like she walked straight out of a fashion ad—something edgy like Calvin Klein, or whatever the kids were wearing these days. But there's something familiar about her, underneath the layers of makeup shrouding her eyes, and it takes him a minute to place what it is.

"You were at Stiles' eleventh birthday," he says, which has to be the strangest way he's ever opened an interrogation. It does what it's supposed to, though, and it catches her off guard, even if he hadn't meant to. "I remember, because you'd made him a card yourself, with glitter and—"

"Yes, I remember," Erica snaps, her eyes flashing as she swings one arm over the back of her chair and slouches down. "I remember, because Stiles spent the whole party sulking that Lydia didn't come."

There's an undercurrent of jealousy to her words, and he wonders if Stiles has any idea how many people he has that care about him. "Yeah, it was a fun party," he deadpans. Stiles had been distraught, singing it's my party, and I'll cry if I want to through the entire thing. Scott, in a show of solidarity, had valiantly tried to hum along.

Back then the Sheriff had wondered why Stiles couldn't just be like the other kids, who didn't even know who Leslie Gore was. He knows now he wouldn't want him any other way, just so long as he's safe.

"We didn't talk much after that, not for a very long time," Erica continues after a moment, the hurt in her voice barely concealed. "He never invited me to one of his parties again."

"That's because there wasn't another one," the Sheriff says, swallowing down hard and forcing himself to hold her gaze. "His mother died the month before he turned twelve. He refused to have a party after that, and it kinda became the new tradition."

Letting Stiles cancel his birthday was one of the Sheriff's many regrets. He always thought Stiles would come around some day, that suddenly he would want it again, but he never really did. So they didn't have cake or ice cream or pointy hats anymore, but Stiles had woken up on his sixteenth birthday to a pair of keys sitting on his bedside table. It worked for them.

Or at least, he'd thought it had.

But Stiles is subtle when something is wrong, and loud about everything else. Erica Reyes is having a whole other kind of rebellion, and the Sheriff has received more than one frantic call from her mother over the last few months.

Erica is silent now, looking a little pale at the revelation. Teens were like that, the Sheriff remembers. Most of them had to be reminded they weren't the only ones with problems. He forgot that about
kids, most days, because Stiles worried about everyone's problems but his own.

"Your mother says she's lucky these days if you come home at all," he says, trying not to sound accusing. "Is this..." he stumbles over finding the right word to even guess what this might be, before deciding on the closest approximation he can reach. "Are you in some kind of cult?"

Erica throws her head back and laughs, bright and ringing like she's auditioning for some part that calls for it. "I haven't heard that one before," she says, leaning across the table to watch him with a grin. "No, it isn't a cult. No, we're not on drugs. No, I'm not sleeping with Derek. Or Stiles, for that matter. And I don't know if they're doing each other, either, though it would probably explain a lot."

"Why don't you explain that?" the Sheriff demands.

"I'm not serious, of course," she dismisses. "Anyway, everyone knows that Stiles is in love with Lydia Martin, and she's the one you should be worried about. I was coming to visit Stiles and she came rushing out of his room, and she didn't look sad, she looked angry. Something got her riled up."

"You think Stiles told her what happened?" the Sheriff asks.

"That or she's part of it," Erica shrugs. "She doesn't like us very much, but it's true she doesn't have anything against Stiles in particular."

"She told me that she and Stiles weren't even friends," he says.

"I'm sure that she did," she says wryly. "Look, she's supposed to have some sort of epic love with Jackson, right? But every time he breaks her heart 'for her own good,' she goes straight to Stiles. She's using him."

"Lydia wasn't even there that night," the Sheriff says.

"Then I suppose you've already made up your mind," Erica says, pushing back from the table. "I doubt there's anything new I can say, so can I go now? Or what?"

The Sheriff furrows his brow as the light catches on the necklace Erica is wearing. "Wait," he says, snapping his fingers and pointing at the chair when she moves to leave. "Sit back down."

Erica lands back in the chair with an irritated huff. "What?" she asks.

He points to her necklace. "Where did you get that?" he asks.

The question seems to throw her, but she rallies quickly enough. "Funny you should ask," she says warily. "It was a gift from Stiles."

"Stiles gave you that?" he asks urgently. "Did he say what it was?"

"Just that it was a symbol for protection, and so old its origin can't even be properly traced," she says. "He gave it to me months ago, after I had a bad seizure."

"I need you to tell me everything he said to you," the Sheriff says.

"You sure about that?" Erica asks wryly. "Because he practically told me the entire history of epilepsy. He knew more about it than I did."

"How about you just give me the highlights?" he asks her.
"He told me that people used to believe epileptics were possessed by evil sprits," she says, leaning back with a wicked grin. "Only thing was, sometimes they turned it to their advantage. Became shamans and highly respected, because they were believed capable of what no one else was: crossing over into the otherworld. They even called it the sacred disease." Erica shrugs. "Anyway, I kinda liked that, because I got sick of the hospitals and the scientific terms and it's just got such a nicer ring to it than brain disease, don't you think? So Stiles gave me this—to protect against evil spirits."

The Sheriff's mind is spinning, though he supposes he shouldn't be surprised by Stiles showing interest in the occult. He was always doing that role-playing thing online, and he never passes up an opportunity to research the obscure. "He didn't say anything else?" he asks.

"Well," she drawls. "He did also tell me that epilepsy was thought to be governed by the moon's phases." She smiles at him, like she has a secret she's only half going to tell. "Apparently they called us moonstruck or lunatics. Stiles thought that was particularly hilarious."

"Doesn't sound very funny to me," the Sheriff says.

"I guess you had to be there," she laughs.

The Sheriff sighs, because he knows something is missing from everything she's told him, but he doubts she's going to tell him what it is. "Thank you, Erica," he says, running a hand through his hair. "That will be all."

She looks slightly disgruntled at being dismissed, though she's been trying to leave since she got here. She stands abruptly, and then pushes out through the doors without so much as goodbye.

The Sheriff drags the manila folder containing Stiles' case file across the table and flips it open. He pulls out the photos of the symbols that had been drawn across Stiles' chest and lays them out in front of him.

They're exactly the same as the ones Erica has around her neck.

Chapter End Notes

I thought I would include some visuals this time, in case anyone is curious! Here is a rough sketch of Erica's necklace:


I was going to try and digitally paint it before I got this part finished, but I ran out of time—but the stones are speckled black and green, and the metal burnished gold. I also did a quick drawing of the matching symbols that Stiles' was found with:

Stiles 8

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the late update again! Work is killing me ded, so probably I'm just going to be able to update during the weekends from now on (I should still have this finished by the end of the month, though!). I'm going to try and have another part up this weekend (Derek finally makes an appearance!), but the next two parts are going to be tricky so I'm not sure I'll have it ready for posting in time.

Also, just to warn you, I might up the chapter count to 20, so I can add a coda. This would be additional, so the story is still on schedule!

They've been silent for awhile now, and Stiles is sure he's going to be the first one to break. He can feel something itching against his skin, a restlessness fighting to get out. He's been stuck in the hospital three days now, confined to bed rest, and with no Adderall because the doctors want to avoid any dangerous interactions.

Mrs. McCall had already threatened to bring out the restraints when they found him wandering the halls the second day, so he's been on his best behavior—even if he is like, seventy-five percent sure she was only kidding—but he's still certain he'll break this silence first.

But he doesn't, she does.

She lets out an almost inaudible sound of frustration and then leans forward with her elbows on her knees, watching him as intently as she has been all along. "Okay, we'll say you've won that match," she says. "So I'll stop trying to figuring out your relationships with your family, and your friends, if you'll answer one question for me."

Stiles watches her warily, sensing a trap. "What's the question?" he asks.

"What do you know about werewolves?" she asks.

Stiles clamps down on his first reaction, which is to freak out. This is not a question just anyone would ask—she's either taking a wild stab in dark, or she already knows, and it's far too dangerous to give himself away in either case.

"I believe they're fairly hairy," he says, trying to smooth out his stilted voice. He swallows hard. "Tend to have anger management issues on the full moon. But then, I'm really not the best person to ask. Why don't you look up Michael J. Fox and check with him?"

"I'd think you'd be the perfect person to ask," she says. "Your father found some old books about werewolves buried in your closet. Not the kind of thing you'd find at the local library, either. Kind of a strange thing for a teenage boy to have, don't you think?"

"Not really. It's for research," Stiles tells her, careful not to let down his guard. "I write Twilight fanfic. Team Jacob for the win."

"I thought we agreed this wasn't a game," she says.
"I thought we agreed I was winning?" Stiles asks. "You're kinda giving me mixed signals here. Maybe we should call it a day. We have to have been here at least an hour, right? That's sort of standard, isn't it?"

"I'm not going anywhere," she says, and it sounds more threatening than reassuring, though she follows it with one of her practiced smiles. "I want you to tell me exactly who Derek Hale is to you."

"I thought we had a deal," Stiles says.

"We did," she says. "And if you'd answered my question honestly, I might have honored it. But I think we both know that's not the case."

Stiles wants to believe she's only bluffing, trying to get confirmation from him on something she suspects, but he's getting a sinking feeling it's nothing so straightforward as that. "He's a friend," he says. "I told you that."

"You're very loyal, aren't you, Stiles?" she asks. "And fiercely protective of those you care about. I admire that about you, truly I do. But this isn't going to end well for anyone if you don't start working with me."

"It's not my fault you don't like my answers," Stiles says, glancing out of the corner of his eye to the door. He's in a fairly isolated section of the hospital, so he doesn't see anyone in the hall. His father had placed him here so he could be better protected, and stationed a deputy at the door.

It occurs to him now that he hasn't seen Deputy Haines since she came in.

"I'm trying to save you, do you understand that?" she asks. "All you have to do is tell me what really happened that night. Tell me who hurt you."

"If I could tell you, I would," Stiles says, forcing himself to hold her gaze. "It's not like I have a name." He watches her for a moment, searching for something in her eyes. "Things would be different, if I did. Names are very powerful things."

"Not necessarily," she says slowly, looking for a moment as she had when she first came in—young and compassionate, innocent in ways he suspects she's not. "Names only have as much power as we give them. After all, you changed your own. What has more power over you? The one you were given, or the one you gave yourself?"

"That's a little philosophical for me, but it does remind me," Stiles says. "I don't think you ever told me yours."

She grins slyly. "It's not really relevant, is it?" she asks. "I told you at the start, I'm not the one that matters here. The less you know about me, the better."

Stiles is beginning to doubt that, and he knows he needs to find out exactly who it is he's dealing with. Two possibilities come immediately to mind, and it disturbs him that the idea she may be a hunter is the more desirable outcome by far.

Stiles glances towards the pitcher on the bedside table, and fumbles to reach for it. He knocks it over and it spills across the table, splashing water down his arm and dripping towards the floor. Her eyes track the water's movement lazily, looking unconcerned.

"Sorry," he says, gripping on the table. "Could you please get me another glass of water? Then I'll… I'll tell you everything."
She's watching him with suspicion, and he has a feeling she's tiring of the role she's chosen. "I plan to hold you to that," she says, as she stands and turns towards the door.

He leans back, sucking in a deep breath, glancing towards the window. Scott might use it like a revolving door, but Stiles' knows he'll break his neck if he goes through it on his own, and he won't be running anywhere any time soon.

He has only one defense, so he reaches deep within himself for what's left of his strength—just like igniting a spark.

Then he waits, to see if it will do him any good at all.
The Sheriff remembers the fire.

He was still a deputy then, one of the first on scene. The firefighters had already been and gone, and the house had stood there a half burned out husk. It looked then exactly as it still does.

They'd found the bodies in the basement. It had always bothered him—people went up to get away from fire, they didn't go down.

He also remembers Derek and Laura Hale standing together, wrapped in blankets from the EMTs and holding hands. He'd been willing to give Derek the benefit of the doubt when years later Laura had shown up dead—hadn't wanted to believe the boy he remembered could do it.

But Laura wasn't his kid, so he could afford to be forgiving.

"You've always been the piece that doesn't fit, Derek," the Sheriff says.

Derek looks up slowly, his face set like carved stone. There's blood around the cuffs of his shirt, as though he's been trying to twist free, but when he'd sent a medic to look at him he'd been assured there was no damage to his wrists.

"You're not making this any easier on yourself by not talking to me," he continues. "I want to know what happened that night."

There's something unnerving about Derek's eyes. They almost seem to be burning—tiny cracks in his irises that are glowing red, like there's molten lava just underneath the surface. The Sheriff remembers then every mug shot Derek's ever had, the lens flare that crops up in every single one, but he blinks once and Derek's eyes no longer look strange at all.

"I was there," Derek says finally, and his voice sounds hoarse from disuse.

"I know that much already," the Sheriff says, reaching over to tap his fingers atop the plastic bag holding Derek's bloody shirt. "And I know you found Stiles, because you were covered in his blood."

Derek's eyes flick to the bag and back, with no change in expression. If he didn't know better he'd worry he was dealing with a sociopath, but he'd been there the night of the fire, and had watched Derek fall apart. This is a convincing act of indifference, but it is an act.
"What did Stiles tell you?" Derek asks, and the Sheriff sees a slight crack in his mask when he stumbles over Stiles' name, but he slots it right back into place.

"He says he doesn't remember," the Sheriff says. "But see, I think that's a lie. I think he's protecting you. I just for the life of me can't figure out why."

Derek leans forward and flashes a sharp, insincere grin. "That makes two of us," he says. "You can go ahead and throw away the key, Sheriff. I'm guilty as sin."

The Sheriff fights to keep his own expression controlled. This is the confession he's been waiting for. This is where everything has led him. This should be the end to it, but he can hear Isaac's words echoing in the back of his mind: if something fits together perfectly for you, if it gets tied up all nice and neat, I'd be wary.

"What happened?" the Sheriff asks tightly. "Did he say no to you? Is that what this is about?"

"Does it really matter?" Derek asks. "I've confessed, and Stiles is better off without me in his life. You know that, and I know that, even if he doesn't."

"It doesn't work that way," the Sheriff says. "I'm glad you confessed, that's the hard part. This is the easy part, Hale. All you need to tell me is what you did, and why. You've been through this before, you know how it works."

"I'm done talking," Derek says.

"Tell me why!" the Sheriff shouts. He stands abruptly, slamming an open palm on the table, hard enough to shake Stiles' case file open and send a few pages sliding loose.

He's watching Derek for a reaction, waiting for him to break. He's learned over the years that a burst of anger is almost always returned in kind, and that's when criminals make mistakes. But Derek isn't even looking at him. His eyes are focused hard on the table, and the Sheriff stills as he hears a hitch in the other man's breathing. He follows his line of sight to the photo of the drawings on Stiles' chest and frowns.

"Do you know what these are?" the Sheriff demands, grabbing them and tossing them across the table. Derek's eyes follow their movement with a frantic edge, and the Sheriff's anger gives way to confusion as the arrogant criminal seems to disappear before his eyes—suddenly Derek seems years younger.

And terrified.

"Where did you get these?" Derek asks breathlessly. "Who is that?"

"They were drawn on my son's chest when he was brought in," the Sheriff says, leaning across the table, trying to figure out what's got Derek so on edge. "Did you do that too?"

"That's why he—" Derek mutters, before glancing up with wide eyes. His skin seems to have been drained of all color. "Oh, no. No, no—"

"Derek," the Sheriff says, trying to recapture his attention, but Derek's eyes have gone unfocused again, tinted with that strange red glow along the iris. "Derek. Look at me."

Derek's eyes snap to his, blinding him for a moment as they catch the light. "You need to get to Stiles. Now," Derek says firmly.
The Sheriff stands up straighter, crossing his arms as he assesses the man before him. "You know what's going on here, don't you?" he asks softly. "All the secrets my son's keeping, they're for you, aren't they?"

"We don't have time for this," Derek snaps.

"You're not going anywhere for awhile," the Sheriff says. "Trust me, you've got the time."

"But Stiles doesn't," Derek yells.

The Sheriff leans across the table again, narrowing his eyes. "Now you're going to want to explain that," he says.

"I can't," Derek says. "You wouldn't believe me, even if I did. Right now you need to get to Stiles and keep him safe. He's in danger."

"The way I see it, he's pretty safe as long as you're here," the Sheriff says. "You did confess, remember?"

"I said I was guilty," Derek says, looking up at him unflinchingly. "I didn't say of what, because I didn't know until now."

"That doesn't even make any sense," the Sheriff says. "If you're trying to recant—"

"You're wasting time," Derek interrupts. "Look, I don't care what you do with me, lock me up, whatever, but go to him now. He isn't safe. You have to get him out of there and take him somewhere no one can find him. Not his friends. Not me. Not anyone."

The Sheriff wants to dismiss his concerns. He can think of any number of reasons for him to be telling him these things—he could be laying the groundwork for an insanity plea, for all he knew. Except, Derek doesn't seem to be lying. The Sheriff usually knows when people are, and he'd bet good money that whatever has Derek so terrified, whether real or not, he honestly believes in it.

Which means there is at least some possibility that Stiles is in danger, while he's sitting here asking questions that aren't getting him anywhere anyway.

He knows, without a doubt, he'd never be able to live with himself, if Stiles were hurt again while he stood by and did nothing.

He walks over to the door without another word, opening it and leaning out. "Someone get Haines on the radio," he shouts.

Derek glances back at him with something like relief, and the Sheriff notices that his cuffs are stained even darker now with blood. He can see a bit of it running down along unmarked skin.

"Sheriff," one of his deputies calls. "We can't reach him. He's not answering his radio or his cell."

The Sheriff feels his heart stutter as he pulls a hand back to scrub it through his hair. Maybe Derek is more talented than he thought, because he's successfully planted a seed of doubt.

He looks back at Derek and the man looks like he's about to come unhinged; like he's just a breath away from snapping his cuffs in two and running out of here himself. For one crazy moment, the Sheriff wonders if he really could.

"Cross," the Sheriff shouts, motioning to one of his deputies. "Stay with him."
"Sir?" the deputy asks in confusion.

"I should be back within the hour," the Sheriff says, starting towards the door. "I just need to check on my son."

"Sheriff!" Derek yells after him. The Sheriff forces himself to stop, and glances around. Derek is standing, his hands twisted awkwardly where they're tethered by the cuffs. "You can't trust anyone. Just, don't…it could be anyone."

"Yeah, I get that," the Sheriff says.

"I really don't think that you do," Derek tells him.

The Sheriff turns away and starts again for the door, maybe a little faster than the situation necessarily calls for. Haines is probably getting a coffee, or being pestered by Stiles, and cell reception at the hospital is unreliable at best.

But he can't shake that look in Derek's eyes, as he told him Stiles was in danger—it was the exact same look the kid had in them as he watched his family get carried out of that burned out house.

Like he was watching his whole world fall apart.
I've been fiddling with this all week, so I figured it's time to finally bite the bullet and post it! This is the first half of the "finale," and then there's going to be the second half, and either one or two additional parts to wrap things up (but more on that later!). For now, here's some answers for you, finally. Congrats to those that have guessed right, and thanks again to all of you for your support!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Stiles watches her stop at the doorway.

She holds her palm flat against the air, tilting her head as it meets the invisible barrier. Stiles can hear a slight snap crackle pop, like something from a Kellogg's commercial, but she doesn't pull back.

"When did you figure it out?" she asks curiously, as she skims her hand across the surface of it like she's skipping a stone.

Stiles swallows hard, unsure what to do now that he's trapped her. Part of him wants to be suave and pretend he's known all along, but most of him is really wishing that mountain ash hadn't stopped her at all.

If she'd just been some rogue hunter, she'd be the Argents' problem.

She glances down at the thin line of mountain ash lined across the door, before turning to see the other line laid across the window. Stiles has gotten where he doesn't need to touch it to lay it out anymore. He'd just needed the little jar of it that he'd asked Lydia to bring him. He was pretty sure that had given her the wrong idea—that she thought one of the wolves had done this to him, and he was trying to keep them out.

She probably wouldn't have given it to him, if she'd known the plan was to keep something else in.

"I didn't," Stiles finally admits, and she turns around, looking amused. "Not for sure. For awhile there you were pretty convincing."

"But you must know what I am now," she says, stepping towards him.

"I've got a pretty good guess," Stiles agrees.

"Only pretty good? You're still cutting yourself short, I thought we were working on that," she says, making a tsk tsk sound as she circles round the bed. "The trap you set for me in the woods was inspired."

"You were supposed to come alone," Stiles says, because his plan had failed almost before it began. He'd had to spread himself too thin—hiding and running interference with his friends while he tried to get her alone.

If he closes his eyes, he can still feel those claws sinking into his side as he's pulled up against that familiar body from behind. His concentration had snapped like a broken rubber band and the
mountain ash had scattered to the wind, taking all his carefully wrought plans along with it.

"Consider the fact that I didn't a sign of a respect," she tells him. "I knew you were up to something. I figured a few unwitting hostages wouldn't be remiss. And those baby werewolves are so much easier to control than your big bad wolf. I had to catch a ride with one of them back here."

She moves to the window, and causally drops the blinds. Her hand traces the edges of the mountain ash barrier, and Stiles can hear it hiss in protest.

"Usually I wouldn't have been concerned," she continues. "People have tried to exorcize me before, and mostly I find it amusing." She turns back towards him. "There was something about you, though. I think it's the first time I've felt fear in a hundred years. Whatever did I do, to give myself away?"

"I'd have to say I started to get a bit suspicious around the time Derek threw me across the room," Stiles says dryly.

She laughs, and the strangest thing about it is that it sounds genuine. "I thought that was how you two played," she says, gripping onto the railing and leaning over him, like they're still just two people in a room, holding a civil conversation.

"He presses me against things," Stiles says defensively. "He doesn't usually toss me. It's a pretty big difference, as my ribs will attest."

"Still, not just anyone would jump to possessed," she says. "I knew you were special. Even Derek didn't realize what I was doing to him."

"You don't get to have him," Stiles snaps, so stretched past the point of fear he feels almost invincible. He leans forward to meet her eyes, and that's when he notices they're starting to cloud over, turning a milky blue. She looks half-blind, though her eyes track his movements exactly.

"You don't think so? He has no idea what I did to him. He's not nearly so clever as you," she says. "He thinks he's losing his mind. He thinks he lost control of himself and hurt you, and the best part is that he really did. He lost it to me."

"If you need a body, then take mine," Stiles says. "Get out of her and stay away from Derek and you can have me. I won't even fight you."

"I don't believe you. I think you'd fight to the bitter end," she says, her voice taking on a sing-song quality that sends chills along his spine. "But it doesn't matter anyway. Do you really think I would have wasted my time with these games, if I could just take whatever I wanted to know from your mind? The ink may have faded but your magic still holds. The protections you wrote across yourself can't be so easily washed away."

She reaches out and presses her hand against his heart. Stiles tries to jerk out of range, but there is a flash of light and she pulls away herself with a laugh. "Oh my, that is talented. Has anyone ever told you, you have spark?"

Stiles gasps, clutching a hand to his heart. His chest is burning, and when he looks down he can see the symbols he'd drawn lit up beneath his thin hospital pajamas like he's just come from a Lady Gaga concert. They blink out a moment later, but he can still feel them burning.

"Anyway, haven't you realized yet that she's already dead?" she asks, reaching up to unbutton the top of her blouse. She pulls it down low over her own borrowed heart, revealing a deep tear in her chest, barely pieced back together with seven thick staples. "It's only a temporary solution, of course,
these bodies do rot so quickly. But I needed a little place to myself to get back my strength."

"Jesus—" Stiles mutters, scrambling back on the bed, but it makes sense, now that he knows, and can look for the signs. She seems to have stopped keeping up appearances, and her eyes have crusted over entirely with that cloudy blue, her lips tinged with the same color. Her skin has gone a sickly sort of pale, and he can see bruises scattered like constellations across her skin—little livid colonies of blood, from where she's sat still a little too long.

"I go through bodies so easily," she whispers. "Oh, I can keep 'em up and running, even keep some of them alive for awhile, though they all eventually give up and die and then start to smell of decay—rotting from the inside out. It's such an awful burden to bear."

"That's why you wanted Derek," Stiles realizes, forcing himself to hold her gaze.

"You truly are clever," she tells him, looking bizarrely pleased about it.

"Why is it only the super-villains seem to realize that?" Stiles asks.

"Maybe you've missed your calling," she says. "Because you're absolutely right. I mean, an alpha werewolf? That's like the Ferrari of the corporeal world, my darling. Of course I wanted him. And oh, he was so broken. Lost his whole family, that one, but then, you know that. They have to be broken for it to work, you see, they're too strong to keep alive otherwise."

"Derek didn't give in," Stiles insists, remembering the glimpses of Derek beneath the facade. It was never all her, not until that night.

"Because of you," she agrees. "But the wolf? Well, that's a bit easier. They're pure instincts, and every last one of Derek's wolf's instincts wants you. Wants you beneath him, wants you screaming, wants you bitten. He'd never have forgiven himself, but he would have done it, and he would have been mine. And so would you."

"Then why did you stop?" Stiles asks, which is the question that's been bothering him all along. She'd had him in those woods. He made it to his Jeep but she was right behind him, tearing off the door with Derek's hands like it was made of tinfoil and then reaching for his throat and he'd known it was over, had just enough time to—

"You don't even realize what it is that you did, do you?" she asks, watching him closely. "You can't learn magic in books. You think those symbols are what protected you? They only have as much power as you gave them. Either you have it, or you don't, and if you do then you don't need any of the tricks. You cast me out of Derek by doing nothing more than calling his name. That's how powerful you are."

Stiles remembers calling for Derek, without really thinking he would be able to get through to him. Derek had been gone that night almost completely, taken over by her. But he'd called his name and he'd just stopped, and Stiles had started driving so fast that by the time he looked back, Derek was out of sight.

"That's why you were scared of me," Stiles realizes. "But you're not scared now."

"Well, this body is dead," she whispers, her lips ghosting cross his ear. He shivers even though he can't feel her breath. "I had to level the playing field a bit. Even you can't cast me out of this body, because there's nothing left for you to call upon in here but little ole' me. And you said it yourself, you don't know my name."

"Rumpelstiltskin?" Stiles tries.
"You are entertaining, I'll give you that," she laughs. "It's the only reason I've let you live this long. I was so hoping you could be saved. If you'd betrayed Derek, I might have been able to keep you both. But you'd never stand by while I took him, and I respect you far too much to leave you alive."

"I don't think respecting someone and that someone being alive are mutually exclusive," Stiles protests. "How about we come to some sort of compromise? Like, you continue to live your life out as a zombie psychiatrist, I continue to be a high school student with strange extracurricular activities, and we vow to never meet again?"

"I think we both know it's far too late for that," she says. "I do have to wonder, though. You're such a smart boy. You had to know what would happen, if you trapped me in here with you. You'd have been better off keeping me out."

"Maybe I'm not so clever after all," Stiles says.

She watches him for a moment, and then she laughs. "Oh, but you are, because you knew just what I'd do to them if I was on the other side of your little fence, didn't you? Your father, your friends," she says. "So instead of saving yourself, you choose the plan that saves everyone else."

"I think you're giving me way too much credit, it's not like I was thinking that far ahead," Stiles says.

"Clearly not, because there's a flaw in your plan," she says, lifting one leg up over the bed railing to crawl on top of him. She drops down to straddle his waist, reaching out to snag both his wrists in one ice cold hand when he moves to throw her off. "Who's going to protect them when you're dead?"

"Stay away from them," Stiles says, somehow managing to keep his voice level. For once it even sounds like a half-decent threat. "Or I swear, I'll be testing my theories about death curses out on you."

"That's not how it works," she says. "Your magic will only survive as long as you, and I'm afraid you haven't got long left." She slams his head into the railing with her free hand, hard enough that he can see stars. He lets out a choked gasp as he pulls at the grip on his wrists, but she's unnaturally strong. Not as strong as she'd been in Derek, but close enough that he knows he's not pulling himself free.

She reaches towards her waistband, and drags out an already bloody scalpel. "If it's any consolation, I truly am sorry," she says. "I think we'd have had fun, but Derek won't be truly broken until you're dead."

"That doesn't look sterile," Stiles protests. "Maybe we could discuss alternative methods? I've always been partial to being smothered with a pillow."

She smiles at him as she runs the scalpel down his face like a caress, just lightly enough it doesn't break the skin. "I've got to make it look good, you understand," she tells him. "Think of it this way: at least this is gonna clear Derek's good name."

Stiles knows if she gets away with this then Derek will be worse off than if he were in prison. He'll be worse off than if he were dead. So this is what it's all been coming down to, this is his one chance to cast her out. He's done it once already by accident, so how hard can it be?

He reaches for the last of his faith, for all those words she's said will do him no good, and weaves them together in his mind until he believes in them despite of her—because belief is the most important thing, she's right about that much.

He doesn't know if it would have worked, because before he can finish the spell, his father appears
in the doorway.

And shoots her straight through the head.

Chapter End Notes

P.S. This is the last cliffhanger, I promise!
Her

Chapter Notes

Thank you all for your lovely comments! You guys rock. And to those of you that didn't guess right? Well, that just means I did my job! When I set out to write this it was because I wanted to write a mystery where everyone was lying and there were just bits of truth and nothing fit together quite right, but that would nevertheless make sense in hindsight and give the story an entirely different slant. So I definitely wasn't trying to make it easy on you!

I'm so grateful to all of you for sticking with me in this little experiment! We're almost to the end (though it's a tiny bit longer than it was! The explanation for that is in the end notes due to spoilers for this part).

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Officers can't always afford to announce themselves before they take their shot.

Oh, it's in the training; that you should issue the warning, announce yourself and give them a chance to surrender. Only thing is, snipers unlearn that lesson pretty fast, and before he was Sheriff, before he had Stiles, he was Beacon Hill's best sharpshooter. They're meant to be unseen, and the reason is that most hostage takers will take the hostage with them, if given half a chance. The only way to stop them is to kill them before they realize what's been done.

So when the Sheriff walks into that room and sees the scalpel at his son's throat, that's the training that takes over. He doesn't aim for the arm or even the heart—he aims for the head.

It's a clean shot, too. He knows he hasn't missed. There's only supposed to be one way a shot like that can end.

But she doesn't go down quite like she should.

The scalpel falls from her slack hand but she stays upright, her eyes going wide as she starts taking in air in deep, choking gasps. He doesn't understand how she's still alive. He keeps the gun aimed on her, but she's not making any further threatening moves. He can see something black leaking out of the bullet wound, and matching little black tendrils are lifting from beneath her skin and crawling outwards—until it looks like she's cracking open from the inside.

Her eyes seek Stiles like the Sheriff isn't even there, like he's not the one holding the gun, and somehow she laughs. "What did you do?" she asks hoarsely. "That's not just gunpowder."

"Did you really think I'd leave my father unprotected?" Stiles asks quietly, but not so quiet that the Sheriff doesn't hear it. Stiles turns to look at him for a moment, looking terrified and guilty all at once, before turning right back to her.

She pushes away, half falling off the hospital bed before turning back to watch his son, and that's when he gets his first good look at her.

"Jesus," the Sheriff gasps, because she looks like a corpse, like something that you might see on
Halloween or in a horror film. Her eyes are a uniform light blue, her pale skin colorless except where the black is still creeping further and further in.

Stiles sits up, and the Sheriff forces himself to bite his tongue, not to yell at him to stay down and risk drawing even more attention to him. He keeps his gun trained on her instead, ready to fire again, though he's not sure at this point if it will do him much good.

"Mountain ash again?" she asks, almost casually, though she's soon overtaken by a hacking cough. That vicious black fluid starts leaking straight out of her mouth.

"And a bit of wolfsbane, though I don't suppose that does you much harm," Stiles says. "It's my own special recipe. A kind of supernatural cocktail."

She starts to take a step closer to Stiles and the Sheriff surges forward, his gun tracking her every step. Stiles shoots out a hand in his direction, his eyes going wide. "Don't," he cries. "Don't come in the room! Please, you have to trust me."

It breaks his heart to ignore his son's pleading, but there's no way he's leaving him alone. "It's not that I don't trust you, Stiles," he says, moving further in. "I just don't trust her."

The woman in question is still ignoring him like he's not important enough to be acknowledged, like Stiles is the only thing that matters. It sends chills up his spine, the way she looks at his son. "I know what you're wondering," she whispers to Stiles. "You're wondering: how close do I have to be?"

"I need you to tell me what's going on, right now!" the Sheriff snaps.

"Do you want to tell him?" she asks. "Or shall I just show him?"

"Dad," Stiles says, though he keeps his gaze on her. "I need you to do something for me."

His son's voice is far too calm for this situation, and he doesn't seem nearly surprised enough that the woman with the head shot is still up and talking. He has a million of questions to ask, a million answers he wants to demand, but the Sheriff understands that sometimes you can't afford to question. Sometimes you take things on faith.

So what he says is this: "Just tell me what to do."

"Shoot her again," Stiles says levelly. "This time in the heart."

He doesn't even hesitate. She falls back against the window, glancing down at the second wound in frustration. Stiles uses the distraction to grab the abandoned scalpel and pull himself loose from the IV, but instead of moving away he steps forward and grabs her, pushing her towards the floor.

"Stiles!" the Sheriff shouts, moving around the bed to see Stiles straddling her with the scalpel in one hand, in a strange reversal of the way they'd been moments before. "Stiles, what are you doing?"

"Yes, Stiles," she hisses. "What are you doing?"

The symbols that they had found drawn on Stiles' chest have reappeared—glowing a faint blue beneath his clothes. "Oh no you don't," Stiles snarls, and the Sheriff's heart stutters faintly at the scene. He's never heard his son sound that way, not his happy-go-lucky kid. "You're not going anywhere."

Some of the black veins along her face have burst open, and her lips have started to recede back from her gums. She can't be human, the Sheriff realizes, in a distant kind of way, because he doesn't really
know what other option there is. "Get away from her, Stiles," he commands, training his gun on her again.

"Right now I'm the only thing stopping her getting free," Stiles tells him, his voice sounding normal for a moment, focused in a way his son's usually not. "I just need you to stay back, okay? You can't touch her."

"And how long do you think you can hold me?" she laughs. "Even weakened as I am, you can't keep this up. You're pretty weak at the moment yourself."

"I think I can keep you here for quite awhile, actually," Stiles says, reaching up with the scalpel and slicing open the palm of his own hand.

"Stiles—" the Sheriff shouts in protest, but Stiles doesn't look up, just tosses the scalpel away, the damage already done.

"I can't cast you out, right, that's what you said?" Stiles asks. "But I can sure as hell keep you in. I hope you're happy with this body, because you're going into the ground with it."

Stiles traces his fingers across his bleeding palm, leaning forward to write in blood across her chest in strange symbols, and he's writing it like it's a language he knows.

"Wait," she says, and the laughter has gone from her voice. She struggles to get her hands free, but Stiles' has them trapped by his legs. "You don't want to do this. I'm valuable, Stiles. I could help you. You have no idea what I could help you become. The things that I could teach you."

"I'm sorry about this, because this is really gonna suck for you," Stiles tells her. "But I think you were right the first time. It's too late for compromise."

Then Stiles closes his eyes and whispers something, and there is a sound like a sonic boom. The Sheriff sees Stiles fly back just before he's knocked back himself, thrown into the wall hard enough his vision blurs. He forces himself back up to his knees, searching for Stiles.

"Stiles," he calls.

He sees him sitting back across the opposite wall. His eyes are open, and staring straight at her. The Sheriff follows his gaze and frowns as he spots her, because all trace of that black substance is gone, as is Stiles' blood. Her skin is still pale, but now it's unmarked except for the bullet holes.

This time, she doesn't get up, but the Sheriff can't take it for granted anymore that she's dead and they're safe. He drops down beside her, reaching out to feel for a pulse at her neck. Her skin is ice cold.

"No," Stiles shouts, dropping to his knees beside him and reaching for his wrist.

He lets Stiles pull him away, but nothing happens except the symbols Stiles' had traced on her chest start to glow a dull red. Stiles goes lax against him, his eyes pressing shut in relief. "I think it's holding," he says, like the Sheriff has any idea what he's done in the first place.

"Stiles," he says, turning and grabbing his son in a fierce hug. "Are you alright? What was—"

"I'm fine," Stiles says. "I'm fine. She can't hurt us now."

The Sheriff presses his own eyes shut, feeling a surge of relief that's for more than just this night. It's as though the divide that's been growing between him and his son has finally been bridged. The
secrets have started to unravel and even if the Sheriff doesn't quite understand them yet, he has a place to start. "This isn't that zombie apocalypse that you're always warning me about, is it?"

Stiles laughs, and wraps his arms around him just as tightly. "No, but that's closer to the mark than you might think," he says.

"Possession then?" he guesses, recalling Erica's history lesson, and those glowing protective symbols on Stiles' chest. The fact that all the evidence pointed at Derek, but he somehow wasn't guilty of the crime.

"Or maybe it's not," Stiles says, and pulls back to look at him. "Dad, I'm so sorry I lied. I didn't know where she was, so I didn't know who I could trust."

"That doesn't matter now. It's over," the Sheriff says, pulling him close again. "I've got you."

"I'm so sorry," Stiles says, and his voice hitches in a way that makes the Sheriff's heart ache. "I've wanted to tell you. So many times. But I didn't know how. I never meant you to find out like this."

The Sheriff still isn't sure what all of this is, but everything is starting to fall into place. Stiles handled this with far too much skill for it to have been his first time. "I know, but you're going to tell me everything now," he says firmly. "Everything, Stiles."

He feels Stiles nod against his shoulder. "It might take awhile," he warns.

"That's okay, kiddo," the Sheriff says, pressing a kiss to the top of his son's head. "I've got the time."

He glances back at the woman on the floor as he lifts Stiles to his feet. She hasn't moved, but he swears that those empty eyes follow them as he leads Stiles towards the door.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, so you might have noticed I upped the chapter count on you! Sorry about that, you guys. The thing is, I've had a very specific last scene in mind since the beginning, the end of chapter 19 (aka the chapter where Derek and Stiles are finally in the same scene), but this ending was originally planned around the Sheriff not learning the truth, and about half way through the story I realized he had to.

And now that he has, I kind of think he deserves one last interrogation: Derek and Stiles. So Chapter 20 is just going to be a sort of extra little coda, but the story will still be pretty much complete by the end of the next chapter.
"So I told him everything," Stiles says, as he rubs absently at the small tear in his hand left from the IV. "Well, almost everything. I might have left out the bits about how Scott almost killed me a few times, but really, he's gone overprotective enough without him worrying about Scott too, don't you think? And let's face it, at this point I'm more in danger of dying of boredom while Scott rambles on about his tragic romance with Allison than anything else. But I told my dad the rest of it, if glossing over some other almost dying bits. I told him about werewolves, and Peter Hale, and…you."

Stiles' voice breaks for a moment and he pulls his legs up to his chest, leaning his head back against the cool metal and closing his eyes. His head is faintly pounding, a low-level headache he's had for days. He's keeping it to himself, though, because he has a feeling its origins can't be traced by medical doctors. He wonders if magic exhaustion is some kind of actual thing.

"Anyway, I think he's taking it rather well, all things considered," Stiles continues. "But being stuck here might actually be helping, because he has an excuse to keep me bundled up in a hospital bed under constant supervision. I was supposed to be home yesterday, but they insisted on keeping me here a few more days because of all the 'excitement.'"

He lets out a broken laugh, running a hand across his short hair. "I know. It's ridiculous, right? But I don't think explaining to my dad that this wasn't that much different than the average school night for me would have much helped my cause, so I'm letting him hover for now. Hopefully he'll get it out of his system by the time they release me."

He glances sideways towards the door, before turning back again. "You're probably wondering what I'm doing here, huh? Well, my dad had to go tie up all the loose ends you left lying around, so I took the opportunity to sneak out. I just needed to see you, to be sure."

"So I told him everything," Stiles says, as he rubs absently at the small tear in his hand left from the IV. "Well, almost everything. I might have left out the bits about how Scott almost killed me a few times, but really, he's gone overprotective enough without him worrying about Scott too, don't you think? And let's face it, at this point I'm more in danger of dying of boredom while Scott rambles on about his tragic romance with Allison than anything else. But I told my dad the rest of it, if glossing over some other almost dying bits. I told him about werewolves, and Peter Hale, and…you."

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He leans his head against the cold metal drawer and tilts his eyes up. "You know, you're really much easier to talk to this way," he says.

There's no response from the figure laid out on the slab, but the empty blue eyes are still open. If Stiles leans too close, there is a faint red glow from the otherwise invisible symbols he's left drawn across her chest.

He thinks it's her way of rattling the cage.
"Stiles."

Stiles straightens in surprise, looking up to see Derek standing a few feet away. Derek winces, obviously sensing the quick spike of fear before Stiles is able to get his heart back under control.

Damn werewolf senses, making them think they knew everything.

"Derek," he says, swallowing hard. "What are you doing here?"

"I got a frantic call from your father," he says. "You went missing from your room, he thought you might be with me. We've probably got less than ten minutes before he calls in all his deputies to start searching the hospital."

Stiles rests his head in his hands, pressing his eyes shut. "He wasn't supposed to be back this quick," he says.

"He didn't want to leave you alone too long," Derek tells him, before his gaze falls on the woman. She's laid out on one of the drawers, pulled half out of the wall. There's a plain white sheet laid just to her chest. She doesn't look so dangerous, like this. "So this is her? You think she's still in there?"

"Well, she can't be killed. By any definition we'd understand she's already dead. I've just bound her to this body," Stiles says. "Apparently it only works because I believe it works, but that kind of circular logic hurts my brain, so I'm not gonna overanalyze."

Derek glares at her. Stiles wonders if he's trying to figure out some way to kill her, anyway. Stiles has learned the hard way that there's no easy outlet for anger here—the body's just a dead hostage, really. Collateral damage.

Stiles doesn't want to think what he might have had to do, if she hadn't already been dead. Or if she'd still been in Derek.

"The body doesn't belong to it," Stiles says, and Derek's eyes snap to his. "Her name was Mary Winters. She was only twenty-seven. She was probably a good person. I mean, I don't know. I think she probably took this job to help people. And now everyone is going to think she was some crazed murderer."

"Attempted murderer," Derek corrects roughly.

Stiles shakes his head, not quite meeting his eyes. "They found Haines in a storage closet," he says, his voice catching on the words. "She'd slit his throat."

"The Deputy?" Derek asks.

Stiles nods. "I used to hang around the station after school right after my mom died. Haines was always nice to me. He taught me to play clock solitaire." Stiles laughs. "He said I was hopeless at it, but he always kept a deck of cards for me at his desk, anyway."

"I'm sorry," Derek says, as he drops down beside him. He sits down close enough to touch, though he doesn't.

"You never did say what you were doing here," Stiles says, glancing over at him.

"Your father—" Derek starts.

"Yes, but what are you doing here?" he interrupts. "My dad had you released pretty much
immediately. I thought you might come to visit, but nope, radio silence on the Hale front. And now
here you are, so I'll ask again. What are you doing here?"

"I would have come earlier, but your father asked me not to," Derek says. "I wanted to respect his
wishes."

"And what about mine?" Stiles asks. "I guess they don't factor in?"

"I wanted to come, Stiles," Derek repeats firmly. "I just didn't know what to say to you."

"Never seemed to bother you before," Stiles says. "Usually when you don't know what to say you
just give me the broody stare. Yeah, kind of like that. And then I do enough talking for the both of
us. It works for us. See? You don't have to say anything. I'll just say you're welcome, and we'll move
on like every other time like it didn't even happen and—"

"You think I'm here to thank you?" Derek snaps. "I'm here to call you an idiot, and warn you that if
you do something that stupid again, I'll kill you myself."

"This is why you should let me do the talking for you," Stiles says. "I think you might actually have
some sort of personality disorder."

"This is serious, Stiles," Derek snaps, surging up to his feet before spinning to glare down at him.
"You could have been killed."

"Why does that sound like an accusation?" Stiles asks. "It's not like I invited her over for a chat or
something."

"That's exactly what you did," Derek growls. "You called her to meet you alone in the woods."

Stiles pauses. "Oh, yeah, right," he says. "I guess I sort of did."

"What did you think you were going to do against her…and me, all by yourself?" Derek demands.
"If you'd at least told the others—"

"She could have been using them too, I couldn't take the risk," Stiles protests. "I found a ritual in one
of the books Deaton gave me that might have freed you. I think if she hadn't forced the others to
come it might have worked, but I had to abandon the area I'd set up when you all started searching
for me, so I could get you alone."

"That wouldn't have been a problem, if you hadn't tried to do this all by yourself," Derek insists.
"And you certainly could have told me after she was out of me. When I saw you at the hospital, you
still wouldn't talk to me. I thought I did this to you!"

"How was I supposed to be sure she was gone?" Stiles asks. "She could have been any of you. I
tested Lydia and Allison, but the mountain ash would have stopped the rest of you either way."

"So you should have told them," Derek insists.

"What good would that have done?" he asks. "Knowing Lydia, she's probably immune to
possession, but she still can't do magic, she couldn't have stopped her. And Allison probably would
have sent the hunters after you, without bothering to check if you were even still possessed."

"Maybe that would have been for the best, at least you would have had some back up," Derek says.
"You're the one that taught us how to be a pack, and still you don't get that you're part of it."
"I get it, I do!" Stiles shouts. "Do you think I would have done all this, if I didn't think it was my pack too?"

"But you don't trust us," Derek insists.

"You think I should?" Stiles demands, carefully pushing himself to his feet. "Scott hangs up on me when I need him, if he bothers to answer at all. The rest are even worse, because I'm only their friend when they need me, and barely even then. And you..." Stiles breaks off. "You've made it very clear that you don't trust me. Why should I trust you?"

Stiles grabs onto one of the drawer handles as he starts to lose his balance, and Derek is in front of him so fast he doesn't even see him move. He presses Stiles up against the wall with one hand on his waist, holding him steady.

"You have no idea what you are to us, do you?" Derek asks quietly. "We'd fall apart without you."

"We're falling apart anyway," Stiles says. "It doesn't matter what I do."

"You always matter," Derek tells him firmly. "And I do trust you, but you're right not to trust me."

Stiles shudders as the cool metal at his back seeps through his thin hospital pajamas. He can feel the heat of Derek's hand against his hip in stark contrast, and it's hard to focus on the words. It takes them a moment to register in his mind, and he's still not sure he believes them. "You don't though. You've never even—"

"I've never what?" Derek asks.

"She said...she said you wanted to give me the bite," Stiles says. "But I know she was just messing with my head. I mean, you never even asked, but she thought if she could get you—"

"She wasn't lying," Derek says. "At least, not about that."

"Oh," Stiles says, swallowing tightly. "That's—"

"It's okay. I know you don't want it," Derek says quietly. "That's why I've never asked."

"It's not that I don't think you guys are awesome, because you are. It's just, I know you probably don't think so, but I'm more use to you like this," Stiles says. "And anyway I'd make a horrible werewolf. I'm too prone to poison oak to be rolling around in the woods and I don't want to wake up with dead bunny in my teeth. I like bunnies. I mean that I like them in a non-culinary sense, not like them as in dinner—"

"Stiles," Derek snaps, grabbing his shoulders and forcing him to stay still. "I would never turn you against your will. Not ever. I'd die first."

"No. No, I know that," Stiles says, taking a deep breath. "And maybe now so do you."

"It's doesn't change what happened," Derek says. "I almost did it anyway."

"That wasn't you," Stiles says. "It was her."

"It was part of me," Derek says, shaking his head. "The weakness had to be there, for her to exploit it. And I'd be lying if I said I didn't want to tie you to me in some way. It's selfish and I'm sorry, and maybe—"

"Don't you dare say we should keep our distance," Stiles snaps. "That's bullshit and you know it."
You made Erica and Boyd, and they both skipped out on you the moment things got rough."

"Way to kick me when I'm down," Derek says dryly.

"You're missing the whole point!" Stiles yells. "I didn't run. You don't have to tie me to you, Derek, it's already been done. And not by some supernatural imperative, but because it's what I want. That's the best I can do. You don't get an absolute, and you don't get a guarantee, and if that's what you're waiting for you're never going to have anyone at all!"

Derek fists his hands in the material of his shirt, gently pressing him back against the wall of drawers. "Maybe that's the plan! Why don't you get that I'm dangerous?" he snarls. "Erica and Boyd were the sensible ones, you should have been running from me from the start. People I care about only get hurt."

"I know you've lost more than most, but that's still not how it works," Stiles says softly. He reaches up and frames Derek's face, turning him to meet his gaze. "People just get hurt, whether you care about them or not."

Stiles isn't quite sure which one of them moves first, but they're suddenly hanging onto each other like they'll lose anchor if the other slips away. It's not exactly his first kiss, because Emma from third grade totally counts, but it's the first one that really matters.

He wonders if this is how Scott feels with Allison, if this is why Stiles can just disappear when she walks into the room. Because for just that moment, Derek is suddenly his everything; it's some weird kind of tunnel vision that seems to slow down time.

Like the rest of the world has just stopped.

"We can't do this," Derek says breathlessly, and reality comes rushing right back in. He lets his forehead fall to rest against Stiles'.

Stiles thinks it's strange, just how expressive Derek's face can be, when he's not hiding everything behind it. He wonders if someday he might actually get a real smile out of him, but he's not sure he's ready for it. It feels a little like that might be the point of no return.

But Stiles has never been all that great at obeying boundaries.

"Give me one good reason why not," Stiles says.

"You gave your father bullets that can kill me," Derek says wryly. "Which he made a point of telling me. Repeatedly."

"Okay. Give me two good reasons why not," Stiles says.

"If I don't get you back, he's going to probably start another manhunt," Derek says. "And then test those bullets out on me."

"That is not a long term reason," Stiles says, flashing a grin. "I can totally find a way around that."

"Well, it's not going to be today," Derek says firmly, steadying Stiles against the wall before pulling away. "Come on. I'm getting you back."

"No," Stiles says. "I'm not going anywhere until I have your word."

Derek crosses his arms. "You want to elaborate?"
"I want your word you're not going to try and push me away, out of some misguided attempt to protect me," Stiles says. "You said you trust me, right?"

"Yes," Derek says reluctantly, obviously sensing a trap.

"Then trust me to know what I want," Stiles says. "Trust me when I say you're worth the risk."

"If you really want to try this," Derek says slowly, approaching him again. "If you want to try to be together. I have a condition."

"Name it," Stiles says, sure he's won.

"We tell your father," Derek says.

"Already done," Stiles assures him. "He knows all about my furry little friends, their scaly counterparts, evil spirits, and Allison's crazy family. I gave him the Cliff Notes version of everything."

"I meant we have to tell him about us," Derek says.

"On the other hand, my dad can only take so much," Stiles says. "Did you know he has high blood pressure? Maybe we could tell him when I'm like thirty."

"Stiles," he snaps. "You're important to me, and he's important to you. I don't want him to keep seeing me as the bad guy, and sneaking around with you while you're underage isn't going to help my image."

"But brooding and slightly stalker-ish kinda is your image! And you totally pull it off!" Stiles protests. "Let's face it, you hang out in an abandoned rail station with three teenagers, respectable was always going to be a stretch. You sneak around with them all the time, why won't you sneak around with me?"

"You're different," Derek says, leaning close enough to brush his lips across Stiles' cheek, in a not-quite kiss. "I plan do something right for once."

Stiles is almost leaning in almost before he realizes what he's doing, but Derek slips away like smoke. "I don't like you respectable," he complains.

"Let's go," Derek says, reaching down to capture and tug at Stiles' hand.

Stiles feels a pull at his chest as he takes a step, and glances back to see the symbols glowing across her chest once more. He lets his hand slip from Derek's. "You go ahead," he says distractedly. "I'll be right there."

Derek frowns but nods, and Stiles moves back to the drawer as the other man turns away. He looks down at her eyes, and the strange blue is swirling like it's a living thing. "I know you're still in there," he says. "I thought you'd like to know, I've come to terms with what happened."

There's no answer, though the blue shifts again, looking like storm clouds caught beneath glass. Stiles tightens his hands around the edge of the drawer, and the symbols glow a deep red.

"Rest in peace, you psycho bitch," he tells her, and then slams the drawer shut.
Okay, so I have a question for you all! This was always supposed to be a one shot, but during the course of writing it, I've written quite a few scenes of the 'night in question' in order to help me keep my facts straight, though I never intended to use them within this story. I was considering turning it into a kind of companion piece—one that retells the events of the night and about the week prior to it, reliable narrator style. So I just wanted to get a second opinion if this was something anyone would be interested in, or if this is a case of I should leave well enough alone!
The Sheriff

Chapter Notes

Well, here it is! The end, finally! Thank you to everyone for sticking with me through this. This little coda is a bit more light-hearted than the rest of the story, but I figured they deserved it.

As for my idea about a companion story, I want to thank everyone that commented with their opinion! I know a lot of people said they would like one, but the ones that spoke against said pretty much all the things that had me hesitant in the first place. And then Cynictis said the word 'sequel' and it kind of ate my brain.

Part of the reason this update is a little late is I've been off plotting my next mystery, and it's already nearly mapped out to the end. It's also going to tie back to this one in ways that should help illuminate more about 'the night,' so hopefully no one is too upset I've put the idea of a the companion piece on the backburner at least for now. But more on that in the end notes, for now, here's the coda!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The trouble with Stiles is that he's a good kid.

The Sheriff hauls people into jail for a living, so he's seen a lot of kids at their worst. He always feels a little tinge of regret, a little pang of sorrow that only a father would know, but he does his job. He arranges the evidence and sets the charges against them.

When Stiles and Scott were involved in the Whittemore debacle he heard what people would say: he can't even handle his own kid.

The truth is that if he thought for a second that Stiles had acted out of malice, if he'd even suspected his son had done it to be cruel, he would have been harder on him than he's ever been on those other troubled kids.

He may not have had the whole story back then, but he'd still known in his heart that Stiles never did anything maliciously. He always got in the most trouble when he was helping someone out. Stiles' mother had been the exact same way.

He's always jokingly called Stiles' a trouble-maker, but he really never was. He did all his homework without being asked, he never cut school, he didn't smoke or do drugs. He never stayed out all night.

Or, at least, he hadn't.

So when it started, the Sheriff had cut him a lot of slack, allowed him this little rebellion. He didn't hold on too tightly because what if Stiles slipped out of reach completely, then where would he be? Stiles has never needed him to tell him what was best for him—more often than not, Stiles has been the one taking care of him.

But now it's his turn.

Stiles may be home now, and all but healed, but the Sheriff's not going to forget just how very close
"I don't understand what's happening here," Stiles says, looking honestly confused as his eyes go from Derek to him and back again, like seeing them in the same room truly isn't registering.

"I invited Derek for breakfast," the Sheriff says. "So we could talk."

Stiles looks rightly suspicious, and he turns back to Derek. "Don't be fooled," he warns. "This is obviously some sort of ploy to get access to a breakfast menu without my supervision. Don't let him sweet-talk you into believing he's allowed bacon."

"We're having it here," the Sheriff says, before Derek can respond. "And you're staying."

"In that case you're getting oatmeal," Stiles says, without missing a beat. "And don't even think about sugar."

"Sit," the Sheriff says, pointing to the chair beside Derek. Stiles drops into it with a sigh. "I have questions."

"But I told you everything!" Stiles cries indignantly. "Do we really have to go through this all again? Shouldn't we just look ahead?"

"Stiles, in your version of events no one has ever been in danger except for, and I quote, 'the really really bad guys that no one cares about anyway.' I need to know the truth about what we're dealing with." The Sheriff leans forward, turning his attention to Derek. "Is my son in danger?"

"No!" Stiles shouts, at the same time Derek answers, "Yes."

Stiles jerks in his seat, in a not so subtle move the Sheriff knows means he's just kicked Derek underneath the table. Then Stiles smiles at him, which isn't nearly as reassuring as he probably thinks it is. "Danger," he laughs. "What is danger? We're all in a constant state of danger if you want to over think it! I could be hit by a bus, or I could be walking down the street and get crushed by a baby grand piano."

The Sheriff raises an eyebrow. "Seriously, that's how you reassure me? You want to compare the threat of werewolves to falling pianos? We're not living in a Laurel and Hardy film."

"No, but you don't know, it could happen!" Stiles says. "It probably happens in Jackson's neighborhood all the time."

"I'm starting to regret wanting you here for this," the Sheriff says. "Why don't we see what Derek has to say?"

"Derek's not much of a talker, actually," Stiles says. "He's really more of a 'speaks with their eyes' sort of werewolf."

"Stiles," Derek says tightly. "Shut up."

Stiles crosses his arms and glares, but surprisingly he does go quiet. Derek runs a hand through his hair, seemingly gathering his thoughts, and then he meets the Sheriff's eyes.

"He is in danger," Derek admits. "So are the others. I can't change that, but I can do my best to protect them. I tried to protect them by staying away, but they just became targets anyway. I truly believe we're stronger together than we are apart."
"Yes, that," Stiles says. "And they need me! I'm kinda the brains of the operation."

"I don't know what part of that I find more terrifying," the Sheriff says.

"Stiles is very…useful," Derek says grudgingly, and the Sheriff can hear all that's going unsaid just as clearly. He remembers watching his son in that hospital room, his cool, detached focus as he worked out how to stop that woman in her tracks.

And then he did it, just like that.

"And the…magic thing?" the Sheriff asks. "Do I need to be worried about that? Is my son going to turn into Sabrina the Teenage Witch?"

"Okay, that's just uncalled for," Stiles complains. "What is with everyone comparing me to girls?"

"It's the teenage and witch part that concerns me, Stiles," the Sheriff says.

"I'm not a witch!" Stiles protests. "Or a wizard, even. Deaton says those are all misnomers!"

"Deaton?" the Sheriff snaps. "The vet?"

"Yeah, he's kind of my Giles," Stiles says, and then frowns. "Great, now I'm doing it."

"You're not distracting me that easy," the Sheriff says firmly. "What does Deaton have to do with any of this?"

"You know Sabrina the Teenage Witch but you don't get a Giles reference?" Stiles asks in disbelief. "You should be ashamed of yourself."

"Deaton helps us sometimes," Derek says quietly, and the Sheriff turns towards him, having almost forgotten he was there. Stiles tended to have that effect, and he's fairly certain it's entirely intentional. "He uses magic sometimes himself."

"It's not like I'm going to be flying around on a broomstick. Trust me, I checked, it's not a thing," Stiles says. "I can just do stuff, sometimes. Or make things happen, if I really want them to. That's all."

"That's all," the Sheriff repeats incredulously. "That sounds like an awful lot to me."

"It's not enough," Stiles says, sliding down in his chair. "Because right now I'm sort of wishing I could make myself disappear."

Derek reaches out and grasps Stiles arm, narrowing his eyes at him. He doesn't say anything, but the Sheriff thinks he's starting to understand the non-verbal secret language the other man shares with his son. That looks seems to say: don't you dare.

Which is probably the best opening he's going to get for his next concern.

"Okay," he says. "So I accept that most of the people my son knows are werewolves. We can talk more about the magic thing, and exactly what a Giles is later." Stiles winces, but gives a nod. "That just leaves one last thing."

The Sheriff turns his focus completely on Derek. "What, exactly, are you intentions with my son?"

"Intentions?" Stiles echoes in disbelief. "No, dad, no, let's just go back to the part of this conversation where we talk about how my life is always in danger. Because you have no idea. I mean, this one
time, I was stuck in a pool with Derek for like two hours—and that is probably not the best example to lead you away from this line of questioning, is it?"

Derek flashes Stiles another glare, and Stiles' mouth snaps shut. It's a neat trick. Derek turns back to him. "I'd like your permission to date him," he says, his tone strangely formal.

The Sheriff really hadn't expected an admission, and from Stiles' deer in the headlights expression, he's guessing he hadn't either. "You want my permission," he says.

"Yes," Derek answers.

"And if I don't give it to you?" the Sheriff asks.

"Then I'll respect your wishes," Derek says. "Until Stiles is old enough that it's his decision."

"Yeah, see if I even want you in a couple years, after this," Stiles says sullenly.

The Sheriff leans back and watches Derek. He believes him—he might not be able to keep Stiles' from the dangers of hanging around with werewolves, but if he told Derek to stay away from his son he thinks he would, at least as much as possible.

But he knows he doesn't have that right.

"It's not my permission you need," the Sheriff says. "I trust Stiles' judgment, and if he wants to date you, that's up to him."

Stiles' mouth falls open. "What?" he asks. "You're serious? Just like that?"

The Sheriff flashes a fierce grin, one that has Stiles' eyes widening and even Derek edging back. "Oh no, not just like that," he says. "There will be rules. Three very important ones, in particular. And there will be consequences for breaking those rules."

"I'm not going to like these rules, am I?" Stiles asks with a wince.

"I trust you, Stiles," the Sheriff says. "But I also know you'll get in over your head to help someone. And I should have been there for you. I haven't been, but I can promise that's going to change."

"You've always been there for me!" Stiles protests.

"You've been off fighting creatures in the middle of the night," the Sheriff snaps. "You've been nearly killed and you've nearly killed and it's all happened right under my nose."

"Sir," Derek starts, but the Sheriff shakes his head.

"What's done is done," he says. "I know you kids have been trying your best, but you're not in this alone anymore. If something happens, I want you bringing it to me. I don't want you handling it alone. Are we clear?"

"Yes," Derek says.

"Good, because that's rule number one," the Sheriff says. "Rule two, Stiles, is I want you home by eleven on school nights, and twelve on the weekends. I will be calling home to check if I'm at work. And don't try that call-forwarding thing, either. I'll know if you do."

"Yeah, about that. See, the thing is—" Stiles starts, but Derek squeezes his arm.
"That sounds reasonable," Derek says.

"I'm glad you think so," the Sheriff says. "Because if either of those rules are broken and my son ends up hurt, I have a nice little supply of wolfsbane bullets, courtesy of Stiles."

"Dad!" Stiles protests.

"Understood," Derek says. "And rule three?"

"Don't break his heart, or I'll make you wish I'd only killed you," the Sheriff promises.

Derek nods slightly in acknowledgement. "I promise you, Sheriff, I will protect Stiles in any way I can."

"Lovely sentiment," Stiles says. "Kind of leaves out how half the time it's me protecting you, but whatever."

"Even from himself," Derek says wryly, ignoring Stiles completely. "If that's possible."

The Sheriff laughs, suddenly seeing how Derek and Stiles might fit together, after all. "Then I wish you luck," he says. "I've been trying to manage that all his life."

"Okay, not that this hasn't been fun and not traumatizing at all, but how about we move on?" Stiles says, standing up abruptly. "Anyone want that oatmeal?"

"Sounds good," the Sheriff says, even though it doesn't, because that's how they work. He lets Stiles take care of him, and he takes care of Stiles. He's still not sure quite where Derek fits in—but the Sheriff has always loved a good mystery.

He'll figure him out eventually.

Chapter End Notes

And that's The End! Even though there is now a sequel, The Lure of the Moon. The sequel is going to break away from this one a bit and hopefully be more of just a new story rather than a straight continuation, though they will definitely be connected! Mostly I just mean I still consider the Pull of the Tide to be complete, and I hope you enjoyed it as much as I enjoyed writing it!

Works inspired by this:  
The Pull of the Tide [Cover Art] by miss_aphelion, Притяжение прилива by Viviena

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