Onwards and Upwards

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Summary

A series of one-shot fics that take place at various points in 'The Sum of its Parts'. The pack is coming together. (And also I've created a monster AU. Please send help.)

Notes

So what's the first thing that needs to happen now that Papa Stilinski knows....? Melissa McCall, you're up!

Coming out simultaneously with this will be the "let's get Isaac into the pack!" fic. As soon as it has a title. To be followed by Erica. And probably more stuff because HELP ME I CAN'T STOP WRITING TEEN WOLF FIC.

Uh, sort of a trigger warning for rape analogies when it comes to being turned into a werewolf though. Sorry about that. Also, my girlfriend has ADD, so Stiles in this chapter is her fault.
Chapter 1

This ficlet takes place directly after the events of Coming Undone. Probably about a week or two weeks later. ^_^

Scott’s already rethinking his decision not to have Stiles as emotional backup as he sets his foot on the edge of his house’s large lawn and smells the hamburgers that his mother is making. Normally, if he set his mind to filtering out the ambient noise of what’s happening around him, he can hear her heartbeat and find it comforting. Today, he can barely hear anything over the thudding of his own heart due to his nerves.

He tries to tell himself that he’s faced down Peter, Derek, Chris and Kate Argent, he’s been shot repeatedly, he can do this. This should be easy in comparison. He takes a deep breath, crosses the lawn, and goes inside.

“Oh hey!” Melissa shouts from the kitchen. “How was lacrosse practice?”

Scott heads toward her, a little taken off guard, and then tells himself he’s being stupid. Just because he’s braced for the talk of the century doesn’t mean his mother is expecting anything weird. “Not too bad. Jackson’s being a dou... doofus,” he says, catching his bad language at the last minute.

Melissa is clearly not fooled, and arches an eyebrow at him, but lets it go. “How’s Stiles doing?”

“He’s doing good.” Scott winces. “Well. He’s doing well.” He can just hear Allison correcting him in his head.

A little smirk crosses Melissa’s face. “You may pass high school yet,” she says, and turns back to the hamburgers she’s grilling on their tiny George Foreman. “You hungry? ’Cause these will be ready pretty soon.”

“Absolutely.” He’s a growing werewolf, after all. He sniffs a little. If he’s going to out himself, he figures he might as well not have his dinner horrifically overcooked to ‘well done’. “Actually, I think I’ll just snag mine now,” he adds, swooping in. The rarer side of medium is good.

Melissa smacks his knuckles with a fork. “Do I even need to tell you about how much e. coli is in this stuff?”

“Not enough to kill me,” Scott says, undeterred. His own burger rescued, although he leaves his mother’s cooking, he turns to her with a look that’s an odd combination of nervous, sheepish, and serious, a look that only Scott can manage. “But... about that. I, uh... I wanted to talk to you. Like really talk to you.”

She blinks at him. “Really?”

Scott nods. “Really.”
“Hallelujah!” She unplugs the grill and steers Scott into a chair, leaving the food on the counter. “Talk,” she says, sitting across from him.

Scott eyes the burgers. “I’m not letting you cook those more later under the guise of warming them up,” he says, but sits.

“Then you’ll eat them cold, bucko. Talk.”

Scott can live with that. “Well, see, I’m . . . no, Stiles . . .” He bites his lip. “No. So, the thing is . . .” His fingers tap at the table. “Shit, Mom, I’m awful at this! Everything has been so messed up and there have been tons of secrets and lies, and it’s sucked and I don’t even know where to start.”

She reaches over the table to grip his hands. “Start at the beginning.”

“Right. The beginning.” He calms down a little. She’s his mom. It’ll be okay. “So remember back when that body was found in the woods? Laura’s body?” he adds, automatically referring to her by name because her memory is treated with respect in their pack.

Melissa nods, looking a little confused to have this as a starting place. “Yeah, I remember that.”

“Okay, so, Stiles and I did something really stupid.”

“Oh, Lord,” Melissa says. “You went out to look for the body. That’s it; I am never working night shift again . . .”

Scott huffs out a laugh. Nights weren’t so much of a problem anymore. “Yeah, we did, and it was fine in the beginning. We were just, you know, doing something stupid. Then Stiles’ dad caught us. Or caught Stiles, but, he knew I was there, you know? Because he’s not an idiot. Anyway, we got split up and then I . . .” He has to stop and take a deep breath because this is still difficult. Peter had still done something to him against his will, and no matter how good things are now, it’s not a fond memory. “So I got knocked down and bitten by an animal. Or what I thought was an animal. A wolf. Which there aren’t any in California. Or at least, not any normal ones.”

“Okay . . .” Melissa says, now well and truly baffled about where this story is going.

“And I thought it was no big deal. Maybe I stumbled too close to the den. It’s not like it’s the first time I’ve been bitten by an animal. So I just cleaned it up and moved on. But . . . then I was suddenly good at lacrosse. Like, Jackson level of good. And I could breathe, and my hearing and sense of smell were out of this world and it was crazy.”

“It . . . sounds crazy, all right.”

Scott charged ahead for another minute. “And it all would have been fine, awesome, or so I thought, except Peter wanted . . .” He trails off. “You don’t believe me.” He nods. “Okay.”

“Well, I’m sorry, honey, but I’m still not even sure what you’re trying to tell me and I don’t see what this has to do with anything that’s been going on, in addition to how insane it all sounds. Like you got bitten by a radioactive spider and now you have superpowers.”

“I’m trying to tell you about how I got all tangled up in this mess with two, two psychotic murderers, and how everything is different now, and there’s a, a family, a pack, and things are finally . . .” He stops because he’s babbling again. He pulls one hand free from his mother’s hold, leaving the other where it is. “Tell me you won’t freak out.”

“I’m already pretty freaked out, but I’ll try to stay calm,” Melissa says.
Scott holds his hand up and shifts enough to show claws.

Melissa stares, fascinated, watching the claws come out. “That’s . . . how did you . . .” She can’t seem to finish the question.

“I’m a werewolf, mom.”

Melissa shakes his head. “You, you, do you think this is funny? Do, do you think that – ”

“Mom! Mom, I’ve got claws.” He gestures with that hand, keeping it a safe distance from his mother. “No, I don’t think it’s funny. Do you need to see the teeth? The pointed ears, the fur? If you want to see a hundred and forty-some-odd pound wolf sitting in your kitchen, I can do that for you.”

“No! No, I don’t want to see that, who would want to see that?” Melissa pushes back from the table. “Jesus. I need a drink. Only my son would manage to, to get turned into a werewolf!”

Scott slams back from the table like his mother had just slapped him. “Manage to?! You . . . you make it sound like I just let it happen and now I’m some sort of . . . I didn’t ask for this! Peter did this to me! He attacked me and did this to me without my permission! Just like he did to Lydia! But because I wasn’t bleeding everywhere in a pretty dress, it’s suddenly something I just let happen?”

“Oh . . . oh, honey,” Melissa says, nearly choking the words out. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean it that way, I just . . . this is kind of a lot to take in.”

Scott nods a little, not sure if he’s accepting her apology or agreeing with her or just indicating that he has physically heard what she said. He wants a hug, because that’s the sort of comfort he’s used to, now that the idea of pack is something good for him. But he won’t ask for one, so he just hugs his arms over his stomach and says nothing.

Melissa is not inobservant, however, and after a moment she walks over and wraps her arms around her son, squeezing him tightly. “It’s going to be okay, Scott. Whatever . . . whatever’s going on, whatever you need, we’ll get it for you. Okay? I promise. It’s going to be okay.”

He nods against her shoulder and lets himself be hugged for a minute, just soaking it in, before hugging back. “It’s not bad now. Peter’s gone. Kate’s gone.” There might have been a sniffle. “I’m sorry I yelled at you.”

“You don’t need to be sorry for that.” Melissa rubs his back. “I was kind of . . . I just shouldn’t have said that. Okay?” She steers him back towards his chair. “Now start at the beginning . . . again . . . and stop dancing around the werewolf thing.”

He sits, and starts over. He tells her the whole story this time. It’s a bit disjointed, because he isn’t a very good storyteller, and there’s a lot of emotional flailing, but he tells it. And this time he uses everyone’s names all the way through, which makes him swallow hard and hiccup here and there because it takes the cushion away. The body can no longer be anonymous. She’s truly Laura Hale, Derek’s sister, his alpha, and now Scott knows what that really means and how hard the loss of a loved alpha could hit, let alone sister and only family. ‘The wolf’ is Peter from beginning to end, and that makes him curl in on himself, because ‘the wolf’ is now a person and stripped of all innocence of action. He doesn’t dare look at his mother when talking about the times he was hurt or shot, either, or the times that he misjudged Derek so badly. But he does tell her everything.

Melissa sits there the whole time and keeps her jaw firmly clenched when her stomach wants to leap into her throat. She murmurs a sympathetic comment here and there, and tries to keep everything straight when Scott jumps around. She sits across the table and holds his hands, and makes sure not
to express incredulity at anything, even the least believable parts, because she’s sure he’s telling the truth. He’s her son, and she knows him, and he would never make up a story like this.

“Well,” she says, when it’s clear that he’s brought her up to date, “you know, this is going to sound crazy, but . . . this is actually a huge relief to me. Werewolf pack and all.”

Scott looks up at her cautiously. “Uh, it is? Because . . . that’s not what I expected. And that’s even taking into account my new definition of crazy.”

Melissa lets out a sigh, a release of tension that brings her almost to the point of tears. “My God, Scott, I was so worried about you. I thought you were, were on drugs, or mixed up in a gang, or, or, developing a mental illness like schizophrenia. I didn’t know what to think. And it turns out all that time you were just . . . looking out for your friends. Trying to do the right thing. Being Scott.” Now she is crying a little. “That is such a Goddamn relief.”

This time it’s Scott who moves around the table and does the hugging. “I didn’t mean to worry you. I really didn’t. I thought, we thought, that if we kept you and Mr. Stilinski out of it, you would worry less, and be in less danger.”

She hugs him tightly and presses his cheek against his hair. “Yes, well,” she says, “sometimes you aren’t very bright, Scott. You know?”

Scott gives an amused huff. “Stiles, Derek, and Lydia don’t let me forget. Allison respects my fragile ego.”

“Good for her.” Melissa gives him another squeeze. “Also: you’re grounded.”

“What for? Exactly?”

“Lying to me. And don’t say you didn’t lie to me, bucko! Omission is just as bad, if not worse, and there have to have been at least a few times in there when you just flat out lied to my face.” She gives him a gentle whap upside the head. “So. You are grounded, mister. No, uhm, no TV for a week. A month! No TV for a month.”

“I wasn’t going to argue!” Scott protests. “I just wanted to know what it was in that entire disaster that I was grounded for.” There was a pause, and then somewhat sheepishly, “Does grounded mean I can’t go to Stiles’ house? Please don’t do that. Everything else, okay, but everyone goes over there.”

Melissa folds her arms over her chest and says, “Well, I guess your pack will just have to come here, now won’t they.”

Scott nods, invested in making his mother happy. “Uh . . . even overnight? Sometimes . . . we do that.” Sometimes any one of them could use a packmate to sleep next to.

“Wolf slumber parties?” Melissa seems amused by this concept.

“Sort of?”

Melissa narrows her eyes. “Are you hiding things again, or just being evasive by accident?”

“Both? Neither?” He flaps a hand at her while trying to think before speaking. “It’s not for fun. We’re a new pack, so I think it makes us want to stick close to each other. And,” he stops here, trying to think of a way to explain that they all sort of have the screaming meemies sometimes (except Derek, who has angry hysterics) without spilling other people’s secrets. “This was all such a
mess for some of us, it’s better to have someone nearby at night.”

“Uh huh.” Melissa smiles suddenly. “So you sleep close to each other for comfort and you, being a
guy, didn’t want to have to say that to your mother?”

“Maybe.” Scott grins. “That and sometimes Derek forgets he should think about pants.”

Melissa folds her hands under her chin and says, “If you weren’t so head over heels for Allison, that
coment would make me suspicious. Actually it does, but sort of in a different way. You don’t have
to answer this if you don’t want to, but, well – do Derek and Stiles have, you know, a thing?”

Scott’s eyebrows came down as he thought about that question and how to answer. It isn’t a secret,
whatever ‘it’ is, but it’s not exactly easy to explain. “Sort of. Yes.” He nods firmly, because he’s
started thinking about how they share the pack, and that lets him start thinking like a wolf, and the
way they smell when they’re together. Content. Stiles is less stressed and Derek is closer to happy.
The way gravity pulls them together, the way it had pulled him towards Allison. But they never have
the scent of lust, or sex; at least, Stiles never has it near Derek. It shows up near pretty girls often
enough. “Yeah, they do. But uh, Stiles is straight, if that’s what you were asking. Though he’s
finally over Lydia! And Derek is sort of a second alpha, since Stiles isn’t actually a wolf, and Derek
knows a lot since he was born as one.”

“So they’re more like partners than boyfriends,” Melissa says, wanting to make sure she has this
straight.

“Maybe? How do you mean ‘partners’?”

“Well . . .” Melissa thinks it over. “I guess in this circumstance, it would mean almost like parents.
The two of them run everything together. They’re friends, but more than friends, but not boyfriends.”

“Kinda, yeah,” Scott says, although he’s noticed that Stiles isn’t really looking around anymore. At
least, nothing beyond a general appreciation of the scenery.

Seeing his hesitation, Melissa smiles a little and says, “Maybe you need to speak ‘wolf’ before you
can understand it.”

“That could be it.” In a moment of blind honesty, because this was his mother here, he adds, “Or it
could be because we’re all pretty screwed up at this point.”

She shakes her head at him and says, “Eat your dinner.”

Scott nods and stands, and the first thing he does is plug the grill back in for his mother. Then he
starts assembling a sandwich for himself. “So . . . how long am I grounded for?”

Melissa narrows her eyes at him. “Why don’t you tell me how long you think would be
appropriate?”

Scott cringes. Every teenager on the planet knows that there is no correct answer to that question. “I
dunno. Some of this was self-punishing. I mean, I got shot and stuff.”

Melissa folds her arms over her chest and gives him a look with raised eyebrows.

Realizing that this was absolutely the wrong thing to say, Scott verbally scrambles to fix his mistake.
“But it’s okay! It didn’t even leave a mark!” Then he thinks of the slowly fading scar from the
wolfsbane bullet to the belly. “Or it won’t in the end. Oh God, I’m making it worse.”
“Yes, yes you are,” Melissa says. “If we’re going to bring that into it, I’d be tempted to ground you twice as long for each time you got hurt.”

“It was only twice.” Scott winces. “I guess grounding me for as long as all this was going on would be fair.”

“Oh, Lord,” Melissa says. “Stiles would eat me out of house and home if he had to come over here every night because you were grounded for, what, three months?” She takes a deep breath and taps her fingers on the table, watching Scott devour his hamburger, because no matter what else is going on, he’s still a growing boy. “Okay. You are grounded from TV for a month, and you’re grounded from your phone and from going out for a week.”

“Only a week?” Scott leans over the table to give her a surprised hug.

“Because you tried to do what you thought was best,” she says, “and because you didn’t ask for any of this. Yes. Only a week.”

“Okay.” Scott pulls his phone out, but pauses as he’s about to hand it over. “Can I text everyone first, to let them know to come here tonight?”

Melissa considers. “You may text Stiles,” she says. “He can tell everyone else.”

Scott nods, not about to argue, and gets with the texting. ‘Grounded and lost phone privileges for a week. Mom says the pack can come over. Gotta go.’

Melissa lets him hang onto the phone until Stiles replies, which he does a minute later with, ‘I’ll let everyone know the party’s at the McCall house tonite!’

Scott taps out a quick, ‘No party! Grounded!’ and hands the phone over to his mother. “It’s not my fault,” he tells her.

She looks at the screen and lets out a snort of laughter. “Don’t worry, Scott; I don’t hold you responsible for Stiles.”

“Thank God.”

They go back to eating their dinner, and less than twenty minutes later, Stiles shows up with Lydia in tow. “Hi, Ms. McCall!” he says, bouncing into the house with his usual lack of what might be considered courtesy. Lydia is just rolling her eyes as she follows him inside. Stiles looks at Scott and says, “I can’t believe you actually told her,” then holds his hand out for a fist bump.

Scott knocks their fists together but gives Stiles a look like he’s the slow one. “Dude, you kinda told me to. If I hadn’t, you and your dad were going to make me. I could tell.” He leans around Stiles to give Lydia a smile in greeting.

“And I totally expected we would have to do that,” Stiles says with a nod. “Hey, hamburgers? Awesome.” He commences stuffing his face.

Lydia rolls her eyes and says, politely, “Thank you for having us, Ms. McCall.”

Scott looked over at Lydia and asks, “Have you eaten? I can make more burgers. And there’s one left that hasn’t been cooked to death.” He’s a little nervous, shifting slightly. “Is Allison coming?” He assumes that Derek is, but Derek will get there in his own time, because Derek can be a jerk like that.

“She said she’ll be over as soon as she’s done with her homework,” Stiles says with his mouth full.
“And yeah, we ate at my place,” he adds, not seeming to realize how inconsistent that statement is with the fact that he’s already inhaled half a hamburger and is clearly thinking about putting together a second one.

Scott gives his mom an apologetic smile and looks in the fridge for other food. “Does anyone want anything to drink? By ‘anyone’ I mean ‘Lydia’,” he adds. Stiles is on his own.

“Just water,” Lydia says, as Stiles shoulders Scott aside to reach for a can of Coke and a Tupperware of mystery leftovers. “Stiles, did you take your Adderall today?”

“Nah, I slept too late,” Stiles says, opening the Tupperware and giving it a sniff. “That obvious?” he adds, sticking it in the microwave to reheat.

“Dude, you are eating all the things,” Scott says, and reaches for his phone to ask Derek to bring cookies, or chips, or the snack aisle of a grocery store. He’s seen Stiles get like this before after a long spell of high-dose Adderall, when he finally eases off of it long enough to realize he hasn’t eaten in a week. Then he remembers that he doesn’t have his phone. He sighs and reminds himself that it’s his own fault. “Can one of you ask Derek or Allison to pick up something to snack on, and some caffeine, on their way here? I’ll pay them back,” he adds, figuring that he shouldn’t make his mother pay for all the food.

“Oh! I will!” Stiles whips out his phone and starts texting. “I want, uhm, I want those Little Debbie snack cakes and microwave burritos and, hm, and waffles. And . . . oranges. Yeah, definitely oranges.”

Lydia gives Scott a somewhat skeptical look. “Caffeine? For him?”

“And a twelve pack of Mountain Dew,” Scott reminds Stiles, who’s still texting away. “Oh my God, Stiles, drink the Coke.” After that, he turns and blinks at Lydia for a few moments. He’s become used to her knowing pretty much everything. Then he shrugs and scoots a little closer to her, closer than the social norm although they both seem comfortable with it. “ADD, which is what Stiles has, and ADHD, are an understimulation of the central nervous system. Not overstimulation, the way a lot of people assume. That’s why people with it bounce and fidget and jitter, and their minds are everywhere at once. They’re trying to make up the difference.” He shrugs a little. “Most ADD meds are a form of amphetamines. Stimulants actually make people with ADD calmer. So if Stiles is ever without his psych meds, just ply him with caffeine.”

“See, Scott, I told you it would be a party,” Stiles says, smirking at him as he takes the Tupperware out of the microwave and sticks his face into it.

“You’re lucky my mother is forgiving,” Scott says, shooting her a nervous glance before peering in the Tupperware to try to figure out what it is.

“Actually, I’m rather enjoying this,” Melissa says, smiling at him. “It’s good to see you and Stiles back to normal.”

Stiles’ phone buzzes and he says, “Okay, Allison’s bringing the food. She’ll be here in about half an hour.” To Melissa, he says, “Derek will show up late. Because he’s a creature of the night,” he adds, in an outrageous Bela Lugosi accent.

Scott mutters something that sounds suspiciously like, “Just as long as he uses the door.”

They manage to pry Stiles out of the kitchen long enough to sit down with a game of Scrabble, since Scott can’t watch TV and Melissa has decided that video games count as they are played on the TV.
(“No computer games, either,” she says, which will obviously need to be on the honor system as he needs the computer for school.) Scott is half-heartedly making words like ‘ball’ and ‘cat’ because he doesn’t really care, while Lydia and Stiles make words like ‘placebo’ and ‘admiral’ for the extra ‘used all the letters’ bonus. Melissa watches this game in amusement and occasionally gives Scott a hint.

Not long after that, the doorbell rings and Scott finds Allison on the other side with one of her smiles, several grocery bags, and two twelve packs of soda. “Hi,” she says. “I got everything Stiles asked for and then some normal things for the rest of us.”

Scott beams and hugs her close, inhaling her scent and kissing her cheek. “Thanks.” He let her into the house and grabs the soda packs from the porch. “We’re playing Scrabble. I’ve been grounded from TV,” he explains, as they make their way to the kitchen.

“Scrabble? With Stiles and Lydia?” Allison lets out one of her warm laughs. “You couldn’t talk them into something like ‘Chutes and Ladders’?”

“I was hoping for something in between like Monopoly, but I was outvoted. And then Stiles started putting down words like ‘decimate’.” He gives a put-upon sigh. “Besides, Chutes and Ladders? And to think that earlier I was telling my mother that you’re respectful of my fragile ego.”

Allison gives him a rather wicked smile and says, “Maybe we could find a better game for just the two of us . . .”

“Oh hey guys is that Mountain Dew? Did you get my Little Debbies?” Stiles zooms into the kitchen, grabs one of the grocery bags and a twelve-pack of soda right out of Scott’s hands. “You’d better get back in here, Scott, it’s your turn and your mom might get suspicious if you take much longer to say hello,” he adds, then zooms back into the living room.

“I think that’s a no,” Scott says, with a laugh. “Do you still have all your fingers? And thanks for bringing this stuff, by the way.” He puts the pack of Sprite on the table and gets one for himself.

“No problem.” She gives him another kiss. “And my fingers are fine. Should we go say hi to your mother and team up at Scrabble?”

“You mean, should I let you save me? Yes, yes we should.” He curls his hand around hers and they head into the living room.

Stiles is already elbow-deep in a bag of Cheetos, and has the open pack of Mountain Dew next to him. “I took your turn for you,” he says, his mouth full. “You got thirty-six points. You’re welcome.”

Allison just smiles slightly and says, “Hi, Ms. McCall. Thanks for letting Scott have us over.”

“I didn’t want to ruin what he seemed to think was a working system,” Melissa says, watching in amusement as Scott nearly loses his hand at the wrist while snagging some Cheetos from the bag before returning it to Stiles.

Lydia makes a ‘tsk’ noise at Stiles and sets to work peeling one of the oranges. Allison just laughs and sits down next to Scott, curling her legs underneath herself and linking a hand through his arm. Stiles leans over to greet her properly, touching his cheek to hers in what seems to Melissa to be a strange parody of an animal greeting. He does this completely without any sense of shame or impropriety. Scott’s eyes skip up to his mother to see her reaction to the normal pack greeting. Her eyebrows are raised slightly, but then she flips another page of her magazine.
Another little knot of tension that Scott hasn’t realized was there melts away. Stiles greeting Allison like that in front of his mother gave all of them permission to act ‘normally’, and his mother’s basic non-reaction to it swept away even more worry. He reaches out and nudges Lydia, no longer bothering to keep a normal distance. “Watch it. Stiles might take your fingers off to get to that orange.”

Lydia gives him an arch look and says, “I’m aware. It’s not for me. I was afraid he would try to eat it whole.” She pulls apart the orange and holds a slice of it out to Stiles, who drops his bag of Cheetos and grabs it.

“Must be vitamin C deficient,” he says, as Lydia feeds him another slice.


“Obviously I need food,” Stiles says, accepting another orange slice. Melissa is watching this with some veiled interest. She doesn’t think she’s ever heard Scott take such a, well, mothering tone with Stiles before. And Stiles has certainly never accepted it before. “I just apparently really want oranges. Or maybe I just really want Lydia to feed me, right?” he asks, grinning at her. She just rolls her eyes at him.

Scott lets out a snort of laughter. “You’ve wanted that for years,” he says, peering at his letter tiles.

“And now I have it!” Stiles says.

Scott and Allison have a brief, heated conference about what they can spell with their letters, which Scott inevitably loses, and have just taken their turn when the doorbell rings. Stiles glances up and grins. “It’s Derek, I’ll get it,” he says, scrambling to his feet and practically jumping over the table rather than going around it, as Scott shakes his head at his friend.

“I didn’t know that he knew what doorbells were for!” Allison says brightly.

“Don’t give him too many points,” Scott says, making a face. “Now he’s making fun of me.”

“What’d he say?” Allison asks.

“I said,” Derek says from the door to the living room, “that he got himself grounded. That’s just a statement of fact.” He says this with measured dignity, apparently oblivious to the fact that Stiles has his arms wrapped around his shoulders and is attempting to get a piggy-back ride but is mostly just hanging on Derek’s back ineffectually.

“It was your tone,” Scott argues, but there’s really no challenge in his voice or on his face. He does make a face at Stiles. “Dude, stop trying to climb Derek before you hurt someone. Like yourself.”

“He likes it,” Stiles says, smirking.

Derek simply reaches around, grabs Stiles by the back of the shirt, and pries him off without commentary. He dumps Stiles back into the seat he had come from and then turns to Melissa McCall with that charming grin he can muster every once in a while, when the occasion calls for it. “It’s nice to meet you, Ms. McCall. I’ve heard a lot about you.”

“Dude, cut it out,” Stiles says, as the rest of the pack gives Derek a somewhat unnerved look. “You’re scaring the kids.”

Derek’s grin fell away. “It’s called being polite and making a good impression.”
“You look like a serial killer,” Stiles says cheerfully, patting the seat next to him.

Melissa bites back a grin, stands, and shakes Derek’s hand. “It’s nice to meet you, Derek. Thanks for helping take care of Scott when you could. I know he can make it difficult.”

“Hey!” Scott protests immediately. Not because his mother was wrong, exactly, but because Derek didn’t exactly make things easy either.

Melissa just gives him a look, but Derek says, “I don’t really deserve that much credit, but thanks.” Then he sits down next to Stiles, sees that he’s about to make some sort of commentary, and takes the orange from Lydia, shoving the remaining half into Stiles’ mouth. That causes Scott to crack up, and he forgives Derek for making fun of him. Stiles just chews busily for a minute, while Derek greets Lydia and Allison, and then, grudgingly, Scott. Then he spits orange seeds into Derek’s face.

Allison is giggling madly, so Scott jumps in. “Derek, you’re not allowed to murder him in our living room. Stiles, stop trying to make him want to.”

“Oh, I won’t murder him,” Derek says. “Then I’d be stuck as your alpha, and we’ve seen how well that goes.”

Melissa’s eyebrows hike up. “And how does that go?”

“Kinda like Mr. Stilinski and veggie burgers,” Scott says.

“Hey,” Stiles says, “one of these days, he is going to learn to like those damned things.”

“Yes,” Lydia says, “on the day that they invent one that’s made of beef. Oh wait . . .”

Now Allison’s laughing again. “Veggie burgers are pretty awful. I’ve tried one.”

They continue to bicker amiably for a while. Derek refuses to join the Scrabble game because he knows he’ll only lose, and instead sits there with Stiles slowly slumping further and further over, occasionally misspelling words. Lydia and Allison stare at the three empty cans of soda that Stiles has gone through with somewhat perplexed looks on their faces. Scott isn’t in the least bit surprised, but doesn’t bother to say anything. He’s busy trying to figure out if they’ll all really fit into his bed, which is a bit smaller than Stiles’.

Before much longer, Stiles is asleep, his face comfortably mashed into Derek’s shoulder, with the older man absentely rubbing his back. Melissa glances up and gives a little smile. “So he still does that, huh,” she said. “I think Stiles could fall asleep during anything.”

“Up to and including fireworks,” Scott says, for the pack’s amusement.

Derek stands, picking Stiles up in a princess carry, which makes both girls giggle again. “I’ll take him up to bed,” he says, and exits the room without another word.

“That part is new,” Melissa muses.

“Wish we had it on film,” Scott says, as he puts the Scrabble board away and started to clean up the living room. “Derek won’t be back,” he adds to his mother.

“Mm hm,” Melissa says. “Well, it is getting late. I think I’ll head to bed myself.” She stands up, then leans over and gives Scott a hug. “You kids behave yourselves. I’ll see you in the morning.”

He hugs her back tightly. “G’night, mom. Love you.” Screw guy shame. After everything else that
was said today, he’s allowed to tell his mother that he loves her.

~ ~ ~ ~
I’m sure versions of this little chat have been written dozens of times.... but if you ask me, it’ll always be funny.

Sheriff Stilinski is gradually growing used to the fact that his son is the alpha of a werewolf pack. It means that his house is often the center of a group of noisy teenagers, which is fine, that steaks are typically cooked rare, which is okay as long as Stiles remembers to cook one medium-well for him, which he always does, that he needs to buy a better vacuum because, well, wolves shed. He’s used to the fact that Stiles never sleeps alone anymore, so if he’s at home, at least one person will be staying with him. More often than not, it’s more than one person, and almost always, Derek is there.

So Stilinski is used to seeing Derek in the mornings, and he’s used to the fact that he’s surly and often wanders around as a wolf, not thinking to shift, and he’s used to the fact that Stiles will physically assault him whenever he shows up. It’s weird, but okay; he doesn’t mind. He is a little taken aback when Derek forgets to put clothes on. He lets it go the first time, but the second time, when Derek is standing in the kitchen, naked, drinking coffee, while Stiles just elbows him around so he can make himself some Pop-Tarts for breakfast, he has to say something.

“Derek,” he says, with deliberation, “are you having sex with my son?”

The coffee mug falls from terminally startled fingers as Derek whips around in a sort of horror to face the sheriff. Only his fast wolf reflexes save the mug from a messy end, but there’s still fumbling as the hot coffee spills over the edge and all over Derek’s hands. “Ow, ow, fuck!” Derek says. The mug is dumped into the sink with alacrity and he looks at Stilinski with dismay. “Why would you ask me that?” His tone conveys that he’s both baffled and appalled.

Stiles, who had been just as startled to begin with, starts howling with laughter. “I, I, sorry man, but that was just too priceless, holy crap.”

Derek turns a glare on his alpha. “You,” he states with calm deliberation, “are an awful person.”

Stiles gives a shrug and turns back to his Pop-Tarts. His father clears his throat and says, “Derek, you’re kind of naked.”

“I’m aware.” Derek flexes his hands as the last of the minor burns heal, and then he reaches for a new mug.

“I see,” Stilinski says. “What you don’t seem to be aware of is that it is not, let’s say, customary to wander around naked in other people’s houses. Not even the houses of particularly close friends. It’s more what you would expect to see if someone was, say, having sex with an occupant of the house. Now, I know you’re not having sex with me . . .”

“Oh, God, Dad,” Stiles yelps.

“I’m not having sex with anyone.” The retort is quick and sounds very final. Derek wrinkles his nose and shakes his head in a gesture that would look more at home on his wolf form, like he got a nose
full of some nasty smell. He pours himself another mug of coffee to buy time.

“Uh huh.” Stilinski does not sound impressed. Or convinced. “You too good for my son, is that it?”

“What?” Derek squawks, nearly losing the new mug. He set it down carefully. He had just wanted a fucking cup of fucking coffee.

“Oh my God, Dad,” Stiles repeats, chortling. “Stop traumatizing him. We’re not having sex, okay? He just forgets to put on clothes because he shifts back and forth all the time and has ever since he was a kid. The day I start having sex, you’ll know, because I will play the Hallelujah chorus at full volume no matter what time it is.”

Derek heaves a sigh and eyes the sheriff like he’s the predator in the room, feeling only a little bit guilty for letting Stiles handle this. Stiles is the alpha, after all. He cautiously makes a move towards his coffee.

“Uh huh,” Stilinski says again, giving his son a narrow-eyed look. “You know that there’s nothing wrong with homosexuality, right?”

Derek’s mug thumps back down, splashing his hand. The noise he makes is almost a small wolf whine in the back of his throat.

“Oh, yeah, Dad,” Stiles says. “I’m a member of the cool new generation. It’s old fogeys like you who have problems with gays. Anyway, I’m friends with Danny, remember? Dude’s been sure he was gay since he was eleven.”

“I’m just saying,” Stilinski says, “if you two are in a relationship, you shouldn’t be embarrassed to tell me.”

“I’m not having sex with anyone,” Derek repeats. “At all.” When had this become his life? He abandons his mug and edges closer to Stiles.

“Dude, you say it like I’d be a terrible lay,” Stiles says. “I would be fantastic in bed! So just keep your opinions to yourself. You too, Dad,” he says, when he sees his father open his mouth. “If Derek was sexing me up, you’d arrest him for statutory, so don’t try to pull off this ‘I’m the cool dad’ routine. Nobody’s buying it.”

As soon as Stiles says that, Derek officially can’t be part of this conversation anymore. He’s done. He shifts and lays down on the floor in the relatively small space between Stiles’ legs and the cupboard under the counter. He doesn’t want to think about what sort of lay Stiles would be.

“Well,” Sheriff Stilinski says, “I’m glad we got that cleared up. Stiles, you know if you need me to buy you condoms . . .”

“Dad, it would be eight hundred times less embarrassing to buy them for myself,” Stiles tells him.

Derek squeezes his eyes closed and lays his ears back, whining again.

“Just as long as you will buy them for yourself, when you need them,” his father says.

“Yes, Dad, I solemnly promise that on my thirtieth birthday, when I might actually get laid, I will buy condoms.”

Derek considers relaxing, but decides against it. Every other time he thought the danger was over, the sheriff fired another round. Such is the case now, because Stilinski nods and says, “Derek, if you
happen to be there, I expect you to hold him to that.”

Derek’s feet scramble as he tries to bolt, but he’s wedged himself in too tightly and he gets no traction on the linoleum floor. There’s just the sound of his claws ticking frantically and uselessly before he gives up and goes limp.

“Now you’re just being mean,” Stiles says, though he sounds privately sort of amused. He steps away from the counter to give Derek room to run away if he wants to. Derek slinks away low and fast, giving in to the instinct to use the kitchen table as cover on the way to the living room. Stiles just looks at his father and says, “You’re a terrible person.”

“And just think, kid, you get half your genes from me.”

~ ~ ~ ~
Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

This happened when I was trying to nail down a concrete timeline. A little fic that would take place during Coming Undone, somewhere in the middle of chapter eight. I know it's a little late for Christmas fic, but oh well.

(Apparently at some point Jeff Davis said that season one started in January or February? Whereas I had already interpreted it as having started in the fall, and the dance in the finale was like a 'winter dance' or 'Christmas dance'. Now that I've written to the tune of that timeline, I'm sticking to it. Uh, sorry? Or something like that.)

Extra note: After I wrote this fic, my girlfriend said, “. . . isn’t Stiles Jewish?” We had a debate over it and ultimately decided that we’ve seen it in fanon but there’s nothing mentioned in canon, at least not the canon we’ve seen. So if I’ve screwed that up and he is, apologies. But the fic was too cute not to post. =D

Stiles wakes up with a start as the nurse comes in to do her eight AM vitals check. He yawns and stretches and mumbles something in return to her greeting. “You want some breakfast, honey?” she asks him, making an adjustment to his father’s IV.

“Sure,” Stiles says, rubbing his hands over his eyes. He looks over at the clock and tries to remember why he’s sleeping next to his father’s bed in the hospital. Had he been sick last night? No, if he recalls correctly, the day before had actually been a fairly good day. His father had been awake off and on most of the evening, and mostly coherent although often confused. He had been able to do some multiplication problems and name animals, remember his name and date of birth, express acknowledgement of where he was and that he was there because he had been hit by a car, even though he remembered nothing of the incident itself. A good day.

In the end, Stiles decides that he must have just fallen asleep out of sheer exhaustion, and that when Melissa had come to pick him up, she had decided to let him sleep rather than disturb him. Even sleep in the hospital was better than no sleep at all, and she knew that if she woke him, he might stay up all night.

He’s by himself, which is somewhat surprising. He would have expected someone to come stay the night with him. But he supposes the others do have their own lives to attend to, even Derek. He can’t remember if the older man was there the night before. All the days are blending together.

An orderly brings him in a plate of toast and scrambled eggs. She’s drawn a little smiley face out of the ketchup, and he smiles a little as he eats his breakfast despite the fact that he doesn’t really want it. He’s just finished when Scott pokes his head in. “Hey, you’re still here?” he says, despite the obvious answer, and Stiles nods. “Uh . . . do you know what day it is?” he asks.

Stiles rubs both hands over his face and scrapes through his memory. “No. Shit. Am I supposed to be
in school?” He hasn’t been in school for a couple days now, come to think of it, and Melissa hasn’t been pestering him to go.

“No. You really don’t know?” Scott asks, and Stiles just blinks at him. “Stiles . . . it’s Christmas.”

“Oh.” Stiles continues to blink. He supposes he was aware, in a peripheral sort of fashion, that it’s the Christmas season. Of course he was. The winter dance had been on the second Friday in December, and that had been . . . how many weeks ago now? Two? Maybe three? He honestly isn’t sure. But it’s impossible to ignore Christmas; it’s everywhere. There’s been a tree in Scott’s living room, as well as Allison’s. On the occasions he’s been at the pharmacy or the grocery store, there’s Christmas stuff everywhere, Christmas music playing. He was aware. He just didn’t give a shit.

“C’mon,” Scott says. “My mom’s gonna make a ham and stuff.”

Stiles shakes his head a little. “No, I think . . . I think I’ll stay here today.” He forces a smile onto his face. “You go home. Tell your mom I said hi and merry Christmas.”

“Are you sure?” Scott asks, doubt written all over his face.

“Yeah, yeah,” Stiles says. “I’ll be fine here.”

“Well . . . okay.” Scott seems a little reluctant, but they exchange a bro-hug and then he leaves the room. Stiles slumps back into his chair, pushes his plate aside, and sighs. He takes out his phone and looks at his empty inbox for almost a full minute before texting Derek to say ‘merry Christmas’. Wherever the other man is, he’s likely just as miserable.

He plays games for a little while and his father snoozes on. Stiles hopes it’s not going to be another one of those days where he worries all day that ‘sleep’ is actually ‘depressed state of consciousness’, although he supposes that’s part of what the monitors are for.

Almost an hour has passed when there’s a knock on the door, which is ajar, and Scott comes back in. He’s wearing a Santa hat now, and pulling a wagon full of stuff. “Hey,” he says again.

“Hey,” Stiles says, and laughs a little. “What’s all this?”

“Well, we decided that since you wouldn’t come to Christmas, we would bring Christmas to you,” he says, and pulls the wagon inside. His mother is behind him, and so are Lydia and Allison. Each of them is carrying a laundry basket full of stuff. The wagon has a little decorative tree made out of metal, with candy canes and bells hanging off the branches. Scott sets it up in the corner.

“God, guys,” Stiles says, laughing again. “You didn’t have to . . .”

Lydia gives him an affectionate cuff upside the head. “Don’t even think about finishing that sentence,” she says, so Stiles shuts his mouth. Lydia has the food. A baking dish full of cinnamon rolls, a gallon of egg nog, and two dishes wrapped in foil that have bacon and ham on them. Allison’s basket has a crock pot and a gallon of cider, in addition to several brightly wrapped gifts. Melissa’s basket is completely full of gifts, which she starts stowing underneath the tree.

Stiles blinks at them. “I . . . didn’t get anyone anything,” he says stupidly.

Scott rolls his eyes at him. “No shit, Sherlock,” he says. “You can make it up to us later.”

Stiles nods a little and looks over as Allison sets the crock pot down and plugs it in, in the corner. She starts pouring cider into it and says, “We brought the spices. Mrs. McCall says you make really good mulled cider.”
“Oh, sure, yeah.” Stiles scoots over and picks up the little containers of cloves, allspice, and cinnamon. He busies himself while Lydia sets out the food. “Did, uhm, did anyone think to tell Derek about this?” he asks.

“We texted him, but . . .” Scott says.

“But ‘bah, humbug’?” Stiles assumes, and Scott laughs a little and nods. Stiles pulls out his phone and texts, ‘get your ass down here, Grinch’, before tucking the phone away again. “We’ll wait to eat until he gets here,” he says, so they start opening presents. Stiles gets a movie from Allison and some books that are more like bricks from Lydia, about forensic science and psychological profiling, which are both fields he’s thought about making a career in. Scott gives him a few video games, and Melissa gives him some CDs. All in all, he gets a pretty good batch of loot. The others open their gifts from each other, too. Scott gives Allison a beautiful necklace that probably cost him six months of wages from Dr. Deaton’s office. Allison has gotten them a set of those Claddagh promise rings, which leads to at least ten minutes of goopiness on both their parts.

Derek skulks in before much longer, and Stiles tugs him down to sit on the floor next to him. They divvy out the food and stuff their faces.

Allison and Lydia have to go home not long after that, since they have their own family celebrations to get to. The others stay, though. Scott has brought Uno and Fluxx, and Melissa actually brought a set of poker chips, so they sit around and play cards and chat about things unrelated to what’s been going on lately.

Around noon, Sheriff Stilinski stirs and his eyes flicker open. “Mm . . . I smell cider,” he says.

“Yeah, Dad, it’s Christmas,” Stiles says, leaning over him. “You want some?”

“Yeah,” his father says.

Stiles gives Melissa a questioning look, and she smiles and says, “It should be fine. He’s not on a restricted diet beyond no alcohol or caffeine.”

So Stiles ladles out a mug of the cider. It’s still hot, so he carefully blows on each spoonful before delivering it into his father’s mouth. “Good stuff,” Stilinski says.

“Yep,” Stiles says. “How are you feeling?”

“Not too bad,” his father replies. “A little foggy, still.”

“It’ll get better,” Stiles promises him.

Stilinski reaches out with one hand to tousle his hair. It takes him a couple tries to get his arm to work that well, but he manages it. “Merry Christmas, Stiles.”

Stiles grins at him. “Merry Christmas, Dad.”

~ ~ ~
Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

This short would come a few months after the conclusion of Coming Undone, and about a month after the conclusion of A Place We Call Home. At a request from my girlfriend, who loves her Derek angst. =D

I don't know if it's canon or fanon that Laura and Derek moved to New York City after the Hale house fire, but I went with it. It seems like they would have needed a change of scenery.

Spring break. That mythical week that teenagers can only dream of. They hear stories about beaches and bikini-clad women. Wild romps in the sun and parties that never end.

The reality, Stiles thinks as he stares out the window at the pouring rain, is much less exciting.

It could be worse, he supposes, given the past year of his life. But the pack has been temporarily split up, and he isn’t a huge fan of that. They’re lucky that the vacation week falls the same week as the new moon, or else he doesn’t know what they would do. Erica’s only been in the pack for a little over a month now, and her first full moon was not an experience he likes to remember.

In any case, Lydia has entered a science competition at Stanford, something about an artificial tadpole brain, and left Thursday night. She’ll be gone all week. Allison’s parents decided to take a camping/training trip up in the mountains. None of them are exactly thrilled about this, but there wasn’t much of an argument that they could make. Since she’s gone, Scott will obviously be mooning and moping around the entire week, so his company is right out.

So now Stiles is lying on his bed on Saturday morning, staring out the window, tossing a hackey-sack to himself and thinking that as vacations go, this one has not gotten off to a very promising start.

He’s aware of Derek in his doorway, because he’s always peripherally aware of Derek now, but doesn’t react to his presence until Derek says, suddenly, “I need you to go somewhere with me.”

Stiles looks over at him and fights against inertia. He loses, and stays slumped against his pillows. “Mmkay. Where?”

“New York City.”

Inertia loses to surprise. Stiles sits up and blinks at the older man. “I thought you meant, like, to the video store or grocery store. New York City?”

Derek nods. “You don’t have school next week.”

“Yes . . .” Stiles says, still confused. “But it seems a little odd to suddenly be planning a trip to the Big Apple.”

There’s a silence that goes on a minute too long to be comfortable. Derek’s jaw is set in that tight,
tense expression that most people mistake as anger, but Stiles knows to be anxiety. “I left New York very suddenly,” he finally says. “I still have some things there at the apartment. I need to make some arrangements and sign some paperwork, and pick some stuff up.”

“Oh,” Stiles says. He yawns. The rain is making him sleepy. “Well, you don’t need me for that. The pack’s all split up right now anyway. You have my blessing, go in peace.”

“No,” Derek says, almost a snarl. When Stiles blinks at him, he looks away, studying the window. “I . . . don’t really want to go by myself.”

“Oh,” Stiles says. “Oh. Okay.” He springs up off his bed. “Did you get tickets?” he asks, since Derek is the one with all the money.

“I figured we would drive,” Derek says.

Stiles actually laughs at this absurd response. Then he sees Derek’s face. “Shit. You’re serious.”

Derek scowls at him. “I don’t like flying. Wolves are not meant to fly. Wolves are meant to have either two feet or four paws on the ground.”

Okay,” Stiles says, and rubs his hand over the back of his head. “Yeah, okay, but . . . you’re not thinking this through, Derek. I mean, it’s difficult to have two locations that are further apart in the continental United States than southern California and New York City. It’s gotta take at least four or five days, right? My vacation is only nine days long. So we’d be able to spend, at most, a day in the city.”

“That’s fine,” Derek says. “The less time we’re there, the happier I’ll be.”

“Look,” Stiles says, “I’m trying to be as tactful as possible here and give you an easy out, but it doesn’t seem to be working, so let’s try this again. You. Want to spend. Eight days. In a car. With me.”

Derek glowers at him.

“Dude, nobody wants to spend eight days in a car with me,” Stiles says. “Scott doesn’t want to do that. My dad wouldn’t want to do that. Hell, I don’t want to do that.”

The glower moves on to a growl. “I’m not flying. Anyway, I’ll have things to bring back.”

“You could ship them – ” Stiles starts, but sees that his protests are in vain. “Ohhhhhhh-kay. I guess we’ll drive. Lemme call my dad.”

Sheriff Stilinski is, to put it mildly, skeptical of this plan. He also doesn’t seem fond of the idea of his sixteen year old son gallivanting off with a twenty-one year old man for his spring break. Stiles has to put Derek on the phone and watch him wince through an entire conversation about why Stiles’ virtue will remain intact during this trip. The conversation involves his shotgun. It also, as per usual, involves Derek trying not to cry.

While they’re having that talk, Stiles takes out a suitcase and tosses in a few pairs of jeans and khakis, a stack of T-shirts, and a few hoodies. He brings a spare pair of sneakers just in case they encounter bad weather, and a jacket. He’s never been east of the Mississippi, and has no real idea what New York City will be like in March.

He takes a stack of books, his laptop, and loads his iPod up with music. He brings a spare pair of earbuds in case his die. Then he goes into the bathroom and grabs some toiletries and his Adderall.
By the time he’s done with that, Derek is off the phone. Stiles takes it back and calls Scott, giving him a brief summary of the situation.

“You can handle Isaac and Erica while we’re gone?” he asks.

“Sure,” Scott says. “I’ll call you if anything happens. We’ll teach Erica how to play lacrosse.”

“She’ll love you forever, I’m sure,” Stiles says, and then says his goodbyes and hangs up.

“We’ll take the Jeep,” Derek says, in that authoritarian tone that makes Stiles roll his eyes, particularly when it’s regarding decisions that technically, he should be the one making. “We’ll need room for my stuff.”

“So, how much did you bring with you?” Stiles asks curiously, tossing his suitcase in the back. He notes that Derek has already deposited a duffel bag with his own things in it. “Is this why you only seem to own three shirts?”

Derek gives him a blank look.

“Ohhhh-kay,” Stiles says, “guess not.”

He gets behind the wheel and heads to the gas station. While he fills up the tank, Derek runs inside and grabs a few sodas and some chips to fortify them on their journey. They don’t really talk again until they’re almost two hours out of town, heading east on I-80. Then Derek says, “When I came out here, I didn’t realize I’d be staying.”

That makes sense. He hadn’t even known Laura was dead when he left, let alone anything else that was going on. “Why did you come out here, anyway?” Stiles asks, realizing that he doesn’t actually know.

Derek’s jaw is tight again. “Laura wasn’t returning my calls.”

So he had known something was wrong, just not what, or how serious it was. “Did you bring anything at all?”

After a pause, Derek shakes his head. “After I realized I would be here a while, I got the apartment and bought some stuff to put in it.” He stares out the window, watching the windshield wipers swish back and forth. “It’s not that I’m really attached to any of the stuff. I just don’t feel right leaving it there.”

“Gotcha,” Stiles says. “So have you been paying rent on two places?”

“No. Laura owned the apartment in Manhattan. She left it to me in her will, along with all the contents.” Derek’s quiet for a minute. “That’s part of what I had to do. The realtors need me to sign some things so they can put it back on the market.”

“You don’t want to keep it?” Stiles asks.

“No,” Derek says. “I want to get my things and then I never want to go back to that city again.”


Derek slumps in his seat, and they continue to drive in silence. They leave the rain behind and begin making good time, zooming down the highway at eighty miles per hour. Stiles becomes insanely bored about the same time they reach Nevada, and demands they switch so he can play on his phone.
Derek takes the wheel with moderately good grace and tries not to roll his eyes as Stiles begins narrating his game of Angry Birds.

The trip isn’t as bad as it could be. Actually, Stiles thinks it’s a fairly enlightening experience. He’s not good at being confined, but his Jeep is something he considers a safe space, so his claustrophobia doesn’t bother him. They enjoy the scenery and eat at greasy little diners and stay at cheap hotels. Derek has enough money for expensive hotels, but Stiles insists that staying at places like The Budget Inn is required on American road trips. Derek agrees because that’s easier than arguing.

Stiles talks and talks and talks, and he plays loud music and sings along and drums on the steering wheel, he reads books and plays games on his phone and looks up trivia about the strange towns they pass through and suggests detours and complains incessantly about how bored he is. Derek drives, pumps gas, stares out the window in silence, and occasionally tells Stiles to shut up.

It’s late on the fourth day when they reach New York. Stiles suggests they go straight to the apartment and skip another night in a hotel, but Derek vetoes this plan with vehemence that comes close to rage. Stiles has no desire to challenge that particular hang-up, but he insists on staying in a nice hotel since they’re in New York City, after all. Derek rolls his eyes but gets them a room at an upscale place in Manhattan, where Stiles gleefully orders half the room service menu and takes a million pictures to post to Facebook from his phone. He falls asleep practically midsentence, slumped onto the bed. Derek has to take his shoes off.

They’re up early the next morning because they’ve got a lot to do and Derek was really too restless to sleep very much. They leave the Jeep in the hotel parking lot and take a cab to a local storage place, where they pick up some boxes before heading to Derek’s old apartment building. Stiles exclaims over almost everything he sees, and the ruder the New Yorkers are, the more he likes them. He insists on getting a hot dog at a stand even though it’s not even nine AM, because he can. Everything’s all well and good until they actually get to the apartment and Derek inserts the key in the lock. He twists it, and they both hear the ‘shunk’ of the lock coming undone. But then he just stands there, unmoving. He can’t seem to actually open the door.

“You okay?” Stiles finally asks, after almost a full minute has gone by, although the answer is quite obviously no.

Derek swallows convulsively and then takes a step back from the door, leaving the key in the lock. “I thought . . . I thought I was ready for this.” Now he does look angry, but Stiles knows that he’s only angry at himself. “For Christ’s sake. It’s been eight months.”

Stiles leans against the wall opposite the apartment door and sits down. He watches Derek stalk up and down the hallway by himself for a minute. Then he pats the floor next to him and says, “Sit.” Reluctantly, Derek sits.

“I was seven years old when my mom died,” Stiles says. “And at first I didn’t really get it. I mean, I knew she had been sick, I wasn’t an idiot, but your average seven-year-old does not grasp death as a concept. I got all the usual clichés, about how Mommy was in Heaven now, and she was watching over me, blah blah bullshit blah. And so of course I kept asking my dad when Mommy was coming back from Heaven, because I needed her help with my homework or I had popped a button off my shirt or I really wanted that strawberry pie she made. And every time, my dad looked like I had kicked him in the balls, and every time, he sat down and explained to me that Heaven was a place you couldn’t come back from, but someday I would go there too.

“And every time, I would be okay until the next time I needed my mom for something, and then I
would start asking about her again. Until finally, almost a year after my mother died, I went into my parents’ bedroom and found my dad packing up her clothes.

“I was livid. I mean, you cannot even understand the epic scale of the temper tantrum I threw. How dare he? How could she come back if he was going to give away all her things? Why would he do that? I was so angry at him, I didn’t speak to him for days. And my dad just . . . unpacked all her things and put them back in the closet. Because he was ready. But I wasn’t. I made him keep her stuff in his room for two God damned years after he was ready to get rid of it. Until finally I was old enough to get what death was and I helped him pack it all up and we took it down to the thrift store together.

“So I know that I can never understand the scope of what you’ve lost, and I know that I can never understand what it must be like, but God, Derek, I understand this. And if you want to turn around and get back in the car and drive all the way back to motherfucking California without ever setting foot in this apartment, I will do that with you and I will never, ever mock you for it. Because you don’t have to be ready.”

Derek is quiet for a long time. He knows that can’t have been an easy story for Stiles to tell, so finally, he nods and says, “Thanks.”

Stiles nods back. “No problem.”

“But . . . I have to do this,” Derek says. “Leaving it like this . . . is like having a ghost hanging over my shoulder. I have to put it to rest.”

“Okay,” Stiles says. “Then let’s get it done. Let’s have a strategy so we can get in and out quickly.”

Derek nods. For a few minutes they discuss what he wants to take and what he wants to donate. What order they want to do things in, what he figures they’ll need.

Stiles stands up and offers a hand to Derek, which the older man accepts. Then he takes a deep breath, puts a hand on the knob, and goes inside.

It’s a nice place. Stiles can see that Laura definitely was the decorator. Derek’s apartment in Beacon Hills is almost Spartan in its lack of décor, and Stiles doesn’t think that’s because he meant it to be temporary. He just doesn’t have any interest in that sort of thing. But this apartment has framed pictures on the walls, a vase on the table, knick-knacks on several shelves mounted along the wall. A throw blanket is neatly folded over the back of the sofa.

It’s surprisingly clean. Stiles mentions this, and Derek nods and says that they had a cleaning service, and he never bothered to cancel it, although he did downgrade it to once a month.

They start in the kitchen. It’s a nice, impersonal area without a lot of emotion attached. Derek has since replaced pretty much everything in it in terms of dishes, and he doesn’t need much in terms of cookware. They break out the boxes and start loading things up. Stiles labels some boxes ‘California’ and others ‘donations’. The vast majority of the things in the kitchen go into the donations box. Derek takes the blender, which he hasn’t yet replaced, and Stiles asks permission to take some of the kitchen gadgets Laura had, like a digital meat thermometer and a heat-proof spatula. He takes the crock pot, too, because when one is regularly cooking for eight people, there’s no such thing as too many crock pots.

The fridge is pretty much empty, the contents having been thrown away by the cleaning lady when she was notified of Derek’s extended absence. What’s left is a twelve pack of soda, half-empty, a six-pack of beer, some condiments and jelly, and a bag of potatoes in the bottom drawer. Stiles puts
the beverages with the things to go to the car, and throws out everything else. The pantry is a little more promising; there are some unopened cans and boxes of crackers and pasta and such. He packs them up, because there’s no point in wasting food, and throws away everything open since it’s undoubtedly stale by now.

From there, they move into the living room. Derek goes through the books and movies. Stiles notices that he seems to be keeping anything that looks like it might have been Laura’s and discarding things that were his own. But he keeps his mouth shut about it. It’s not his business what Derek wants to keep or not.

He does want to keep the throw blanket, though, because it’s nice, and starts wrapping up some of the knick-knacks in newspaper, because he knows that Derek will want them. They were Laura’s. They finish the living room in about an hour. The bathroom only takes about ten minutes and most of what’s inside is thrown out. The linen closet takes even less time; everything there goes straight into the donation box. Derek has enough towels and sheets.

The next room is Derek’s. It looks much like what one would except from a young man: messy and disorganized. The cleaning woman has picked up some, but still, the books are stacked haphazardly, his socks are crammed awkwardly into a drawer, and there are posters tacked to the wall rather than the neatly framed pictures in the rest of the apartment. One is a movie poster for Indiana Jones; the other is for a band Stiles has never heard of. There are some postcards tacked up, too, of different places around the world.

Derek works in silence. He packs up his clothes and books, not really looking at them. He’s bought himself an entire new wardrobe in the meantime, so only a few of the T-shirts and an old pair of jeans go into the box to go back to California. The rest goes into the donation pile. He does bring most of his books and the stack of CDs on one side of the room. The bed has been stripped of sheets and the cleaning service never remade it, so it’s just a mattress. Derek rolls up the posters and packs away the postcards. Stiles busies himself sorting things in the donation boxes so he won’t notice when Derek furtively takes a stuffed wolf out of a drawer and tucks it into the box with his clothes.

That’s everything except for Laura’s room, and Stiles knows he left it for last out of reluctance. But he’s steady on his feet as he crosses the hallway from his own bedroom, steady on his feet as he turns the knob and goes in. And then he collapses. His knees practically unhinge and Stiles has to drop the box of books he’s carrying, narrowly missing his own toes, to grab Derek and keep him on his feet. “Are you –”

“It still has her scent,” Derek says, his voice barely a whisper. “I thought – I thought enough time would have – that it had been cleaned enough to –” The words trail off into a strangled moan. Stiles helps him to the floor, where he presses his face against the blankets on Laura’s bed and lets out a muffled howl of grief and agony.

Stiles sits down beside him, wraps his arms around Derek, snaking one around his waist and the other across his shoulders. He holds him as tight as he can, but he says nothing. There’s nothing he can say, no words that can diminish this pain. He remembers the night after the hit-and-run had put his father in the hospital, how Derek had just sat with him, not saying anything. How words would have only made things worse. So now he sits with Derek, and holds him. He’s never seen Derek cry before, but now he sobs into Laura’s bed like he’s been split in half and the emotions he’s kept pent up for months are gushing out.

They sit for what feels like hours. Stiles isn’t good at sitting and being quiet, but when it’s this important, he can manage. His mind wanders, which feels almost blasphemous to him, but he can’t help it. He becomes preoccupied with working out the math of how much gas has cost on the trip so
far, and calculating the Jeep’s gas mileage. It keeps him from fidgeting.

Finally, Derek sits up and rubs the back of his hand over his eyes. He leans forward, resting his forehead against the crook of Stiles’ neck. They sit like that another minute, and then he pulls away. “I – I have to get out of here,” he says. “I just – I can’t.”

Stiles nods and says, “Why don’t you start carrying boxes downstairs? I’ll pack up in here.”

“Yeah, that – that sounds good,” Derek says, and flees the room without attempting to have any dignity. Stiles grabs a stack of boxes and gets to work.

He works as quickly as he can, although he’s careful when he needs to be. Laura had much more stuff than Derek did. The clothes go straight into donation boxes; there’s no need to bring them. Almost everything else, Derek wants. Stiles packs up her books and her papers, her music and her movies, her blankets and stuffed animals.

Derek takes his time with the boxes, which Stiles can’t blame him for. By the time he’s carried them downstairs and called a car to pick them up, Stiles is done. They bring down the last of the boxes together.

The realtor meets them at the hotel. Derek signs some papers. A charity organization is going to come pick up the boxes of donations, and take the furniture as well. The apartment will be empty by the end of the week so it can then be sold. The proceeds will go to the World Wildlife Foundation. All this is left in the realtor’s hands.

It’s midafternoon by the time they get back to the hotel with all the boxes. The driver helps them transfer the things from his car to Stiles’ Jeep. With the seats folded down, it all fits, although getting it all reminds Stiles a lot of playing Tetris. Now he wants to play Tetris. He downloads the app to his phone. It’s still four days in the car to get home.

Derek hesitantly asks Stiles about dinner, but Stiles knows that Derek just wants to get out of the city. So he says he’s not hungry and gets behind the wheel, watching some of the tension leave Derek’s shoulders. The other man gets in the passenger seat and stares out the window. After a while, he closes his eyes. Stiles uses his GPS to navigate his way out of the city so he won’t have to bother him. It’s a little late, but they can still put five or six hours of road behind them before they’ll have to stop for the night.

They’re well into Pennsylvania before Derek stirs again. “You hungry?” he asks.

“Starved,” Stiles replies.

“Why don’t we stop and grab some dinner, then.”

“Okey dokey.” Stiles flicks his turn signal on and gets in the right lane. There’s an exit coming up in a couple miles.

“Thanks,” Derek says to his window. “For coming with me.”

Stiles thinks of a lot of possible responses, like the standard ‘you’re welcome’ or equally plausible ‘any time’ or ‘no problem’, none of which really seem right to him because to him, it doesn’t seem like there’s anything to thank him for. Taking care of his pack is more than his job, it’s his life, his place in the universe. To him, it’s natural that he did this.

But to Derek, it’s not natural, because Derek isn’t used to being able to depend on people. And Derek doesn’t want this to be a big deal, and Derek doesn’t want to be sappy or emotional right now.
So in the end Stiles does just say, “You’re welcome,” and then follows it up with, “Any time,” and then follows that up with, “Ooh, this exit has a Perkins, I could really go for some pie right now,” and also, “Did you know that the Jeep gets really crappy gas mileage? Maybe I should bring it in for a tune-up,” and then he sees that faint little smile on Derek’s face, the smile that means ‘Stiles is being an idiot again’.

And Derek tells him to shut up, and Stiles doesn’t, and that’s when they both know that everything is going to be okay.

~ ~ ~ ~
Chapter 5

Written by request for Eavis. Wolves playing in the snow! =D

I have no idea when this one takes place. Uh.... after A Place We Call Home, obviously, since Erica and Isaac are in it, but by then it's too late for snow? Hm... well, we'll say it's a freak snowstorm in April. <3

It's not unheard of to get snow in Beacon Hills, but it doesn't happen very often. They're far enough south in California, and not high enough in the mountains, that snow is not a regular thing. So when Stiles wakes up to find four inches of snow on the ground, he becomes extremely excited. He bounces up and down on the bed, waking the others. “Guys! Guys! It snowed last night! It totally fuckin’ snowed!”

“Mm?” Allison stirs sleepily and her eyes flutter open. “Oh, wow,” she says through a yawn. “They said we’d probably only get freezing rain.”

“This is awesome!” Bounce, bounce, bounce. “Get up, everyone! Come on!”

Scott laughs and climbs out of bed, giving Allison a quick kiss on the temple as he gets up and pulls on a pair of jeans. “There’s no use putting him off when this happens,” he says, with the voice of experience.

Derek opens one eye and growls, then appears to go back to sleep. Lydia makes one of her chuffing noises and then transforms back into a beautiful young woman. Both Stiles and Scott hastily avert their eyes as she pulls on her underwear. “Only because you’re the alpha,” she says. She leans over and ruffles Isaac’s fur as he climbs out of bed and pads to the bathroom. The lack of modesty that the pack generally displays around shifting has never infected him.

Erica, for her part, has no problem bouncing out of bed and shifting back to her human form. “I’ve never played in the snow, would you believe that?” she asks, standing there completely naked. “Because exertion could bring on seizures, and outside in a snowstorm wouldn’t be a good place to have one.”

“I, uh, I see,” Stiles says, holding a hand in front of his face. “I see quite a bit right now, actually, so you could maybe . . .”

“Why bother?” she asks, giving him a cheeky grin. “Fur will be better in the snow anyway.” She transforms back and trots out of the room with Scott and Allison on her heels.

Derek is still curled up in the center of the bed. Stiles reaches over and tweaks his ear. He growls. “C’mon, c’mon, c’mon!” Stiles urges. “It snowed! It motherfucking snowed, get up!”

Derek shifts back for better glowering ability. “What are you, five years old?” he asks.

“Close enough,” Stiles agrees. “If you’re not outside in ten minutes, I will bring the snow to you.
Don’t think I won’t!”

Derek groans as Stiles shimmies into his jeans, grabs a sweatshirt, and bounds out of the room. By the time he’s downstairs, several of the others are outside. “Cheaters!” he shouts to the batch of wolves romping around in the backyard. Allison laughs as she laces up her boots. “Just because they don’t need winter clothes,” Stiles grumbles, pulling on his coat and gloves.

Allison just laughs again and crams a hat with a pom-pom onto his head. “But they don’t have hands, and we do. Sneak attack?”

Stiles’ eyes light up. “If you weren’t my best friend’s girlfriend . . .”

They go out the side gate and start stocking up on snowballs. The snow is perfect for it: wet and heavy, great packing snow. Once they each have half a dozen, they charge around the corner, laughing maniacally and pelting the wolves. By mutual agreement, they avoid Isaac, who’s been beaten up on enough in his life, and focus on the other three. Erica lets out a yip as one catches her in the ear, and the wolves all run for cover. Scott jumps up and grabs one in his mouth, crunching down on it.

“Show off!” Stiles shouts at him. Scott just gives a whuff of a laugh, and then Erica and Lydia both jump on Stiles, pulling him down into the snow. He laughs and tries to push them off. “C’mon, let’s build a fort!”

The wolves help as best they can while Stiles directs them, patting down snow with their paws. Five minutes later, Derek finally puts in an appearance. He comes out onto the back porch in his wolf form and presses one paw into the snow. His nose wrinkles and his ears lie back on the top of his head. Stiles points and laughs at him from the relative safety of the wall they’ve constructed, and Derek gathers back on his haunches.

“Take cover!” Allison says, laughing, and all the wolves dive behind the fort as Derek lunges forward. He bursts through the wall of snow and takes Stiles in a full tackle, knocking him to the ground. Stiles lets out a whoop of laughter and says, “Ha, who’s five years old now?” before dropping the snowball he was holding on top of Derek’s head. Derek whuffs and sneezes while Stiles scrambles free.

Derek intends to go after him, but then gets completely distracted by scratching his back against a tree, and a few moments later is just rolling around in the snow. Allison hides her giggles behind her hand. Stiles doesn’t bother. Derek chomps down on part of the fort and sneezes again. He herds Isaac and Erica back into the safety of the wall they’ve constructed, and Derek gathers back on his haunches.

Two hours later, the sun is high in the sky, the snow in the backyard has been decimated, and they’re all thoroughly worn out. They head inside, melted snow dripping off their coats. Allison lays down some towels while Stiles starts making cocoa. He watches Allison trying to rub down Scott’s fur and says, “I don’t think that’s going to work . . .”

“Yeah,” Allison agrees, and starts handing out towels instead as they all shift back with varying levels of embarrassment. They start drying themselves off, or in Isaac’s case wrapping the towel around his waist before reaching for a second one.

Stiles has just finished handing out the mugs of cocoa when the front door opens and Sheriff Stilinski comes in, kicking snow off his boots. He looks at the assembled group of mostly naked young men and women in his kitchen, looks at Stiles, and says, “You know, there was a time when I didn’t have to knock before I came into my own house.”
"You didn’t knock,“ Stiles points out.

"The more fool I,“ his father replies.

"Cocoa?“ Stiles says, offering him a mug.

"Sure,“ Stilinski says, shrugging out of his coat. "Sounds good to me."
“Hey, Dad?” Stiles pokes his head into the dining room to find his father sitting at the table with some files spread out in front of him. “Can we talk?”

These words from any son send a chill up their father’s spine. Stiles is not an exception; in fact, he is the rule. Sheriff Stilinski looks up from the files in what’s very close to alarm. The serious expression on Stiles’ face does not comfort him. “Sure. What’s up?” He looks around, expecting to see Derek or Erica or someone else behind him, but there’s no one. “Where’s everybody else?”

“Asleep at Scott’s, still,” Stiles says. “I snuck out early.”

Now the alarm bells are turning into warning sirens. It’s obvious that Stiles hasn’t slept much, if at all, as he so commonly does not. But his father keeps his composure and gestures to the chair across from him. Stiles sits down and fidgets. There’s a long minute before he says, “Do you trust me?”

An automatic ‘of course’ wants to fall out of Stilinski’s mouth, but it’s such a lie. He hesitates.

Stiles sees the moment of indecision and hastily clarifies. “I mean, not ‘do you trust me not to make stupid decisions’ or ‘do you trust me to obey the law’ or any of that stuff that, uh, I’m not really good at. I mean, do you trust me to be honest with you? That although sometimes I may hide things or refuse to answer your questions, that I would never, ever, sit down and look you in the eye and lie to you?”

“Yeah,” Stilinski says, and this is true. Ever since the debacle over the course of the previous fall, Stiles has been honest and open with him. “Yeah, I do.”

“Okay.” Stiles meets his gaze. “Then I’m not having sex with Derek.”

“Oh, kid, I know that,” his father says. “I – ”

“You just like giving him a hard time,” Stiles says. “I know. But . . . I need you to stop. Because . . . geez, this is hard to explain without giving away his secrets, but . . . you’re hurting him, Dad. When he gets all awkward and uncomfortable, it’s not because he’s embarrassed. It’s because he’s hurting. Because he’s honestly revolted by the fact that you seem to think he’s the kind of person who would take advantage of a traumatized sixteen-year-old boy.”

“Oh.” Stilinski presses his lip together. “Shit. I, I don’t mean it that way.”

“Dude, I know that,” Stiles says. “I know that you’re just giving him shit because, well, that’s what
guys do. But Derek’s got his fair share of issues, and I, I need you to step off this one. Because my job is to protect my pack. And that includes Derek. And . . . it includes protecting them from you, if I have to.”

Stilinski lets out a breath. “I’m sorry,” he says.

“I know. I know you never meant it that way. And it’s not like I don’t see how you might have gotten that idea. But . . . I’m pretty much straight. And so is Derek, inasmuch as he’s anything.”

Stilinski narrows his eyes. While his son fidgets and steals his mug of coffee for a few swallows, he makes a mental revisitation of the Hale house file. About how he had figured that the arsonist was close to someone in the Hale family. There was just too much they knew about where everyone would be and how to keep everyone in the house.

He waits until Stiles puts down the mug, then looks at him and says, “Kate Argent?”

Stiles looks surprised for a moment, but he didn’t get his genes for intelligence from nowhere, and then he nods and says nothing.

“Derek would have been . . . what, sixteen?”

“Fifteen,” Stiles says.

“Jesus,” his father replies.

“Yeah,” Stiles says.

Stilinski, who knows his son well, says, “Does he know that you know about this?”

Stiles shakes his head. “He’s . . . said things, after his nightmares, a couple times. I put the pieces together. But shit, Dad, what can I say? She’s dead. We can’t exactly put her on trial. And I’m afraid if I bring it up, I’ll just make things worse. If he wants to deal with it by putting it to the back of his mind, maybe that’s okay.”

“Maybe,” his father says, but he makes a mental note not to let on that he’s figured it out, either.

“So this whole thing, it’s a joke to us, but it’s not a joke to him. Because he remembers what Kate did to him, and he’s upset that you think he would do the same thing to me. He’s doing this thing now where he doesn’t touch me if you’re around, and that’s hard for him. It’s hard for both of us.”

“Okay.” Stilinski lifts his hands in surrender. “I owe him an apology, and I’ll make sure he gets one.”

“Thanks, Dad.” Stiles is obviously relieved.

“You know what the ironic thing is?” Stilinski asks, with a slight smile. “If you two were an item . . . I would be completely okay with that. Because I do trust Derek to treat you right and do right by you.”

“Heh,” Stiles says. “Well, I guess in a way we are an item. Just in a not-having-sex sort of way. Eh, it’s weird. I couldn’t begin to put it into human words.”

“I know,” Stilinski replies.

“Well, I guess you are a pretty observant guy,” Stiles says. He stands up and says, “I’m gonna head back to Scott’s. See you after work, I guess.”
“Okay,” his father says. “See you later.”

Sheriff Stilinski takes a few days to think about how he wants to tackle this. It obviously has to be done in private, which will be difficult given the way the pack always hangs out together. And now that he’s thinking about it, Derek has been avoiding him lately, or at least trying not to be alone with him.

So he thinks about it and has a word with Stiles and takes the opportunity on a nice spring evening. Stiles has picked up some hamburgers and Stilinski is out setting up the grill. Derek comes out of the house with the plate of meat, realizes he’s now alone with Sheriff Stilinski, and obviously considers putting it down and fleeing.

“Thanks,” Stilinski says, taking the tray from him. “Good timing. I wanted to talk to you.”

“I, oh,” Derek says, now actively looking for escape routes.

Sheriff Stilinski sets the tray down, since the coals aren’t hot enough yet anyway, and turns to face him. “I owe you an apology,” he says.

Derek looks at him warily. “You do?”

“Yes,” Stilinski says. “I haven’t been fair to you. Those jokes about you taking advantage of my son seem funny to me, because I know you would never do that. But I didn’t realize that you were taking them seriously. I never meant to imply that I thought you were that sort of person, and I apologize.”

Relief, intense, profound relief washes across Derek’s face. He’s always so stoic and grim-faced that Stilinski doesn’t think that many people would even recognize the expression. But it’s there, and he sees it. “Oh,” Derek says. “Yeah, I mean, it’s not . . .”

“Don’t try to say it wasn’t a thing,” Stilinski says. “It was. I was being a jerk without realizing it.”

“Yeah,” Derek says, rubbing his hand over the back of his head.

“I know that you and Stiles don’t have a sexual relationship,” Stilinski says, and Derek winces a little. “I just give you a hard time because, I guess, I’m starting to think of you as another son. And parents love to embarrass their children.” Derek looks incredibly startled by this proclamation, so Stilinski continues onward, not wanting to push the issue of parental claim. “Stiles is known for making stupid decisions, but I trust you to look out for him and take care of him.”

“Thanks,” Derek says, some of the tension going out of his shoulders and spine.

Stilinski nods. “Want a beer?”

“I would love a beer,” Derek says.

“I think we both deserve one,” Stilinski says, and laughs. He fishes around in the cooler he’s brought out onto the back porch and pulls out a bottle for each of them. “Stiles says that you two are more like partners than boyfriends. He says that’s the closest he can come in people-terms to describe it.”

“It works,” Derek agrees.
“Okay then.” Stilinski uses the edge of the barbecue to pop the top off his beer, then holds his hands over the coals to test them. “We cool, as Stiles would say?”

A little smile twitches at the corner of Derek’s mouth. “Yeah,” he says. “We’re cool.”
Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

A bunch of people had asked to see the scene in which Stiles talks to his history class about having PTSD. So this would take place between The Boy in Red and Making Connections.

Trigger warnings for discussion of mental illness, obviously, but rape is also brought up a few times in the conversation.

Stiles thinks he must look like a wreck, because Mrs. Jimenez actually pulls him aside and reminds him that his agreement to speak to the class is purely voluntary. He doesn’t have to do it if he doesn’t want to. He’s talked about it with Gwen, of course, and she thinks it might be good for him, if only so he can verbalize some of the things he feels.

“So, post-traumatic stress disorder,” he says, as Derek settles at his feet. “The basics are just what it says on the label. You go through something traumatic. Could be a car accident, a natural disaster like a tornado, a terrorist attack. And you have an epic freakout about it. You can’t let it go and you don’t know why. It plays over and over again in your head.

“So you’re probably all wondering what happened to me. And it’s surprisingly simple. A very bad man threatened me and roughed me up. Then he put me in the trunk of his car and left me there. I was there for about two days.” Stiles stops and takes a breath. “And the reason I’m telling you that is because it makes a great demonstration of what makes PTSD such an insidious disease.

“Because right now, I’m guessing at least a third of you are thinking ‘what, that’s it?’ You expected it to be a lot worse. ‘He just got beat up a bit?’ Yeah. Beat up and left for dead. And although two days of hypothermia, dehydration, and waiting to die aren’t exactly a vacation, it could have been a lot worse. That’s what you’re thinking. And that’s what I was thinking.

“See, the thing about PTSD – about a lot of mental illnesses – is that they come with epic amounts of self-blame. Most people don’t blame themselves if they get cancer. They don’t blame themselves if they have a stroke. But every mental illness comes with guilt. You sit there and think ‘why can’t I just deal with this? Why can’t I be stronger?’ And PTSD is one of the worst for this because it’s got a defining trigger, unlike depression. You can look at the specific event and think, it wasn’t that bad. I should be glad it wasn’t worse. I should be able to get over it.

“But you can’t. There’s no rhyme or reason to it. Your brain has just gone haywire. I mean, they’ve done MRIs and stuff, and proven that the brain of someone with PTSD is acting in completely different ways from someone without. So it’s not your fault. It’s not my fault. But it still took me almost a year and some very creative bribery on my father’s part to get me into therapy. Because I just kept looking at what had happened to me and telling myself that I had no God damned right to be as fucked up by it as I was.”

Stiles stops and takes another few breaths. “So yeah. And you three guys out there – I see you – who are still thinking ‘man, what a pussy’ – for one thing, that’s misogynistic, vaginas are tough – and secondly, fuck you. Because I couldn’t choose not to get PTSD any more than Michael J. Fox chose to get Parkinson’s.”
“Language, Stiles,” Mrs. Jimenez murmurs, without any real concern.

“But this is exactly why PTSD is such a problem among veterans,” Stiles says. “I mean, I could get into toxic masculinity but we don’t have all day. But they think, you know, they’ve just gotta tough it out. They’re strong. They just need to suck it up and get over it. But that does not work. Like, really, it does not. And the fact that they don’t feel comfortable talking about it, and seeking treatment, is one of the reasons that the suicide rate is so high among veterans. So you can think I’m a pussy all you want, but don’t you dare say anything about it. Because the more we promote acceptance and education about PTSD, the better chance our returning veterans have. Which is something I think we can all agree on.

“Speaking of which,” he adds, “this is Jack.”

Derek, who knows the drill, immediately sits up straighter and looks up at Stiles for direction. Stiles scratches behind his ears. “So I bet a lot of you are wondering, how does a dog help someone with PTSD? And here’s how. A month ago, I couldn’t get stuff out of my locker. I just carried everything with me, all the time. Because the time it took me to spin my locker combination and get my books out was too long to have my back to a hallway. I just couldn’t do it.

“You know those times when you’re home alone, and you could swear you’ve heard a noise upstairs?” he asks, and several people laugh. “Having PTSD is like that all the time. It’s called hypervigilance. You’re constantly expecting to be attacked. You’re always trying not to look over your shoulder, literally. I couldn’t use my locker because if I turned my back on a room or a hallway for more than ten seconds, I would get so panicked that I started to get nauseous. The first time I tried to force myself through it, I almost blacked out.

“But when I have Jack here,” he continues, giving Derek another pat, “he sits right behind me and guards my back. And I don’t have to worry, because I know he’ll stop anyone from getting too close to me. This is also helpful because I can react violently when startled. So Jack protects other people from me, just as much as he protects me from other people.

“Jack is also trained to know when I’m starting to have a flashback or a panic attack, and he can help distract me and break me out of it before I flip my shit. And as much as I adore Jack, his talents are not exactly unique. Which is why there’s several organizations now that revolve around training companion animals or service dogs for veterans, and if you ever have spare cash, you should donate to them. Especially C4H because they get all their animals from rescues and shelters, so you’re helping veterans and saving puppies, which sounds too good to be true, I know.

“Okay, uh, last things last. Being supportive. Let’s say that you know someone with PTSD, or with any mental illness, really. I can see what you’re thinking again, because it’s ‘what do I say?’ Which is an excellent question. But the key is really more in what not to say. See, nobody with a mental illness expects you to pull a solution out of your ass. They just want to know that you’re there. So really, anything ranging from ‘that sucks that you’re going through such a rough time’ to just ‘let me know if you ever want to talk’ is pretty much okay.

“So here’s what not to say. For starters: ‘a lot of people have it worse than you’. Ugh, no. That’s what we were just talking about. I know that, helpful dipshit. That’s half the problem right there. That doesn’t magically make my problems disappear. Secondly, any variation of ‘you just need to cheer up and/or stop worrying!!’ I will legit punch you if you say that to any mentally ill person, ever. Don’t you think we would if we could? ‘You should try exercise/healing crystals/whatever bullshit I just read about on the internet!’ No. Just stop. There are remedies, and we talk about them with a professional. Sometimes they involve medication, you’re making the baby Jesus cry. The only suggestion you’re
allowed to make and try to facilitate is ‘have you told a doctor about this’. Making sure someone gets professional help, that’s okay.”

He looks over at Mrs. Jimenez. “Okay. I think I’m done. Any, uh, any questions, I guess?”

“What happened to, you know, the guy?” a girl in the back calls out.

“For complicated legal reasons, I’m not allowed to discuss that,” Stiles says. He had been prepared for that question.

Over at the window, a boy named Theo who’s been aiming for Jackson’s abandoned ‘biggest douchebag in Beacon Hills’ position asks, “So did he like, rape you and you’re too ashamed to admit it? Because that would make more sense.”

“Theo!” Mrs. Jimenez says.

Stiles raises a hand to cut her off, and she obeys without thinking about it as his alpha presence rolls through the room. His voice is calm. “If I had been raped, I would have said so. I told the truth about what happened to me. PTSD is common among rape victims for obvious reasons, but I’m not one. On the other hand, I will personally kick your ass if I ever hear you suggesting that rape victims have something to be ashamed of. They don’t. Period.” He lets out a breath as Theo makes a sulky face. “Anything else?”

“What, um . . .” A nervous girl in the back half-raises her hand. “What if you think you might, uh, know someone with PTSD, but . . . they hate dogs?”

“Oh, well, Jack really helped me, but he’s hardly the only treatment for PTSD,” Stiles reassures her. “I almost went on medication for my anxiety before I got Jack, and that would be a perfectly valid treatment. And it sounds stupid, but like half of what helped me was learning to meditate and do breathing exercises. But believe it or not, just having a counselor to talk to really does help.”

“What if it’s not something you can talk about?” she asks.

Stiles can very easily hear the underlying ‘Beacon Hills is weird and the traumatizing things that happen here are also weird’ beneath the question. “There’s always someone you can talk to. Hit me up after class, maybe I can give you a referral or two.”

Mrs. Jimenez stands up and says, “Let’s all give Stiles a hand for being brave enough to talk to us about this,” and there’s a smattering of applause, some of it even sincere, while Stiles goes back to his seat. He realizes that his hands are shaking slightly. Derek leans against his knee, and he reaches over to smooth down his fur without thinking about it.

“All the gold stars,” he says under his breath, knowing that Derek will hear, and Derek gives a low chuff of amusement.
Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

Inspired by Kirinin, who asked if I might ever do a fic about time travel. The answer is .... sort of?

I have a lot of problems with time travel in fiction, primarily with the inherent paradoxes it creates, but the idea intrigued me and then I got the idea of Stiles going back in time and letting himself out of the trunk of Peter's car, and this fic popped out!

Takes place.... well, that's sort of irrelevant, isn't it? =D But I'd say sometime between The Boy in Red and Making Connections.

Stiles doesn’t know how he got to the forest. He certainly doesn’t remember intending to go there, or arriving there. He’s not even sure what forest he’s in, to be honest. It looks like the preserve. He can’t say where exactly, but the kinds of foliage, the scents, those are the same. He’s been in a few different places around the country, and he thinks he knows the preserve fairly well by now.

He reaches for his phone almost automatically, and it’s not in his pocket. That startles him. Why would he not have his phone? Then he realizes the answer is obvious. He’s dressed in a T-shirt and boxer shorts, the same clothes he remembers having gone to bed in. That’s his last memory. So what happened? He does a quick self-assessment. He’s not hurt, doesn’t feel drugged. He isn’t wearing a watch, so he can’t tell whether or not he’s lost any time.

He’s standing on the edge of what looks like an old dirt road, too narrow for two cars to pass each other. He’s not sure it’s even a road per se. it could just be an old forest path that off-roaders have used enough times to give it that appearance. It’s dark out, and chilly to boot. He’s shivering a little, in his thin clothes, but he doesn’t think he’s in any immediate danger. Moving will be the best cure to ward off the cold, so he starts down the road at a brisk walk.

While he walks, he scours his memory for anything unusual that might have happened the day before. But it had been pretty typical. A morning appointment with Gwen, school for the rest of the day, homework, dinner with the pack. He took one of his sleeping pills because the next day was Saturday and then went to sleep curled up in the bedroom at the den with Derek at his back. If someone got in there to abduct him and cart him into the forest, it would have been quite a trick. He wonders if he somehow sleep-walked out of the house. He knows that sleeping medication can have weird side effects.

Without his phone or any way to guide his steps, all he can do is follow the road and hope it takes him somewhere familiar. He starts to warm up as he walks. Anxiety lurks at the back of his stomach, but it’s nowhere near panic, not yet.

He’s just rounded a corner when he sees a car parked off to the side, pulled all the way off the road and into a little clearing. It looks strangely familiar. A plain silver sedan. He can’t place it in his memory, but the sight arrests him for some reason. He stands and simply stares at it for a long minute.
Then he hears a muffled thump. A voice that shouts, “Hey! Hey! Can anyone hear me?”

It’s his own voice, and it’s coming from the trunk.

Stiles accepts this with strange calmness. Of course, it’s not where he is that he should be worried about. It’s when. It’s December, right after the winter dance, and he’s inside the trunk of Peter’s nurse’s car. And now, somehow, he’s gone back to that time and place, possibly one of the most pivotal moments of his life, and he’s standing outside the car.

The calm fades into excitement. He can save himself. All that time that he was pounding on the lid of the trunk, screaming for someone to come to his rescue, all the panic and dehydration and frostbite, all the PTSD and claustrophobia, he can stop it all right now. He can get himself out of the trunk of that car where he lost his sanity and he’ll be okay again.

Of course, that’s easier said than done. He’s dressed in his pajamas. He has no tools. He can’t even call someone for help.

Even so. He’s in a hell of a lot of a better position than his former self is. He can try to find a branch to jimmy the trunk open. Maybe there’s a spare set of keys in one of the wheel wells. Hell, maybe it isn’t even locked. And even if it is, worst comes to worst, he can still save himself. He can just thump on the trunk and say, ‘hey, I know you’re here. I’m going to get help. It’s going to be okay.’ He can’t even say how much hearing that would have helped him, back then. Simply knowing that someone knew where he was. It’s probably a long jog back to town, but hell, his stamina is a lot better than it used to be. He could make ten miles in a few hours, get to the station, get his dad out here.

He lifts his hand to make that thump and say those reassuring words, and then, at the last moment, hesitates.

This would change everything.

He can see it playing out before his eyes. Peter’s clearly been gone for a while – Stiles remembers that he didn’t dare start shouting right away – which means that the confrontation at the Hale house has likely already happened. Even if it hasn’t, he can’t get there in time to change it. Which means that Peter has been shot and will be captured by Chris, imprisoned to await Gerard’s judgment.

So what happens if he opens this trunk? No hospital stay. No PTSD. Those are good things. Great things. But what then? Would he still go undercover with the Argents? Would he still find Peter in their basement? Would he still have the pack, be the alpha?

Would he lose that?

It had always been easy to say that he wouldn’t give up the pack for anything. Standing there in the forest, it becomes a lot more difficult. He’s shivering, standing there with his hand on the smooth metal, wondering what Stiles-inside-the-trunk would think, knowing that someone who could help him was standing right outside, but not doing anything. He would hate that person, Stiles was sure of it.

But this would change everything. What would happen to Derek, if Stiles hadn’t desperately needed him, hadn’t learned about the tactile nature of wolves and started offering him physical comfort? What would happen to Scott, without an alpha whose authority he could accept and respect? What would happen to Peter, trapped in Gerard’s basement being tortured?

What would happen to his father if he never found out about werewolves? Would he still go into the
forest the night the omega attacked the ambulance, would he still be hit by Gerard’s car? Would he
die in the road because a Stiles without PTSD wouldn’t be bothered by the fact that his father wasn’t
answering his text messages until it was too late? Would Stiles be able to live with that afterwards?

Slowly, Stiles’ hand slides off the trunk.

It’s still cold, so he starts walking again. The road curves gently through the forest, but never
becomes familiar. He should probably be walking the other way, he supposes, to get back to
civilization, but somehow the idea of moving forward is more appealing, so he does.

It’s not long before he starts to hear voices. Familiar ones. His own and Scott’s, so much younger; he
nearly busts a gut laughing because they sound so childish, debating which half of a body they might
find. There’s no better way to put it: he and Scott were real dumbasses.

So he’s gone further back. Again it seems strangely natural to him. A logical conclusion. He didn’t
change the first pivotal moment, so now he has a different one. But the decision is much easier this
time. Yes, horrible things happened because Scott was bitten. But wonderful things happened, too.
And he knows that if Peter hadn’t found Scott, he just would have found somebody else. He’s not
going to dump that on anybody else’s head. They had made their choices.

The sun starts to rise as he continues to walk. The road has become just a path now, worn tracks in
the dirt of the forest. It doesn’t bother him. When he hears noise up ahead, it doesn’t surprise him.
But what happens when he comes over a rise does.

The Hale house is standing there in the suddenly mid-day light, whole and sound and beautiful. He
saw a picture of it once, a grainy old newspaper clipping, but this is different. This is a house that
somehow glows with laughter and love. He walks up to the gates curiously, hearing children
giggling and adult voices calling to each other.

There’s a banner up that says ‘happy birthday’, though there’s no name, and a gathering of about
twenty people in the back yard. About half of them are adults. He sees Talia, recognizing her from
the one photo album Derek had, laughing as she cuts into a cake. Kids are running around
everywhere. He finds Derek sitting at the picnic table. He looks about twelve or thirteen – old
enough that Stiles can recognize him easily, but young enough that he still looks almost nothing like
the man he’s going to become. Stiles thinks of a million things he can tease Derek about later.

There’s Laura, all flash and zest as she quibbles with another young adult over who gets the last
hamburger. Derek’s father – Stiles thinks his name was Aaron but he’s not sure – playing referee
between two kids about Derek’s age who are having a sparring match. He turns to see a young man
who looks strangely familiar, but who Stiles can’t place. He’s got a toddler boy perched on his
shoulders, who’s laughing like crazy and saying “Higher, Daddy, higher!” and Stiles realizes with a
shock that feels like cold water that the man is Peter. Peter-before-the-fire, who Derek has always
referred to as if he’s a separate entity entirely, and now Stiles can see why.

He stands there and he watches Derek’s smile as his mother hands him a plate with cake and ice
cream, listens to the happy squeals of Peter’s son, and he thinks, this. This is something worth giving
up everything for.

It would change everything.

But that would be okay. He can’t imagine his life without Derek, without the pack. But somehow
he’ll just have to deal. Because this family deserves to be saved.

He approaches Talia somewhat hesitantly, not sure of what he can or should say to make himself be
believed. They’re werewolves, of course, so she’ll probably be somewhat more receptive to ‘I’ve been sent back in time through magic with a message for you’ than your average person, but still, she doesn’t know him and she’s got no reason to trust him.

In the end, it doesn’t matter. When he tries to get her attention, she looks right at him, right through him, and then turns away to continue her conversation. Stiles blinks and tries again, and he takes ahold of her arm, only his hand goes right through it. Anxious now, he approaches Peter, who’s dishing up some ice cream for another child, a girl of about eight with long dark hair. “Peter, can you hear me?” he says, and Peter doesn’t even twitch. “Peter!” Stiles says, trying to shake him by the shoulder.

When that still garners no response, he climbs up onto the picnic table. “Hey!” he shouts. “Hey, can anyone hear me? Listen to me!” Panic is rising up into his throat now. What was the point of seeing this if he can’t stop what’s coming? “Listen! Something terrible’s going to happen if you don’t – don’t listen to me, please! Please, can’t you hear me?” He drops to his knees in front of Derek, who’s still eating his cake. “Derek, listen to me! Derek! Derek, please!”

“Stiles!” someone shouts, and Stiles whips around, but nobody’s looking at him, nobody’s paying any attention to him.

“Are you there, can you hear me?” Stiles calls out, jumping off the table. Before he really realizes it, he’s running around the clearing, trying desperately to get someone’s attention. He feels like someone is shaking him, and he keeps hearing his name but he can’t find the person who’s calling for him, and the panic is building up so he can’t control it, can’t contain it, as he begs the Hales to listen to him and waits for the moment that the house erupts into flames –

“Stiles! Damn it, Stiles!” the voice says again –

And Stiles wakes up with a jolt.

“Jesus,” Derek swears, looking at him in the dim light of the green-shaded lamp in their bedroom. “Are you awake now? I couldn’t wake you at first, that fucking Lunesta – ”

“Derek, I’m sorry,” Stiles blurts out, crying without realizing it. “I’m so sorry, they wouldn’t listen, I tried to stop it but nobody could hear me – ”

“Hey, hey,” Derek says, leaning closer and rubbing his back. “It was just a nightmare, that’s all. Take some deep breaths.”

“No,” Stiles insists. “No, I was there, I saw – I saw you and Peter and your parents and everybody and they looked so happy and I tried, I tried to get them to listen but nobody could hear me and I – ”

“Shh, shh, it’s okay,” Derek says. “It’s okay. It was just a dream.”

“It wasn’t though,” Stiles says, although he’s coming to the realization that it was. He’s always had vivid dreams, but that one was a particular doozy. But he’s seeing it more now, the seamless shifts, the way he accepted everything without question, the way he recognized people even when he had never seen their faces before. “I was there, it was like some sort of spell sent me back in time and I thought I would have a chance to change things but – ”

“It wasn’t real,” Derek says firmly. “Anyway, there’s no such thing as time travel.”

Stiles manages a wan smile and says, “There’s no such thing as werewolves.”

Derek makes a face at him, and Stiles tries to laugh. “Weren’t you there last week when Lydia went
off on a ten-minute rant about why traveling into the past would be impossible, and all the
paradoxical implications?"

“Yeah,” Stiles says. He’s calming down now, knuckling tears out of his eyes. “But it felt so real.”

“I know.” Derek hooks an arm around his shoulders and pulls him into a hug.

“I felt like I could have saved you, you and your family. And I wanted to. Even though I knew it
meant everything would change.”

“Well, that’s the paradox that Lydia was . . .” Derek’s voice trailed off. “You would have given up
the pack?”

“For you,” Stiles says. “For your family. You were smiling. Peter was smiling and playing with his
son. It would have been worth it. I love all of you guys more than words can say, but it would have
been worth it.”

Derek’s quiet for a long minute. “I wouldn’t give it up, though,” he says, and Stiles blinks up at him
in surprise. “If I could go back. Because . . . I love my family. I miss them every day. But I can’t
imagine life without you, either. Without any of you. I feel like I would wake up every morning
knowing that something was missing from my life, and I would never know what, and that . . . that
would be awful.

“We can’t know what would happen if we prevented the fire. We can’t ever know. I could go back
and save my family from the fire only to have hunters kill all of us a month later. Maybe things
would have been even worse. We can’t . . . we can’t change the past, Stiles. We have to deal with
everything going forward. If we could change the past, that would be all we would ever think about.
Our regrets would become our entire lives. We could be stuck redoing things over and over again
and never getting them right and hating it. Maybe that’s why time only moves in one direction.”

Stiles swallows a little and says, “That was kinda beautiful.”

Derek scowls at him. “What? Shut up.”

Stiles leans against him, letting Derek hug him tightly. “Do you want to get up for a while?” he asks.
“I think I’m going to go make some cookies.”

“See, that’s what I’m talking about,” Derek says, and leans over to press a kiss against his temple.
“Life without your gingersnaps. A tragedy.”

Stiles laughs, and it comes a little more easily. “Well,” he says, “I’ll see what I can do about making
sure you never go without.”
Chapter Notes

So I've been asked many times to detail how Derek, Stiles, and Erica got their open relationship ironed out, since I skipped over it between The Boy in Red and Making Connections. Here it is!

This would take place about a month after the conclusion of The Boy in Red.

Warnings for excessive schmoop, Erica being Erica, and boys using their words. =D

Stiles spends almost an entire session with Gwen talking about how he should approach the whole ‘I’d really like to get laid’ thing before he feels confident enough to actually try it. Of course, there’s a part of him that still can’t really believe it’s happening. That can’t believe it’s possible that a hot girl like Erica would actually be interested in sleeping with him. He knows that he’s not exactly the ugly duckling he used to be, but sometimes he still feels that way.

He approaches Derek on one of those rare winter afternoons that the sun has come out and it feels like spring is coming even if it isn’t. Derek has brought one of his art projects outside so he can sketch in the sun. The rest of the pack is around, but there’s plenty of room, and they won’t be overheard. “Hey, got something I need to talk to you about,” he says, dragging over a lawn chair. Derek glances over at him and gives him a little nod. “The whole thing with me and Erica.”

He can see as well as feel Derek go tense all over. “Yeah, it’s fine,” he says, not looking up from his sketch. “I mean, you know, we talked about it. You’re good to go.”

“Okay, no,” Stiles says. “We rambled about it while stoned on marijuana. I only remember about half of what was said. That does not count as a real discussion.”

“It’s fine, Stiles, just –”

“Let me talk for a minute, okay?” Stiles says, and Derek sighs. “I know you’re not comfortable with the subject, but we’re going to be adults and use our words for a few minutes, because I don’t want to find out a year from now that you’ve been having a freak-out the entire time. And don’t lie to me, because that’s exactly the sort of thing you would do.”

Derek heaves another sigh and then sets down his sketchbook. “Okay,” he says. “Talk.”

It’s not exactly encouraging, but given the subject matter, it’s as good as Stiles is going to get. “First things first,” he says, “there are two points I need to make. Number one: you are my lupa. And I am not going anywhere. No matter what happens with anyone else. This,” he says, gesturing to indicate the bond between them, “is never going to change. I promise. Okay?”

Derek’s jaw twitches, but then he nods.

“Number two: it is one hundred percent okay if you are not okay with me sleeping with Erica. Or anybody else, for that matter. You don’t have to be okay with this.”

“That’s a lie, though, isn’t it?” Derek says, not looking at him. “I don’t have any right to ask you to
go your whole life without having sex.”

Stiles sighs. “Look, I don’t know how much about this whole lupa thing works. I mean, this connection, it’s not like either of us asked for it. We have it and I wouldn’t go back and get rid of it, I wouldn’t change it or give this up for anything. But the fact remains that there wasn’t exactly a negotiation of terms before the fact. And yes, having you is more important than having sex.”

“But it’s not having me,” Derek points out. “You have me no matter what.”

“Okay,” Stiles says, with a nod. “Fine. Having you happy, is more important to me than having sex.”

At this, Derek glances up. “Really?”

“Dude, I have the internet, I have self-warming lube and a sock,” Stiles says. “I wouldn’t volunteer for a life of celibacy, but I think I could survive it. I don’t want you to live every day being miserable, thinking I’m going to leave you for the proverbial other woman.”

There’s a long pause. Then Derek nods. “Okay. But . . . I don’t want you to be unhappy, either. So, you know. Compromise.”

Stiles thinks this over. “Would it be easier for you if it weren’t Erica?” he asks. “If it were someone outside the pack? I mean, not that there are women lining up to have sex with me, but I think with Erica and Lydia’s help, I could find someone.”

Derek shakes his head. “No,” he says, and his fists clench and relax. “It’s better if it’s someone in the pack. Who would understand . . . you and me. And it’s . . . safer.”

Since Derek is obviously thinking about Kate, Stiles doesn’t push the issue. He’s happier with Erica anyway, so he’ll let that go. “Then the question I need to ask, and you don’t have to answer it right now, is if it’s okay if I have sex with Erica.”

Another long silence. Derek fiddles with his pencil, marshalling his thoughts, and Stiles waits patiently. “The thing is,” he finally says, “saying no won’t make me any happier. Because . . . I don’t want to lose you. And that’s what this is about. If I say no, it’s because I’m afraid that I’ll lose you to Erica. But then I’d only be afraid that . . . you’d start to resent me, and be angry, and I’d lose you because of that. And maybe both of those things are overreactions. It’s possible that I have issues.”

“A remote possibility,” Stiles agrees gravely. “But okay, here’s a metaphor that will maybe help you out. So, Scott and Allison are obviously in love in love, right? Like, epic, world-changing, til-death-do-us-part love. And you know how Scott really loves those triple chocolate cookies I make, right?” he asks, and Derek nods. “I’m the only person he can get them from. But does Scott love Allison less because he can only get those cookies from me?”

He expects some sort of expression of revelation from Derek, like he finally understands what Stiles has been talking about this entire time. Instead, Derek drops his gaze to the ground for a brief moment, then looks up with a shy smile. “You mean . . . you love me like Scott loves Allison?”

Stiles blinks, then takes a moment to marvel at how dense Derek can be when left to his own devices. He leans over and presses his forehead against Derek’s. “I love you like my dad loves curly fries,” he says, and Derek huffs out a laugh. Stiles’ voice softens and he continues, “and like my dad loves my mom.”

“Okay,” Derek says, and lets out a breath. “I love you, too.” He pulls away. “You’ve never broken a promise to me, to the pack. So . . . I know you won’t break this one, either.”
“Okay,” Stiles says. He takes out his phone and texts Erica, asking her to come join them. He wants to settle a few more things, set up a few guidelines, and he thinks it’ll help Derek to witness it. She bounces out of the house a few minutes later, and he tries very hard not to look at her beautiful everything. “So, remember what we were talking about while we were stoned?”

“How could I forget?” she asks, looking him up and down like he’s a buffet and she’s trying to decide where to start.

Stiles swallows and tries to keep his boner in check. “Derek has said he’s okay with it, now that he’s no longer stoned, and I just wanted to clear up a few points. I mean, presuming you’re, uh, still interested . . .?”

“Yeah, I’d hit that like a bumper car tournament,” she says cheerfully.

“Uh, okay, good,” Stiles says, hoping that he’s not as pink as he thinks he is. “I just wanted to get everything straight, as in, be very clear that this is no strings attached sex, you won’t be my girlfriend, friends with benefits sort of relationship, not in that Hollywood sort of way where if you sleep together long enough you’re eventually expected to get married.”

Erica gives him a faintly puzzled expression as if to say ‘well, duh’, but then her gaze darts to Derek and the tension in his back and shoulders. The confusion clears off her face as she realizes that Stiles is saying this not for their benefit, but so Derek can hear them agree on it out loud. “I am one hundred percent in agreement,” she says.

“Obviously, I won’t expect you to stop sleeping with other guys,” Stiles continues, “and I think for the time being we should try to keep it on the down low as much as possible. I mean, we don’t need to try to hide it, everyone with a nose will know it’s happening anyway, but let’s not go throwing it in . . . anyone’s . . . face.”

Erica salutes and says, “Sir, yes sir.”

Stiles turns back to Derek. “I’m gonna give you a day or two just in case you change your mind, okay? You promise you’ll tell me, if you have second thoughts?”

Derek looks up, and nods. “Yeah, I promise,” he says.

“Okay,” Stiles says, and leans over to give him a hug. It’s a little awkward, but they’ve had worse.

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It’s actually another two weeks before they get anywhere, because there’s always stuff going on, the new semester has started at school, there’s a winter faerie bumming around, and their lives are never quiet. Stiles really wants to do this when Derek isn’t around to feel like he’s being banished, but that’s easy enough because he’s got the studio in San Francisco now, and he always goes once a month to drop off new stuff, meet with his agent, and make sure everything is arranged to his liking.

This month is a little different, in a way that actually benefits them, because his agent has arranged for a showing and Derek is going to be there late enough on Saturday night that he says he’s going to get a hotel room and stay the night. Stiles offers to go with him, but there’s a lacrosse game on Saturday that he doesn’t want to miss, and Derek knows it, so he says he’ll be fine. Lydia offers to go instead, because she loves San Francisco and it will be a good opportunity for her to get some
hardcore shopping done, and they all know Derek won’t want to spend the night alone.

So Derek leaves first thing Saturday morning and won’t be back until mid-day on Sunday. Stiles goes to the lacrosse game practically out of his mind with anticipation, and mentions to Scott that it would be awesome if he could have his place to himself. Scott immediately figures out exactly what he’s up to and says, “Got you covered, bro.”

The game is brutal enough to get him worked up but not so brutal that it leaves him exhausted, which is good. He goes home, has a snack, and showers. His father is going to be working late because there’s a new deputy starting and he was going to show her the ropes. Stiles takes a breath and texts Erica, ‘home from the game, come on over, there are lemon bars’.

‘bitchin’ is Erica’s reply. Stiles tries not to wear a track in the floor with his pacing while he waits for her to arrive. What if she’s changed her mind? What if it was all a joke to begin with? What if she gets his pants off and then laughs at him? What if he isn’t any good?

He’s worried himself halfway to the point of calling her and saying never mind, or possibly calling Gwen before he has a panic attack, when the door bangs open. He nearly trips over his own feet going into the front hallway as Erica shouts, “Hey, babe!” and tosses her jacket in the vague direction of the hooks. “What’s cookin’?”

Now Stiles has a new dilemma which he really should have thought about but hadn’t. How can he plan some things so carefully but not think about basic things like what to say when a gorgeous woman comes to his house for the express purpose of having sex with him, and he hasn’t thought to actually mention that to her yet? What if she’s having her period? What if she has a headache?

“Uh hey so,” he blurts out, “Derek’s in San Francisco and my dad’s working late – ”

That’s as far as he gets. It’s as far as he needs to get. Two seconds later, Erica’s tongue is in his mouth and her hand is down his pants and he forgets all about being nervous.

~ ~ ~ ~

“I want you to promise me something, okay?” Stiles asks.

Erica yawns. “Mmkay. What?”

“Don’t ever . . . fake this with me. Okay? I don’t want this to be . . . an obligation for you. I mean, I know I’m your alpha. But I don’t want you to ever feel like you have to have sex with me, because I’m your alpha and I can only have sex with you because of Derek.” He twines some of her hair between his fingers. “I want you to have sex with me because it’s fun and you enjoy it. I want you to do it because you want to do it. I might be your alpha, but for this stuff, we’re equals.”

Erica glances over at him, smiles, and then playfully pushes at his face. “Okay,” she says. “Agreed.”

“I mean, I know I’m not experienced,” Stiles says, “but I’m so open to instruction, I mean, I’m not one of those guys who thinks he was put on earth as some sort of sex god.”

“You did pretty good, all things considered,” Erica says, stretching and purring a little.

“Well, what I lack in experience, I make up for with enthusiasm,” Stiles agrees. “And I mean, that
was awesome, it was amazing, I want it to be amazing for you, too, I want you to have all the orgasms – I mean not all like I don’t get any, I want both of us to have lots of orgasms is what I’m saying.”

Erica laughs. “So you wanna go again?”

“Oh my God, yes.”

~ ~ ~ ~

“Hey, I brought home some donuts, are you going to sleep all – for Christ’s sake, Stiles – ”

“Dad!” Stiles says, jerking the blankets back up. “Knock!”

Sheriff Stilinski covers his face with both hands. “Clearly the days of ‘it’s not like you have a girl in here’ are over,” he says, and clears his throat. “Good morning, Erica.”

“Good morning, Papa Stilinski,” she chirps.

“There are donuts downstairs,” he says, and hastily exits the room.

Ten minutes later, Sheriff Stilinski hears the Hallelujah chorus blasting from Stiles’ room.

“Very funny, kid!” he shouts up the stairs.

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Once they’ve eaten the donuts, Stiles texts Derek to say, ‘I miss you. Come home soon.’ With a smiley face.

~ ~ ~ ~

By the time Derek gets home, everyone’s at the den, and Stiles is making beef stroganoff because it’s one of Derek’s favorites. He abandons it to greet Derek in his usual fashion, that is wrapping his arms around the other man’s shoulders and trying to climb him like a monkey. Derek growls affectionately and says, “Why are you always climbing me” just like he always does, and there’s a profound note of relief in his voice.

Everything is normal that night. They eat, they play video games, they talk about the lacrosse game and San Francisco. If Derek is a little more blatant in the way he keeps close to Stiles and occasionally leans over to rub his scent into Stiles’ shoulder or hair, nobody says anything about it.

Derek doesn’t say anything about it at first, but he seems reassured by the normalcy of the evening, reassured enough that while he’s helping clean up in the kitchen, he asks hesitantly, “So . . . did you
have a good weekend?”

“Yeah,” Stiles says. “It was fun.”

There’s a moment of quiet, not at all uncomfortable. “Good,” Derek says, and leans over to rub his cheek against Stiles’ temple.

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It’s awkward at first, because how could it not be? Derek goes to school with Stiles and they sleep in the same place at night, whether it’s the den, or Stiles’ house, or Scott’s. There are only a few hours that they separate, while Derek is painting, which is time Stiles needs to do things like his homework. But Pandora’s box can’t be closed, and now he’s hornier than ever because sex is awesome and he really wants to have it a lot.

So they make time, and they try to avoid shooing Derek away, but can’t stop the occasions when he finishes what he’s doing and comes looking for Stiles while he and Erica are busy. He doesn’t say anything about it, though. He’s a little cool towards Erica, stiff and unfriendly, for a few weeks. She tries not to let it bother her. They’re all pretty sure that he’ll get over it.

Stiles knows something is bugging him, and finally manages to work out that the smell of sex gets underneath his skin. He starts showering after his encounters with Erica, and that helps some, when Derek doesn’t have the evidence right in his face. His nose still wrinkles sometimes, but it’s usually beforehand, when he can tell that Stiles is thinking about it and the pheromones are rolling off of him in waves.

It’s awkward but they get used to it, and Derek starts to relax. He sees that it’s still him that Stiles comes to when he wakes up from a nightmare, upset and in pain. It’s still Derek that Stiles defers to when there’s any sort of trouble in the pack and he’s not sure how to handle it. It’s still Derek that Stiles curls up with at night.

And Erica doesn’t get special treatment. She still gets put on dish duty and Stiles still makes her do her homework and gets annoyed when she lies to her father about what the pack is doing. She’s still the person in the pack most likely to lose turns in the cookie rotation for various infractions which she’s so fond of committing. She even tries to barter sexual favors for cookies once, but Stiles just shuts her down saying she has an unfair advantage over the rest of the pack. Not just over Derek, but over everyone. She pouts, but gets over it.

Derek even has to admit after a while that it’s been good for Stiles. He’s a little more mellow now, less prone to panic attacks. It’s a good way for him to burn off energy without beating the shit out of something. He’s increasingly more likely to pick ‘cuddles’ when ‘cuddles or violence’ comes up.

Stiles sees Derek relax into it, watches him get used to the idea and find that it’s okay. He starts to casually mention it, just on occasion, to see how he reacts. No details, just things like, “Erica and I are gonna be busy for a while” or “after this I think I’m taking an Erica-break”. Derek usually just nods and doesn’t really respond. Stiles shortens his post-sex showers, scrubs less, and gradually stops them completely (unless he really needs one, which happens sometimes). There’s a wrinkled nose here and there, but he doesn’t get upset about it like he did before.

One day he comes home from school with about half the pack, stressed over a history test, annoyed
at some douche thing a senior had said to him, twitchy because the full moon is getting close. Derek shifts out of his fur and then grabs Stiles by the wrist. He tows him over to Erica and then points up the stairs. “Go,” he says, and gives Stiles a nudge. “You need it,” he adds, and that’s when Stiles knows that things are going to be okay.

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Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

Written for Rynne, who requested some more exploration of Derek's asexuality. ^_^

Takes place after 'With Friends Like These' (seriously don't read it until after that or you won't know what's going on).

I think Derek talks more in this short than in any of the previous fics.

Derek glanced up as he heard the door to the studio open. He saw Mac slide into the room, looking shy and uncertain, and gave her a nod before turning back to his painting. Sometimes he doesn’t like people watching him work, but most of the time he’s okay with it as long as they’re quiet and don’t disturb him. But he has a feeling that Mac isn’t there to watch him paint, and he doesn’t want to stare at her until she feels comfortable enough to say something.

About five minutes go by before Mac shifts and says, “Hey . . . can I ask you something?”

“Sure,” Derek says, putting down the paintbrush and giving her his full attention. In some ways, Mac is like Stiles. She likes her data organized. In the past few weeks since moving to Beacon Hills, she’s often come to him with questions about werewolves or the supernatural world in general. Stiles is so busy, what with the move home and getting ready for Christmas, that he doesn’t always have time for her the way he wants to. He’s always there when she needs her alpha emotionally, but for questions, he’s deferred to Derek.

“It’s not . . . werewolf stuff,” Mac says, twisting a piece of paper in her hands.

Derek shrugs. “You can ask me anything. The worst that’ll happen is that I won’t answer.”

Mac nods a little. “It’s about Cassidy,” she says, and Derek nods, understanding her anxiety a little better. “Except it’s sort of not. It’s complicated . . . it’s like, I wish I could have helped him. Looking back on it now, I wonder why I didn’t see it. Like . . . the way he was so weird about sex, you know? I should have seen it.”

“Everyone’s different when it comes to that sort of thing,” Derek says, twirling his paintbrush between his fingers. “It’s not like you had a lot of experience with the subject.”

“But I just thought, maybe I should talk to you because . . . you went through something similar?” Mac’s gaze darts up to Derek and then away, nervously, as he frowns. “You got sick, like, really upset, after we figured out what Woody had been doing. While you were in the bathroom, Veronica asked if you were okay, and Stiles said that you weren’t, and that she shouldn’t ask questions about it. If you’d rather not talk about it, I understand, I just thought . . . maybe you could help me understand Cassidy better.”

Derek lets out a breath. “It was very . . . different,” he finally says. “I mean, I don’t know a lot of detail about what Cassidy went through.”
“It’s just, you . . . you and Stiles have that thing, but you don’t do the sex thing,” Mac says. “Which
seems weird. Like . . . I guess maybe I just want to be sure that you’re okay. Because I know that
Cassidy must have been hurting so much, and I couldn’t, didn’t, notice or ask or do anything about
it, and so now I want to . . . make amends.”

“First off,” Derek says, “you shouldn’t blame yourself for what happened with Cassidy. No,” he
says, as she opens her mouth to protest. “Not one little bit. But I am okay, Mac. And thank you, for
asking, and thinking of me.”

Mac blushes a little. “You guys helped me so much, I just . . . doesn’t it bug you? I mean, are you
not gonna have sex your whole life because of what happened?”

“It’s different for me,” Derek says. “In a lot of ways. But primarily, really, I’m just not interested in
sex. I never was. When it was Kate . . .” He lets his voice trail off, and fiddles with his paintbrush
again. It still hurts, but time has made the worst of it fade. Time and love and family. He can talk
about it now, in a way that he couldn’t before. “I was fifteen. And I loved her. I really did.
Romantically, and . . . enthusiastically. And she obviously expected me to want to have sex with her.
I didn’t want her to think anything was wrong with me, so . . . I did. It was okay. I mean, I’m not
saying I went home and threw up afterwards. It happened and I was okay with it because it was for
her. Then . . . she betrayed me, and everything . . . ended.”

“And now there’s Stiles,” Mac says.

Derek nods. “I love Stiles,” he says. “With all my heart. I want to spend the rest of my life with him.
But I don’t want to have sex with him. I don’t want to have sex with anyone. And it’s not because
Kate hurt me. It’s just because I don’t.”

“I think . . . Stiles thinks it’s because of Kate,” Mac says hesitantly, like she’s afraid that she’ll offend
him.

“I know,” Derek says. “For a long time, I really couldn’t talk about it. Not like this. So I think Stiles
just put it to rest. He made some assumptions and I didn’t disillusion him, and he doesn’t want to hurt
me. He asked me once, after he started sleeping with Erica, if I wanted to try to find someone like
that, and I said no. He asked if I was okay without, and I said yes. And then he let it drop. From a
practical standpoint, I guess it’s the same thing.”

“I don’t know if it is,” Mac says thoughtfully. “I mean, if you wanted to have sex and you couldn’t
because of what she did to you, that would be something that needed to be fixed. But being asexual .
. . that’s different. That’s not something broken. It’s just the way you are.”

“Well, you’re right about that,” Derek says. “Does it matter?”

“Well, not if it doesn’t matter to you,” Mac says, “but . . . maybe it does matter to Stiles. That he
knows that you’re not broken.”

Derek twirls the paintbrush. “I’ll think about that,” he says.

“Was it weird? Him and Erica?”

“At first, yeah,” Derek says. “I mean, the first thing you need to understand is that Stiles and I were
both all kinds of fucked up when we started . . . having a relationship. However you want to define
that. And as he grew more confident as the alpha, I got . . . less confident. I got scared. I was sure I
was going to lose him, that he didn’t feel the same way about me, that I didn’t deserve him, that it
would never work because I didn’t want to have sex with him.”
“So what happened?” Mac asks.

“He kicked my ass,” Derek says, and laughs a little at the memory. “Basically. He told me that we were always going to be together no matter what. And that I should stop worrying about it. The second thing you need to understand is that Erica loves sex. She’d be the first to call herself a slut. None of the rest of us call her that because it’s got so many negative connotations. But Erica just loves sex. She thinks it feels great, she’s got a hot body, and she wants to use it. She sleeps with a lot of different guys. She’s not serious with any of them and they all know it. Stiles is one of them. And for Stiles, it really helped to have someone that he could satisfy those urges with, who would always understand that it wasn’t going to be romantic or serious, because he was committed to me.”

Mac nods a little. “Still. Awkward.”

“Less than I would have anticipated,” Derek says. “He had to shower a lot at first because the smell of it could get under my skin, but . . . I got used to it. And if anything, it was easier after it happened. Where I could see with my own eyes that even though they were having sex, she was still just his friend. And that I was still his lupa. That he still behaved differently towards me than anyone else, that it was still me he came to first when he needed something. I think I worried about it a lot more than I actually needed to.”

“That makes sense,” Mac says. She twists a strand of hair around her finger and says, “I’m glad that you’re okay. I know I’m new here, so . . .”

“You’re pack. That’s what matters. I don’t think my situation was anything like Cassidy’s, but . . . there are a lot of different versions of ‘normal’. I mean, nobody is really ‘normal’. Or maybe everybody is. Some people want to have sex, some don’t, some people view it as a big deal, some think it’s just for fun, whatever . . . whatever floats your boat, as Stiles would say. What matters is that you find someone whose version of normal is okay with your version. Or two someones. Or, you know, whatever.”

Mac nods. She leaned over and gave Derek a hug, nuzzling against his collarbone for a few moments. “I still wish I could have helped Cassidy, though.”

“I don’t think anyone could have helped Cassidy until he was willing to admit he needed help,” Derek says. “I was like that for a long time, too. I hope he’ll be okay someday, Mac. I really do.”

“Me too,” Mac says.

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Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

Here’s a series of drabbles about what the outsiders in Beacon Hills think of Stiles and his pack. Probably take place somewhere between The Boy in Red and The Line in the Sand, at various points between fics when nothing is going on. Written for thereadingsuccubus over on tumblr <3

“Hey, your order’s up!” Audrey shouted as she stacked several pizza boxes on the counter. She looked up as Carter came over and grabbed them. “Have you been out to the Hale place before?”

“No,” Carter said, and grabbed the boxes. “Why, what’s up?”

“You can’t actually get to the property,” Audrey said. “It’s gated.”

“What, like a gated neighborhood?” Carter asked.

“No, like, the property is out on the preserve and there’s a fence. Just, when you get there, call the number on the order and they’ll come out to the fence and pick the stuff up.”

Carter frowned. “Why don’t they just leave the gate open if they’ve ordered something for delivery?”


Carter shook his head, frowning a little and nearly staggering underneath the weight of the boxes. “They must be having one hell of a party,” he said, and headed for his car. Six large pizzas could feed about fifteen people. He saw Audrey shaking her head off to the side, but didn’t bother. The drive out to the preserve was further than he usually had to go for a job, but in a way that was nice. Less time sitting around getting bitched at by the manager was always nice.

When he reached the fence, he parked off to the side and gave it a dubious look. “Weird,” he muttered, but dialed the number on his cell phone as instructed. The fence was plastered with ‘no trespassing’ signs and he wasn’t about to risk his job.

“Stilinski Surrogacy Services, you need ‘em, we breed ‘em!” a bright voice picked up.

“Uh – hello?” Carter said. “This is Pizza Express, your – ”

“Oh, are you at the fence? Cool, we’ll be right there,” the voice said, and then the line disconnected. Carter was left blinking at the phone. He shook his head a little and then got back in his car to wait. It was dark out, and he had to admit that the preserve was a little spooky. He was a city kid. He wondered if he could con Dominique into taking the run the next time that the Hales ordered. From the way Audrey had talked about it, it happened fairly often.
That was what he was thinking when a camo-colored Jeep rumbled up and pulled to a stop just inside the fence. A gangly teenager a year or two younger than Carter was behind the wheel, but Carter didn’t take much note of him because Derek Hale, the scariest person in Beacon Hills, was scowling his way towards the fence. Carter went very still, feeling like there was a target on his back, or possibly on his face.

“I, uh, pizza,” he said stupidly, as Derek started undoing the locks.

Derek gave him a look that clearly said ‘you don’t say’, and then Carter got distracted again because two more people were emerging from the Jeep. Two beautiful people. Two of the most beautiful young women he had ever seen. One with dark blonde hair, wearing tight jeans and a leather jacket and a wicked smile. The other was a redhead, somehow managing to be statuesque even though she was several inches shorter than the blonde and wearing a simple sundress. Carter gaped at both of them as the blonde reached out and took the pizzas from his hands.

“It’s not that we don’t trust you,” the teenager who had been driving the Jeep said as they started to check each box to make sure their order was correct. “It’s just that, well, screw-ups happen, right? Fact of life.”

“We’re good,” the blonde said, her mouth already full of pizza.

“Really, Erica?” Derek said, giving her that same unamused look that Carter had been a victim of a few moments earlier. She gave a remorseless shrug and flounced towards the car. Carter wondered why it took four people to come pick up pizza, especially pizza that could be brought directly to one’s door, if one did not have a creepy house in the middle of nowhere surrounded by a creepy fence.

Yeah, he was definitely asking Dominique to do this next time.

“Here,” Derek said.

“Huh?” Carter said.

Derek stared at him, looked deliberately down at his extended hand with money in it, and then back at Carter.

“Oh,” Carter said. “Uh, right. Thanks.” He took the money and found that it was a crisp one hundred dollar bill. “Uh, I’m not sure I can break – ”

“It’s for you. Keep the change.” Derek turned and headed back to the Jeep.

“B-But the pizzas were only sixty-two . . .” Carter’s voice trailed off because Derek was already getting back in the Jeep, and then it was pulling away. “Oh,” he said, blinking after them. Then he got in his car and headed back to Pizza Express.

“You look like someone just sprouted an extra head in front of you,” Audrey said, when he returned.

“Are they always like that?” Carter asked.

“Yes.”

“Do they . . . order on Thursday nights a lot? Because put me down to work, like, every Thursday from now on if they do.”

Audrey looked amused and said, “I’ll see what I can do.”
One thing was sure about working in the Beacon Hills Police department: it was never boring. Xavier Montero had discovered that after working there only a month, but as a low-ranking officer, he had a feeling that he steered clear of the worst of it. Whenever things got really weird, the sheriff always showed up and took control of the situation.

So things got awkward when Sheriff Stilinski had the flu and had been put on strict bed rest (“by his doctor?” Xavier asked and Madison had snorted and said, “by his son”) and then there was an incident down at the Beacon Hills mall. Xavier wasn’t sure what kind of incident it was, and he certainly had never trained for anything like it. It was a combination of vandalism, harassment, and shoplifting. But the problem was, nobody had spotted a perpetrator, even though it had been going on over an hour by the time he got there.

Things were going missing, windows were painted in bright colors, women were reporting having their butts pinched, men had had their shoelaces tied together. Xavier wasn’t sure if it was schoolchildren at work or what, but nobody ever saw the damage taking place, and whenever someone was grabbed, there was nobody there when they turned around.

Xavier was starting to think that it was all a hoax when he took a step forward and nearly careened through a plate-glass window because someone had tied his laces together. And he had never noticed anyone near him. Review of the security footage was likewise useless.

“I don’t get it,” he said, rubbing a hand over his head.

Madison, his partner, chewed on her lower lip. “Well, we’d better figure it out,” she said. “Christmas is in four days and the mall is only going to get busier. The stores can’t get reimbursement from their insurance if we can’t figure out what’s going on.”

“Yeah, but – ” Xavier started, and then they heard shouting. “Jesus, what now,” he said.

What now turned out to be that someone had poured laundry soap in the mall fountain, and mounds of bubbles were heading in every direction. They got the fountain turned off and janitorial staff to clean up the worst of it, but they had barely finished that when there were reports of dancing outfits in Macy’s, although when the police approached, the clothing all dropped to the floor, motionless.

“What the fuck,” Xavier blurted.

“I think I’d better call . . .” Madison hesitated.


“He’s sick, remember?” Xavier said. “I’m pretty sure he’s not going to want to get dragged out of bed for, for whatever the fuck this is.”

“I’m not calling the sheriff,” Madison said, scrolling through her phone’s menu, “I’m calling Stiles. His son.” She ignored the way Xavier was gaping at her and then spoke into the phone. “Hey, Stiles, it’s Officer Peretti, we’ve got a bit of a situation . . . uh, I’m honestly not sure, but something is down at the mall tying shoelaces together and pouring laundry soap into the fountains but nothing’s
showing up on the security cams . . . oh? Yeah, okay. Okay. I’ll meet you outside the security offices.”

She hung up, and ignored the way Xavier was gaping at her. “Why did you just call a seventeen year old – ”

“He’s eighteen now,” Madison said.

“Oh, that’s okay then,” Xavier said, rolling his eyes. “I know that Sheriff Stilinski’s sick, but show me where in the manual it says to call in a civilian.”

“Show me where in the manual it deals with pranksters who are invisible to security cameras,” Madison said. “I’m going to go hit up the Cinnabon. He said he’d be here in twenty minutes.”

Xavier just gaped after her. He scowled and shook his head and decided not to accompany her. There had to be some physical evidence, some rational explanation for what was going on. He went back to the security closet and started re-reviewing the footage around the fountain. He still didn’t see anything. It just suddenly started to bubble. Frustrated, he pulled footage for a few of the other incidents. He was still engrossed in that when he heard Madison talking outside the security offices. He slammed the door open and scowled at the gangly teenager standing there chatting with her. He was holding a bag from a local bakery.

“What, you had to make a stop first?” Xavier asked, sneering at him.

“Yep,” Stiles said, unperturbed. “Bread and honey. That’s the best way to catch pixies.”

“. . . what?” Xavier said.

Stiles set the bag down, withdrew several loaves of fresh white bread, and started slicing it with a bread knife that he had brought with him. “Just pour a few stripes on it,” he said, handing the bear-shaped bottle of honey to Madison. “We’ll put it around the mall in a few places. They’ll gorge themselves; they can’t help it. That’ll slow them down long enough for us to get rid of them.”

“Pixies, though?” Xavier asked, folding his arms over his chest. “Madison, are you – are you taking notes?”

“Uh, yeah,” Madison said. “That way we won’t have to call him next time.”

“Uh . . . uh huh.” Xavier scowled and went back into the security office, because ‘slicing bread’ was not in the job description for law enforcement. He took out his phone and called the deputy on duty, Carmichael. “Just, uh, reporting in. Something weird is going on down at the mall. Madison’s called the sheriff’s kid and he’s pulling her chain and talking about pixies, and she’s going along with it.”

There was a heavy sigh at the other end of the phone. “You keep looking at the security footage. I’ll come handle it.”

Carmichael hung up. Xavier shook his head and kept working. He realized about twenty minutes later that he didn’t hear voices anymore. He went to open the door and see what was going on, but it was locked. “Oh, for fuck’s sake – ” He put his shoulder against it, but it didn’t budge. With a sigh, he got on his radio. This was going to be humiliating, but it was better than breaking the door and causing property damage. “I’m locked in the God damned security closet,” he reported to Madison.

“Copy that,” she said. “I’m down by the Dillard’s but on my way.”

He paced back and forth, irritated. It was almost ten minutes, and he was about to call her again,
before the door opened and an annoyed looking security guard let him out. Madison was standing behind him. “What took so long?” he snapped.

“Was just finishing up with the perp,” she said. “I guess some kids had hacked into the feed, that’s why we didn’t see anything on the cameras. Anyway, they’re all minors, and no real damage was done, so Carmichael’s talking to the parents but we probably won’t press any charges.”

“Oh.” Xavier said. He was so relieved to have a rational explanation that he didn’t even ask where the Stilinski kid had gone, or if they had enjoyed their bread and honey. There were still some crumbs on the table in the break room.

He didn’t think much of it when, a few weeks later, Sheriff Stilinski called him into the office and explained that he was being transferred to nearby Stockton. It was fine by him. They needed the manpower, Stilinski said, and he was a bachelor and could move easily enough. He had no problem showing his back to Beacon Hills. It was a pretty weird place.

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Mike Tamland’s hands were dirty when his phone chimed in indicate that he had an incoming text. Specifically, he was up to his elbows in a pork roast. He took a few minutes to finish tying it off and put it in the display case before going to check his phone. He wasn’t worried; he knew who it was. Stiles was prompt as always.

Mike had met Stiles almost a year previous, when the teenager had wandered into his butcher shop, bouncing like he was on speed. The shop had been in Mike’s family for generations. It was a combination butcher shop, farmer’s market, and bakery. His wife did most of the work in the bakery, and these days he had hired some local kids to help out. Business was good, and he had no complaints.

Stiles had come in and said brightly, “Hey, so, I was hoping you could help me out. I’ve got a special anniversary coming up and I want to make a really good dinner and a friend of a friend said that I should come here for the best quality stuff.”

“Well, your friend was right,” Mike had said. “Are you going for something fancy or something solid?”

Stiles had pursed his lips and said, “Elaborate?”

“Well, I’ve got some good lamb chops, and that always does well with the gourmet crowd,” Mike had said, thinking that this kid really seemed too young to have an anniversary to celebrate. Maybe it was for his parents. “But for my money, I’d rather have a good beef tenderloin any day. You get more food for your money, and it sticks with you longer.”

“I bow to your superior expertise,” Stiles had said, and then surprised Mike by buying eight pounds, enough meat to feed a dozen people. Mike gave him some cooking instructions, and he had bounced back out of the store happy. A week later, he had been back, talking about how good the roast was and what did he have on sale this week.

From then on, Stiles had been a regular at the shop. He started buying other stuff there, and Mike was always surprised at the quantity. He bought his apples in pecks, and it wasn’t unusual for him to buy four loaves of bread at a time. He and Margaret, Mike’s wife, started swapping recipes.
According to her, Stiles did a lot of his own baking, but rarely baked anything that needed to rise because he didn’t have time. He was often accompanied by a large black dog (Mike really thought it looked a lot more like a wolf, but it wasn’t his business) with a blue vest, who enjoyed antagonizing Mittens and Cupcake, the store cats.

About six months after Stiles had first come into Mike’s shop, he had showed up on what was a truly lousy day. Things had been going wrong with increasing severity from the moment he had woken up. From the tumble he took stepping out of the shower, to the way Mittens had scratched him when he tried to see what kind of bug she was hunting, from an entire bushel of apples that had gone rotten without explanation, to the refrigerator in the butcher shop that had shorted out, spoiling a quarter of his stock.

Stiles walked right in and blinked twice at Mike, then at Mittens, who was currently hissing at a wall outlet for no reason that Mike could ascertain. Much to Mike’s confusion, he then looked down at his service dog with a faint frown. The dog had gone rigid the moment he had walked in. Stiles’ jaw went tight and he said, “Mike, you have to get out of here, now – ”

“I – what?” Mike asked, just before a pipe burst with a bang. Stiles didn’t waste time. He hoisted himself over the counter, grabbed Mike by the elbow, and dragged him out of the shop. The next thing Mike knew, he was standing in the parking lot, bewildered, while the service dog kept him in place by keeping its teeth buried in the cuff of his pants. Stiles, meanwhile, had charged into the bakery and started shouting about everyone getting out.

Mike was still trying to figure out what was going on when there was a fwoomp noise and the small shed behind the market practically exploded.

“Gas leak,” Stiles was saying to some of the people, trying to keep them calm. He was already on his phone. The next thing Mike knew, there was a black man with a friendly smile pulling him to one side, and he was telling Stiles something about an ‘entropy curse’ and Mike could have sworn that he heard the teenager say, ‘I fucking hate sorcerers,’ and around then it occurred to him to wonder where Mittens was, since the cat had been inside the shop right before the shed exploded. He didn’t even realize he had expressed this worry out loud until Stiles said, “Don’t worry, I’ll go find her,” and walked off.

Ten minutes later, Stiles came back, a little sooty and disheveled, holding a yowling Mittens in his hands. The cat was unharmed, if furious, and settled down once she was back in Mike’s grip.

Mike was never really sure what had happened that day, but he was pretty sure that Stiles had saved his life, possibly the lives of his customers, and most likely his shop as well. So when Stiles asked, “Is it okay if I text you before I come to see what’s on sale so I can plan out the meals while I’m at home and I can make sure I have enough of everything I need,” he said sure. And a little later he had offered to maybe get some stuff together for Stiles before he came, to save him some time. “You’d do that?” Stiles asked, and Mike said sure. Grocery stores had only been invented in the twentieth century. Before that, it was a shopkeeper’s job to assemble purchases for a customer.

So when he picked up his phone, he saw Stiles’ usual biweekly text of, ‘yo Mike, what’s good today?’

‘Got some pork chops for you, bone-in the way you like them,’ Mike replied.

‘cool. good apples?’

‘you want Gala or Macs’
‘Macs I think,’ Stiles replied, and proceeded to rattle off his grocery list. As usual, it was an obscene amount of food. If anything, it had only gotten bigger since Mike had first met him a year previous. Ten pounds of pork chops, one peck of apples, five pounds of green beans, three dozen eggs, two pounds of butter, three loaves of bread (two white and one wheat), and on from there. Mike shared the list with Margaret, and they started getting it ready.

Mike knew that Stiles still had to do some of his grocery shopping at the regular store, for things like cereal and coffee and peanut butter, but the majority of his fresh food came from Mike’s shop. Mike joked that Stiles was going to be solely responsible for putting his two kids through college, and Stiles just laughed.

“Why does he need so much food, anyway?” Margaret asked once. “Sheriff Stilinski’s a widower, it should just be the two of them.”

Mike shrugged and replied that it wasn’t his business. There was a lot about Stiles that wasn’t his business, or anyone’s, and the majority of Beacon Hills was happy to keep it that way.

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Dr. Kirby was in his fifth hour of his shift at the Beacon Hills Emergency Room when he glanced up as Rashea wrote a new name on the whiteboard. “No,” he said. “No! Do not even finish writing that –”

Rashea capped the marker and gave him a sympathetic look. “Sorry, Dr. Kirby.” In a bright tone, she added, “He’s baaa-aaack!”

Kirby groaned and snatched the chart. “What is it this time?”

“He fell while ice-skating.”

“Sure, he ‘fell’,” Kirby said with a snort. He skimmed the particulars and then slapped the chart against the counter and started making notes on it. “Ugh. I don’t even want to see him until he’s back from x-ray,” he added, and practically flung the chart at Rashea. She tried not to smirk at him and took it out of his hands.

Forty minutes later, the x-rays were done, the radiologist had reviewed them, and Dr. Kirby pushed aside the curtain to face the teenager sitting on the bed with a sour look on his face. “Well, Mr. Stilinski, it seems that you have miraculously escaped broken bones yet again.”

“That’s what I told everyone,” Stiles said. Kirby scowled at him, and then for good measure, scowled at the enormous wolfdog in its ridiculous blue vest. It scowled back. “But they were all like ‘no, Stiles, that was a really nasty spill, you really should get your ankle x-rayed’.”

Kirby shook his head and started to jot down some notes. He muttered to himself while he did a basic exam, which Stiles protested vociferously. “You know they don’t make frequent flyer points for emergency rooms, right?” Kirby asked, as he shined a flashlight in Stiles’ eyes.

“Ow, what,” Stiles said, flinching back. “It’s not my fault!”

“You must be the most accident prone person in all of California,” Kirby said. “Follow the light, you know the drill.”
Stiles groaned, but did as he was told. “I don’t have a concussion,” he said. “I didn’t even hit my head!”

“Did I ask if you hit your head?” Kirby growled. “I did not. But I’m still checking for brain damage, because that’s the only conceivable reason I can think of that someone as accident-prone as you would think it was a good idea to go ice skating in the first place. In the middle of the night, no less!”

Stiles huffed out a sigh, but allowed Kirby to finish his exam. “It wasn’t in the middle of the night,” he said. “I fell hours ago, I just waited to come to the ER until you were on shift, ‘cause I know you like me so much.”

Kirby grabbed an ace bandage and shot the teenager a murderous look. “Are you serious?”

“Well, sort of,” Stiles said. “I did fall this afternoon. I tried to shrug it off at first but then the swelling got worse.” He gave a little shrug and continued, “Then I decided to wait until after the shift change because I know that Dr. Soyan has been working evenings lately and uh . . . last time I came in, she kept me here for hours for a social services consult. You know. I think she thinks I have an abusive boyfriend or something.”

Kirby rolled his eyes and said, “I can’t think of many people I would find less likely to put up with an abusive boyfriend than you, Stilinski.” He secured the bandage and said, “I’ll write you a prescription for some Vicodin. Keep it elevated tonight, don’t put any weight on it for two or three days, and for Christ’s sake, no ice-skating until you’ve gained control over your peripheral nervous system.”

“Yes, sir,” Stiles said, grinning. Kirby glared back, tore the prescription off the pad, and shoved it in his general direction.

“I don’t want to see you in here for at least six weeks,” he said.

“I’ll do my best!” Stiles said, leaning on his totally-not-a-wolf as he hobbled towards the exit.

Kirby shook his head and began to document the visit. Once he had it completed, he grabbed the next chart from Rashea.

“So if he didn’t ‘fall while ice skating’,” Rashea said, “what happened?”

“I have no idea,” Kirby said. “I didn’t ask, and I don’t want to know.”

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“Okay, so, here’s the scoop,” Ana said to her new classmate. She began pointing to different tables in the cafeteria. “There’s your basic jock group. Less douchey than some other jock groups I’ve run into over the years. Actually a few of them are genuinely nice. Over there is your cheerleader table, they’ve all seen Mean Girls too many times and you want to avoid them.”

“Got it,” Leslie said. “So that table is the nerds,” she continued for Ana, peering around the cafeteria.

“They’re your basic Mathletes,” Ana agreed. “Good in a pinch if you’ve got a big test you don’t
want to fail. Over there is your artsy crowd, your hipsters, your punks, your emo Goths. You know, like everywhere.”

“Who’s that group over there?” Leslie asked, pointing to a table.

“Them? That’s Stilinski’s crew. Uh . . . they’re kind of difficult to pigeonhole.”

“They look kinda like your typical ‘beautiful people’ group,” Leslie said, sounding a little dubious.

“Well, sort of,” Ana said. “But okay. So you see the kid with the brown, spiky hair and the ginormous dog in a blue vest? That’s Stiles. He’s kind of their ringleader. Which seems totally normal until you know that two years ago, he was a complete outcast, like seriously, total loserville. Then his pal Scott, on his right, he started doing great at lacrosse and dating Allison, the brunette next to him, and . . . anyway, suddenly they were sort of popular? And now a bunch of them play lacrosse but Stiles is still a complete dork and he doesn’t even try to hide it.”

“What’s with the dog?” Leslie asked, taking a bit of her apple.

“He’s a service dog,” Ana said. “Actually Stiles is pretty open about that. He has PTSD.”

“What’s that?” Leslie asked.

“Post-traumatic stress disorder. Something . . . bad happened to Stiles.” Ana’s voice took on a subdued tone. “Nobody really knows what. He doesn’t talk about that. It’s funny because he’s pretty chatty and sometimes you can’t get him to shut up but then there are times when you realize you don’t have a clue what’s going on with him.”

“Crazy,” Leslie said. “Okay, who else? The chick in his lap must be his girlfriend, right?”

“Sort of,” Ana said. “That’s Erica. She’s kind of like . . . the village bicycle. I mean, she makes that joke herself. She’s a total slut and completely unashamed of it. We’re all pretty sure Stiles is boning her, but they’re sure as hell not dating. Sometimes you see him around town with this older guy and we think maybe they have a thing? Basically we have no idea what’s going on and Stiles seems to think it’s fun to keep us guessing.”

“Maybe it’s all one big polyamory thing,” Leslie suggested.

“I’ve heard weirder theories,” Ana said, opening a juice box. “Anyway, Scott and Allison are like, an institution, so don’t even bother hitting on either of them. They’ve got rings and shit. They’re going to make beautiful babies.” She gave a wistful little sigh. “And Danny’s gay, but any of the others would be up for grabs if you wanted to give it a try.”

“I dunno, cliques like that . . .” Leslie wrinkled her nose.

“You know, you’d totally expect them to be huge jerks,” Ana agreed, “but they’re really not. I mean, a couple people I know have tried sitting with them at lunch or at games or whatever and said that they’re always really nice and welcoming. But that . . . somehow they have this aura, like, you don’t belong there and you know it, even if they’re being super nice.”

“ Weird,” Leslie said.

“Yeah,” Ana agreed. “They’re not elitist but they’re totally exclusive. The only exception to that rule is Danny. Sometimes he sits with Stiles’ crew and sometimes he sits with the jocks, because his best friend is Jackson, co-captain of the lacrosse team, complete asshole and total dreamboat.” She gestures with a wave of her hand. “But he’s like the only person in the entire high school who does
Leslie finished her apple and tossed the core in the trash can. “Anything else I should know about them?”

Ana hesitated for a moment. “Look, uh . . . you’ve only been in town for like a week, right? So you probably haven’t realized exactly how weird stuff can get around here. But, for the record? If you’re ever somewhere minding your own business and Stiles or one of his crew shows up and tells you to duck, or run, or hide in a closet . . . just do it. And don’t ask questions.”

Leslie looked at Ana with her mouth ajar. “Uh, what?” she said.

“Just . . . trust me,” Ana said. “Oh, hey, there’s the bell! I gotta go. See you later!” She grabbed her backpack and left the cafeteria in a rush. Leslie frowned and looked over at the table where the ‘Stilinski crew’ was sitting. She was surprised to see that Stiles was looking at her, and when she blinked at him, he smiled and lifted his hand in a wave of greeting. Automatically, she waved back, and wondered why it seemed like Stiles had heard exactly what they were talking about.

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“Okay, hustle, hustle!” Finstock shouted. “C’mon, you little ingrates! Faster! I want to feel the hair on my head move from the wind you’re generating!”

“That doesn’t make any sense, Coach, we’re way over here!”

“Shut up, Bilinski, nobody asked you!”

“Yes sir, Coach!”

Finstock shook his head in disgust. “What am I gonna do after those idiots graduate?” he muttered. “Seriously, gonna lose all four of them and Whittemore in the same year, I’m going to be back at the starting block. And it’s hard to go back. I don’t think I’ll be able to do it.”

“You’ll still have me, Coach.”

“Greenberg, you flunked three classes. It’s not something to be proud of.” Finstock raised his voice. “C’mon! I want to see your eyeballs bleeding from the effort you’re putting in!”

“That’s gross, Coach!”

“Shut up, Bilinski!”

The team comes rounding the final curve of the track. Hardly any of them are out of breath, Finstock notes with some pride. He’s got a good team this year. “Okay! Now, as you all know, the game against Merced High is this Saturday! I want you all in top form! So eat lots of protein, don’t overwork yourselves, and no sex, that means you, McCall!”

“Actually, studies have proven that sex before athletics can actually be – ”

“This isn’t science class, Bilinski, keep it to yourself!” Finstock waved them towards the locker rooms. “Now get out of my face!” He shook his head as he headed back to the school. Next year was going to be tough, that was for sure. “What do you think I’d have to do to get them to turn a
couple freshmen before they go?” he asked.

“What, Coach?” Greenberg asked.

“Nothing,” Finstock said, waving him off. “Never mind.” To himself, he just shook his head again and muttered, “Fucking werewolves.”

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Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

Hey, look, a chapter written entirely about an OC! I am so, so sorry.

Written for the friendly folks over on tumblr who wanted to know how Jake Argent was doing. Takes place after The Line in the Sand. ^_^

To the friendly, wonderful person who gave me the idea for the "hunter app".... I can't find your comment because I can't remember which fic you left it on, I am so sorry. Give me a shout and I'll make sure you get credit for your amazing idea.

ETA: Found it! Much thanks to Steve_Ski for the awesome idea. ^_^

Jake’s alarm clock goes off at precisely six fifteen in the morning, and he immediately rolls over and hits the snooze. The snooze button is his favorite feature of his alarm clock. Actually, his alarm clock is his favorite feature of his alarm clock. He’s never had one until now. Before moving in with Chris and Victoria, he was woken every day with a loud rapping at his door and his mother’s shrill, “Get up!” And when Rose said get up, he scrambled out of bed and dove into his clothes as quickly as possible.

There’s a lot he’s never told any of the others, about the way things were in the house he grew up in.

So he could set the clock for six twenty or even six thirty and still be on time to school, but he sets it for six fifteen because he really likes having the time in the morning to relax and lounge in bed for a little while. When the alarm goes off a second time at six twenty-two, he rolls out of bed without issue. Okay, there is some yawning. He enjoys getting up before sunrise about as much as any other teenager.

Chris seems to be the same way, to be honest. Jake never sees him in the morning, but Victoria is always up, dressed, and in the kitchen. Since Allison showers at night, that means he has no competition for the bathroom. He ducks inside and turns on the water.

The quick shower wakes him up the rest of the way. He gets dressed in a T-shirt and loose corduroys and then pushes a brush through his hair. It’s getting kind of long, now. He likes it long. He can pull it back into a little ponytail at the nape of his neck and it doesn’t get in his way.

He’s never been allowed to have long hair before. His mother was always cutting it the second it started to look unruly – which on Jake was pretty much all the time. His hair is curly (neither of his parents have curly hair, so maybe they just don’t understand) and it looks fine short or long but not in between. His mother never cut it short enough for it to look good, so he’s always just had a mop of messy curls on top of his head, getting in his way.

Two weeks previous at breakfast he had pushed his hair out of his face and remarked, “I really should get a haircut.”

Victoria glanced up from her toast and said, “All right.”

“But I don’t want to,” Jake blurted out, before he could think better of the idea.
Another glance, another even, “All right.”

Jake wasn’t sure how to handle that, so he just . . . didn’t say anything. Let it ride. And he started pulling his hair back into the ponytails and nobody said anything about it. Actually, that wasn’t true. A couple of girls at school remarked, “your hair looks cute like that” and he had been stymied for several days over the fact that girls thought anything about him was cute.

“It is, though,” Lydia said two days later, pulling the front half of it up and securing it with a hair-tie. “It looks better long.”

“That’s kind of a girly hairdo,” Jake protested, squirming.

“Tell that to Aragorn, son of Arathorn,” Lydia replied.

“I’m not . . . Aragorn,” Jake said.

“Nobody’s perfect,” Lydia said with a shrug.

Now, looking at himself in the mirror, he draws himself up a little, squares his shoulders, and pulls the front of his hair back. “A day may come when the courage of men fails,” he says, and then laughs at himself. He gets dressed and leaves the bedroom, heading downstairs.

“Good morning, Aunt Victoria,” he says, going into the kitchen. His aunt is standing by the kitchen counter. She looks over, smiles, and says good morning. A bare moment later, the toaster pops and his breakfast appears.

While Stiles is all extravagance and flailing and overdrive in the kitchen, Victoria is the exact opposite, the picture of precision and efficiency. Jake has been living with his aunt and uncle for over six months and he can count the number of times his breakfast hasn’t been ready when he gets downstairs on one hand. Nine times out of ten, his toast will come up within ten seconds of his entrance into the kitchen.

It’s multi-grain today, and he immediately negates the healthiness by smearing butter and honey all over it, then sitting down with a glass of milk.

A year previous, he would have sat in absolute silence, kept his head down, tried to look at Victoria as little as possible. She seemed nice, but then again, Rose could seem nice too, when she was in the mood. He tried not to be noticed. He ate his rye toast without complaint even though he hated rye bread.

It wasn’t that he was afraid of Victoria, precisely. He was wary of her, feeling her out a little at a time, but he was ninety-eight percent sure that she wouldn’t hurt him. It was just that he lived in constant, paralyzing fear that one day Chris and Victoria would wake up and realize what a mistake they had made, taking him in. He woke up with it a lot at first, bad dreams where his mother and father came to get him and punish him for leaving.

They had talked about putting him in counseling, but Chris had said, “Let’s just give him some time,” and so they did. There wasn’t any one defining event, one eureka! moment where he accepted his new life. It came gradually, over weeks and months. Little things made the biggest difference. Chris saying ‘thanks’ when Jake passed him the potatoes. Victoria giving him a few extra dollars in his allowance because he polished the banisters and scrubbed the front hallway floor before company came over. Chris offering to teach him how to drive after he turned sixteen. Victoria asking whether he liked mushrooms on his pizza instead of just ordering without consulting him.

And then, of course, there was Allison, who had gone well above and beyond the call of duty when...
it came to making Jake feel like family. Not just pack, not because her alpha had said so, but family, because she wanted to. Allison, playing video games with him in the evenings and laughing good-naturedly when she loses but never gloating when she wins. Allison, showing him around town so he knew where all the cool shops were. Allison, always encouraging him when he was too nervous or shy to ask Chris or Victoria something, running interference if she had to and never making fun of him for it. Allison e-mailing and texting and skyping with him all the time while she was in Neptune so he didn’t get bored or lonely.

So things got better, and Jake didn’t really notice it, not the way people around him did. By the time winter rolled around, it was natural for him to say ‘pass the salt’ without flinching and look Chris in the eye when they talked and ask Victoria if she wanted him to wipe down the windows and the mirrors or was it just the windows?

And it feels natural to sit there in the morning and munch on his toast while Victoria is doing one of a dozen things in the kitchen, and then stand up and say, “Okay, I’m off to school,” and Victoria says, “Have a good day” like she actually means it.

He doesn’t grab a lunch from the refrigerator, or run to catch the bus. There are certain things that Stiles negotiated for, when he and Chris had the ‘pack or not pack’ discussion. One of them was that Stiles already makes lunches for half the pack anyway, and he’s going to include Jake. And the other was that he’ll get rides to and from school.

Of course, when Allison’s home, which is three or four times a week, he just hitches a ride with her. The other mornings, someone always swings by to pick him up on the way. It’s hardly ever Stiles, because he picks up Erica and Boyd, but Scott will get him if he has the car that day, or Danny or Lydia will because they both live fairly nearby. The awkwardness that Jake originally felt around these people has likewise evaporated. They’re his friends now, even the people he previously would have thought too cool or beautiful to ever notice his existence.

Danny picks him up today, and they chat about computers on the way to school. They’re there about five minutes after seven, which gives them ten minutes before the first bell rings. Jake trots over to say hi to the others. As usual, Stiles is first to greet him, giving him the hand-clasp, back-slap, bro-hug type of thing that Jake has seen the guys in the pack exchange. It’s not exactly a pack greeting, but it’s not exactly the casual greeting two friends would exchange, either.

He had been surprised, at first, that Stiles had actually obeyed Chris’ edict that Jake wouldn’t be joining the pack any time soon. “Give him time to get his feet under himself,” Chris said. “Give him time to decide what he wants out of life.”

Stiles nodded and said that seemed reasonable, given where Jake was coming from. Jake had thought at the time that Stiles was just saying that to placate Chris, and would go right on adopting Jake into his pack. But Stiles hadn’t. Oh, he hadn’t abandoned Jake. He made it very clear that he was there whenever Jake wanted to come over or if he needed to talk. But after that, he backed off and let Jake have some room to settle in.

It took Jake two months to realize that Stiles really did respect Chris Argent every bit as much as he said he did. And not only that, but Stiles respected him. Stiles was giving him time to make the decision for himself. The offer had been made, and it would stand, but it was up to Jake whether or not he ever joined the pack.

So Stiles greets him at school but doesn’t greet him the way he does the others. They chat for a few minutes – not just Jake and Stiles, but the entire pack. Stiles is talking about this project he wants Jake’s help on, getting them all organized for their college applications. Lydia’s done all of hers already, of course, but some of the others are still researching and getting their stuff together. Stiles in
particular is behind, because he’s always so busy with other things. He wants to make pro vs. con lists for the different schools in San Francisco that they’re looking at, and he wants a spreadsheet with who requires what – essays, letters of recommendation, et cetera – and he wants Jake to help him put it together. Not just for him, but for Isaac and Scott and some of the others who are getting overwhelmed by the entire process.

Jake had discovered fairly early on in Beacon Hills that if he has one God-given gift, it’s a talent for organization. He had helped Chris do inventory on his weapons – a not inconsiderable process – and suddenly their basement was more organized than it had ever been in anyone’s life. Everything had neat labels and was grouped with similar items and the things he used most were easily accessible. Chris had looked at Jake like he was from another planet.

When Stiles had found out about that, he had been thrilled, far beyond what Jake himself felt was appropriate. He thought it was probably the world’s lamest superpower, but Stiles didn’t seem to think so. He immediately assigned Jake to help Danny and Allison with a project they’re doing, putting together a list of all the different hunters, their territories, and their attitudes about werewolves and other beasties. Danny’s going to turn it into an app that any werewolf can download. “Safety in numbers is all well and good,” Stiles said when he told Jake about the project, “but safety in well-informed-ness is even better.”

“I don’t think that’s a word,” Jake replied.

“Cry about it,” Stiles said cheerfully.

For obvious reasons, he doesn’t share any classes with the rest of the pack. They’re seniors now, and he’s a sophomore. But he’s made some friends. He’s shy and uncertain but gradually gravitates towards the other geeks and nerds who share similar interests. To be honest, it helps that everyone knows he’s Allison’s cousin and friends with Stiles. The pack is viewed somewhat like superheroes by the lowerclassmen, and so they tend to look at Jake in awe, as if he’s some sort of advanced groupie.

The teachers like him, too, because he’s quiet and respectful and does his work. He’s smart enough, he supposes. Not a genius like Lydia, but he’s diligent and a good listener, which gets him further than a lot of his classmates. He starts the day with math, then goes to history. After that is Spanish class. He’s thrilled to be in Spanish. His father insisted he take French, because he’s an Argent, but he wanted Spanish because he thinks it’ll be more practical in the future. Chris and Victoria clearly don’t care what language class he takes, as long as he gets good grades in it.

After that he has study hall, which he has no idea what to do with. He got a job as a library aide because the idea of fifty free minutes in school was so foreign to him. The librarians fuss over him a lot, and he likes being there. Then he has chemistry. Everyone hates Mr. Harris, who’s perpetually grouchy, but Jake loves science so chemistry is one of his favorite classes.

Then he has lunch, and he has actual friends to sit with, something that’s never happened before. Sometimes he goes over to their houses after school, like a normal teenager, which is always novel for him. Then it’s English, and his last class on this particular day is gym. They’re playing basketball. He’s terrible at it. He couldn’t make a basket to literally save his life.

They’re playing three-on-three, and Jake hangs on the outskirts and tries to do as little damage to his fellow teammates as possible. This is a strategy that works well for him until a rogue ball from another court smacks him in the face. His glasses go flying off and hit the ground about ten feet away. “Aw, shit!” he says, holding one hand to the side of his face.

“Sorry, Jake!” another teenager comes trotting over. “You okay?”
“Hurts like a bitch,” Jake says.

Someone else retrieves his glasses. “Uh . . .” he says, handing them over. The frames are bent out of shape, the joint of the stem at a strange angle.

“Oh, man,” Jake says. “That’s the third pair I’ve broken.”

“Sorry,” the first kid says again, wincing.

Finstock has jogged over at this point and gives the kid a cuff on the shoulder. “Keep track of your balls!” he says, and everyone giggles. “Go sit on the bleachers, Argent.”

“Oh, right,” Jake says, feeling stupid. He goes back into the locker room and changes. Since gym is his last class of the day, there’s really no point in sticking around. He decides to get a head start on his homework. The locker rooms aren’t exactly a place where he can do that, so he goes to sit in the library. There’s still about twenty minutes of school left, and it’s too cold to sit outside. Normally he would need a pass, but the librarians let him in since they know him.

He’s been there about five minutes when a girl he knows from his history and Spanish classes walks over. She glances around nervously, then says, “Hey, uh, Jake. Can I ask you something?”

“Oh, right,” Jake says. He blinks up at her owlishly, trying to identify her without squinting. “Uh . . . Joy, right?”

“Yeah. Oh! Where are your glasses?”

“They broke. Again,” Jake says. “What’s up?”

Joy chews on her lip and looks around for a minute. “Um. You, uh, you’re friends with Stilinski and his crew, right?” she asks, and he blinks and nods at her. “Can I tell you something that’s going to sound crazy?”

“Sure,” Jake says.

“I was walking home from school yesterday, right?” she says. “And I dropped my phone and it fell, like, right on the sewer grate. So I go to pick it up and I’m moving really slow because I didn’t want to knock it in. And then, I swear to God, I saw eyes down in the sewer. Looking up at me.”

“Jesus,” Jake says. “What’d you do?”

“I grabbed my phone and ran away like a little girl,” Joy says, laughing nervously. “But, I mean . . . it’s Beacon Hills, right? And weird shit happens . . . so I knew I should tell somebody but I knew I couldn’t tell my parents, and I’d tell Stiles or somebody but they’re like . . . kinda larger than life and scary sometimes? But you’re not, uh, scary.”

“You really don’t need to be scared of them,” Jake says. “But I’ll tell him. What color were they?”

“Kind of greenish,” she says, and Jake asks how big they were, and he takes some notes to give to Stiles after school. Then the bell rings and he offers to give Joy a ride home without thinking about it, because she’s obviously nervous. Joy turns six different shades of pink and says okay, so Jake texts Allison to let her know.
Allison greets Joy with her usual level of sunshine and then gives Jake this knowing sort of look, which makes Jake turn even pinker than Joy. They give her a ride home, and then Allison drives them back to the den. She’s going to go practice her archery, she says, and Jake goes into the house. Fortunately, he has a spare pair of glasses there. Chris has gotten him several, since his glasses seem to be perpetually breaking. He still can’t believe that Chris hadn’t killed him when he had broken the second pair; he had had to have Allison tell him about it because he had been so afraid of Chris’ reaction. He puts the spares on and dives into the refrigerator without a second thought, to assemble a sandwich. He’s a growing boy, literally. He’s grown three inches in the seven months since Chris and Victoria took him in.

It’s a little quieter than usual. Stiles and several of the others are at lacrosse practice. Boyd is at home taking care of his siblings, and Erica went with him. That leaves Lydia and Mac as the only ones in the den with him, since Allison has gone outside to practice. They’re both in the study, although Jake doubts either of them are doing homework. Jake joins them there and pulls out his own work. Since he knows Stiles is busy, he asks Lydia about the green-eyed sewer monster.

“Could’ve been a grindylow,” she says, “or a kappa. Let me pull up the bestiary . . .”

They wind up getting involved in a two hour discussion of different folk tales about water sprites, and how most people assume that they were invented by concerned parents who wanted to keep their children away from water they could drown in. Jake does his math and his chemistry homework while they talk. Kappas aren’t really anything to worry about, Lydia says, but grindylows can be nasty and that seems more likely to her.

“I live in Harry Potter,” Mac announces to the ceiling, and the others laugh.

Stiles gets home with the others in a rush of noise and enthusiasm. Lydia and Jake brief him on their conclusions while he puts dinner together. He nods along with this and says they’ll look into it in the morning before school, or possibly during school if that becomes necessary. “I’m not wandering around sewers in the dark,” he says, which seems very sensible to Jake. The sun is already setting; it’s just after five.

Jake finishes up his homework while Stiles makes a gigantic pile of taco meat, and then dumps a bunch of taco fixings on the counters so everyone can help themselves. He talks to Boyd about UC East Bay’s great education program and says to make sure he talks to at least two teachers about getting letters of recommendation. There’s a good scholarship program that he thinks both he and Isaac will qualify for. Similarly, he’s found a computer programming based scholarship that might help Mac.

After they’ve eaten, Allison says she’s going home for the evening. She’s agreed to help her mother with some things around the house. Lydia offers to come along and help. “Why are you always so eager to help Allison do her chores?” Jake asks her.

“Because Allison’s father is a silver fox,” Mac says, and several of the girls burst out into giggles.

“I don’t know what that means,” Jake says.

“Probably all for the best,” Stiles says, stifling laughter. “Although he totally is.”

“There you go on the Kinsey Scale again,” Derek remarks, pressing his temple against Stiles’ cheek and nuzzling his hair.

“What can I say? Sexuality is fluid.”
Jake decides to withdraw from the conversation before he can get scarred for life. Allison is still laughing and Lydia is giving fake “well, I never!” protests that she clearly doesn’t mean at all, as they head out to the car. This doesn’t stop her from saying, “Hi, Mr. Argent!” with a bounce in her voice that’s only present around certain people. Now that Jake is thinking about it, most of these people are attractive older men.

“So guess what, Dad,” Allison says, grinning, “there’s a girl in Jake’s class who has a crush on him.”

“What? No!” Jake protests. “She just wanted to talk to me about a sewer monster! That’s not the same thing!”

Allison is still giggling. “Is that why she was giving you moogly eyes while we drove her home?”

“There – there were no moogly eyes!” Jake protests.

“What’s her name?” Chris asks, glancing over from where he’s unloading the dishwasher.

“Joy,” Jake says, flushing pink.

“You liiiii-ike her,” Allison sing-songs. “You should ask her to the Valentine’s Day dance next month. She’d say yes. A girl can tell.”

“Maybe,” Jake says, mostly under his breath. Allison and Lydia high-five.

Chris shakes his head a little, although he looks more amused than anything else. “Got a sec, Jake?” he asks, and Jake immediately goes stiff and anxious, despite his best efforts. “Don’t look so worried. It’s nothing bad.”

“Oh,” Jake says, as Allison and Lydia make themselves scarce. “Uh, sure, yeah. What’s up?”

“We got this in the mail today,” Chris says, taking out an envelope. It’s addressed to Jake in neat block handwriting, and it’s been opened. “I’m sorry that I invaded your privacy, but I wanted to make sure it wasn’t anything that would hurt you. It’s a letter from your brother.”

“Oh,” Jake says again. He takes it, but he doesn’t open it for a minute. He knows that Julien went to check in on his brother, that Julien himself explained why Jake had gone to live with Chris and Victoria. But he also knows that Philip was always his parents’ favorite, and that Julien can’t watch him all the time. God knows what Henry and Rose are telling him now that Jake is gone. But after a minute, he gets his hands to stop shaking long enough to open the letter. It’s written very neatly, on lined notebook paper, in the same block printing that he recognizes as his brother’s.

‘Dear Jake,

Dad says I shouldn’t write you so I’m giving this to Uncle Julien. He says he’ll mail it for me. I hope you get it. Uncle Julien seems nice. Is it really true that you met the alpha in Beacon Hills? Uncle Julien says that you did and that he’s a good guy. Can werewolves be good guys? Uncle Julien says yes but Dad says no (but Uncle Julien seems smarter than Dad and he’s been more places).

I wish you could come home. I’m going to be in the school play this year. I only have two lines. ‘That seems pretty serious’ and ‘I didn’t know that!’ I want to be an actor when I grow up. I think it would be fun to be on TV. Mom says I can’t be, though. She says me being a hunter is even more important now that you’re gone. That doesn’t make sense because you were never good at that stuff anyway. I like that stuff, though. I’m going to be in a karate tournament next month. Mom says I’d better win.
In art class we’re learning about animals so I drew a picture of a giraffe for you. I hope you like it. Maybe I can come visit you soon. Uncle Julien says he might take me over the summer if Dad lets him.

Love,

Philip’

Jake puts the letter down and knuckles a few tears out of his eyes. Chris gives him a few moments, then says, “‘You okay?’”

“Yeah, I . . . I think so,” Jake says. “I’m really glad he doesn’t hate me.”

Chris looks about as uncomfortable with this as he usually does whenever topics involving emotion come up. He gives Jake a clap on the shoulder and says, “If you want to write back, Julien said he would make sure that Philip gets the letter.”

“Okay,” Jake says. “Thanks.” Not that he has any idea what to write. He doesn’t want to get his little brother in trouble, and he can’t even imagine what his parents would do if they found a letter from him in Philip’s stuff. He wishes he could send one a la Mission Impossible, where it would self-destruct after reading.

After a few moments of awkward silence, Chris clears his throat and says, “Come give me a hand in the basement. I have some stuff I need to get put away.”

“Okay,” Jake says, and follows him downstairs.

“Homework done?” Chris asks.

“Yeah,” Jake says, and waits – he always waits – for Chris to say he wants to check and make sure. But Chris never does. He helps Chris sort out boxes of ammunition and then Chris gives him a friendly shove and tells him to go do ‘whatever’, like he was last a teenager in the Ice Age and has no idea what Jake does with his time.

What Jake does, usually, is play computer games or video games. Danny’s been teaching him some computer programming. He does that for a little while, watches the newest Supernatural episode, plays some World of Warcraft, and heads down to the kitchen for a snack. Dinner was four hours previous. He eats a sandwich while he plays on his phone.

“Don’t stay up too late,” Victoria says, as she heads upstairs.

“I won’t,” Jake says, and he doesn’t. He’s in bed by ten. It was, after all, a busy day.

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Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

For the person who requested badass! Victoria, since she doesn’t have a lot of screen time in this series but still manages to be intimidating every time she shows up.

This is so silly and stupid. XD

Anything worth doing, according to Victoria Argent, is worth doing right. Whether that’s marriage or motherhood, werewolf hunting or werewolf helping, or making a chicken pot pie, if she’s involved, all Is will be dotted and Ts will be crossed properly. She’s never missed a trick in her life. She’s raised her daughter to an impressive adulthood, she maintains a spotless house, she’s a member of a book club, a recipe club, and the PTA.

She could buy premade pie crusts, but she never has before and she isn’t about to start now. She’s rolling out the dough while she listens to Franz Liszt. She stops to clean up the kitchen between every step. While the pie crusts are in the oven, she starts chopping the onions and the carrots and celery. The recipe calls for two cups ‘frozen mixed vegetables, thawed’. She had gotten it from a young newlywed at their recipe club. Victoria had given her a look that had apparently frightened her so badly that she had never turned up again.

She pours herself another glass of wine while the onions are sautéing. The flour, broth, and milk that will be added have already been neatly measured and are sitting on the counter, waiting to be added at the proper time.

The pie crust has just come out of the oven and has been set down to cool when she hears a noise behind her.

She knows she’s alone in the house. Allison has . . . pack things. Victoria prefers not to think about that too deeply. She can’t do anything about the fact that her daughter is in a werewolf pack. She raised her daughter to be an independent person capable of making her own choices. Victoria may not like it, but over the years she’s come not to hate it, either. And she’s immensely proud of her daughter, who’s a fighter in every possible way.

It’s possible that it could be Chris. He had a sale to attend, a shipment of weaponry being delivered from his company to NAS Lemoore. He had departed around noon and said he would be home in time for dinner, so he was due back shortly. But she hadn’t heard his car, and it was very unlikely he would come into the house without announcing himself. He knows better than to sneak up on any member of his family.

She turns smoothly, picking up the knife off the counter as she moves, and finds herself facing what looks like a zombie.

She makes a number of observations in quick succession. The first is that the zombie is nobody she knows, and seems freshly dead. Seventy-two hours, if she’s not mistaken, from the looks of their face and their fingernails. The second is that the warding system they have set up around their house
apparently only reacts to living intruders, which is a problem they will clearly have to fix. She doesn’t have to wonder how it got inside; she had left the back porch door open, as it’s a lovely day.

The third is that the zombie is clearly not friendly, as it’s reaching for her. She calmly rams the knife all the way through its eye socket. It pitches backwards onto the floor, twitching and oozing. She’s surprised that it doesn’t smell. She would have noticed a smell. Since magic is obviously involved, she assumes that this is part of it. Hadn’t Chris said something a week or two back about a sorcerer they had run out of town? Clearly, he was back for round two.

Now, the important question was, was the zombie going to get up? Victoria had never dealt with one before. Zombies didn’t occur naturally; they were always created by a sorcerers. The strength and durability of the zombie depended on the power of the spell. So it was perfectly possible that a zombie could get up after being struck by a mortal wound. But it was also perfectly possible that it wouldn’t.

This one didn’t. So, Victoria assumed, durability was not something that had been a concern of the sorcerer. That made sense, given that she could hear more noise in the hallway. Clearly, the sorcerer had gone for quantity over quality.

She stayed where she was and waited for them to approach her. Her back was protected, up against the counter, and she had a variety of weapons at her disposal. There was no need to go into the hallway, where she would be vulnerable. She could try to get into the living room and shut the porch door, but they would probably only break it down. No, she was better off here, where she could bottleneck them.

Two more appeared in the doorway. They shuffled along awkwardly. The primary asset of a zombie as an attack dog was that it didn’t feel pain and was difficult to kill, and they were usually stronger than the average human.

Of course, Victoria Argent was anything but average.

When the first one reached her, she stabbed the tines of a meat fork into its neck. It gargled and staggered backwards, and she smoothly picked up the rolling pin she had been using on the pie crusts and slammed it into its face. It continued stumbling, and the other zombie had reached her now. She redirected her attention, smashing the empty wine bottle over its head. It went down like a lead balloon, so she went back to the first, beating it into a pulp with the rolling pin with unruffled efficiency.

By the time she was done with that, another was in the doorway. Victoria picked up a can of Sterno and a lighter and, calmly and rationally, set it on fire.

While it was still a smoldering heap, she realized that her vegetables were done cooking. She glanced around, saw nothing else of an immediate threat, and turned back to the stove to add the flour, then the milk and broth.

A fifth zombie shuffled into the kitchen, and Victoria held up an imperious finger. “Excuse me,” she said, “this is a time-sensitive portion of the recipe.” She continues to stir until the mixture is becoming thick and bubbly, while the zombie stands in the doorway, seemingly confused as to how to proceed. Victoria adds the chicken and turns the heat to low. “Thank you, where were we?” she asks, and kicks a kitchen chair across the room. It hits the zombie in the knees, hard enough that it falls forwards. She steps out of the way and yanks a drawer open. The zombie’s face smacks right into it with an audible crack and it went down.

Victoria stepped over it and went back to cooking. She’s just moving the mixture into the pie plate
when one last zombie appears. She scrapes the last of it out and then whirls, hitting the zombie in the face with the still hot pan so hard that she feels the vibration all the way up to her elbow.

Then she folds the pie crust closed and places it back in the oven. When no other zombies appear, she goes into the living room, looks around, shuts the back door, and locks it. She retrieves her favorite gun and pours herself another glass of wine from a new bottle.

Chris arrives home about ten minutes later. He looks around and says, “I take it that you had an eventful afternoon.”

“Apparently, the warding system Dr. Deaton set up for us only triggers for living intruders,” Victoria says.

Chris refills her wine glass. “I’ll have to talk to him about that.” He doesn’t ask if she’s all right, but he does run a hand down her back as if checking to make sure she’s still there, warm and solid at their kitchen table.

“You should have just enough time to get them disposed of before the pie comes out of the oven,” Victoria says.

“Okay,” Chris says, and wonders how much she would hurt him if he brought a wheelbarrow into the house. Probably a lot. He reaches down and picks up the first corpse. “Oh, your knife,” he said, jerking it out of the zombie’s eye. “Probably want to disinfect that or something.”

“Yes, that would probably be wise,” Victoria agrees.

Chris does indeed have just enough time to remove the corpses from their kitchen and clean up before dinner is ready. The chicken pot pie is delicious.
A collection of supernatural outsider POV scenes by the request of a bunch of people on tumblr. =D

Takes place after Thicker Than Water.

It’s rare that more than one werewolf pack will ever run into each other, because most packs prefer to stay on their own territory. But werewolves are still people, as well, and sometimes they go to college or change jobs or get married. Sometimes packs collide and sometimes they combine, or sometimes they’ll exchange a member or two, like an electron being passed between two atoms as they meet.

It’s more common in families, where siblings will get married and join other packs, sometimes combining into one larger pack but more often creating a group of packs with strong bonds together. And when those packs have any sort of reunion, exchanging rumors is usually the first thing that starts happening. When one of those packs has friends in California . . .

“Oh, you know what I heard?” Manuel asked, carding his fingers through his mate’s fur. “I heard that there was this incubus that visited Beacon Hills and tried to kick up a fuss, demanded a sacrifice, et cetera. He said he could give them either four virgins or twelve non-virgins. And so the boy in red said, ‘tell you what, you can only have one person, but I’ll let you have a pack member.’”

“He gave a pack member to an incubus?” someone asked in a horrified tone.

“Yeah, and she – ” Manuel is practically laughing too hard to talk. “She just climbed onto his dick and kept going until she wore him out.”

“No way,” Fiona says. “You can’t do that.”

“But she did!” Manuel says. “She had sex with a sex demon until it got tired and begged for mercy.”

“That’s nothing compared to this story,” Gracie chimes in. “Someone told me that they managed to cure a kanima. Not kill it but cure it, and add it to their pack.”

“What the fuck is a kanima?” her brother Chuck asks.

“That’s exactly what I said!” she says. “I guess that it’s some sort of lizard monster that can happen when an alpha bites someone who’s got issues. And most people say that if you find one, you have to kill it, that there’s no other way. But the boy in red has that thing about not killing people who haven’t done anything to deserve it, and he found some way to get it in touch with its inner werewolf, I guess.”

“That is some crazy shit,” Manuel says, shaking his head and laughing.

“You know, I talked to Raz, and he said he had to cross through their territory about six months
ago,” Sheila says. “So he checks in with them, and the boy in red is just like ‘by the way do you like almonds because I just made eight dozen cookies and I don’t think I can eat them all’.”

Everyone bursts into laughter. “He can’t be real,” Fiona says.

“I think he must actually be two dudes,” Gracie says. “Like, he’s secretly twins and nobody knows it, or he’s got split personality disorder. Because half the stories are him being one stone-cold motherfucker, and the other half are like Betty Crocker on steroids.”

“Hey, yeah, that might be it,” Chuck says with enthusiasm.

“Like there are two human alphas?” Fiona says. “I’ll go with split personality disorder. That actually makes some sense, right? Like if he’s normally a nice, easy-going guy, but when shit goes down, he’s got this dark personality that takes over.”

“Dude,” Manuel says, “this isn’t a TV show. Maybe he’s just a nice, easy-going guy, but when shit goes down, he kicks its ass?”

“And then makes cookies,” Sheila says, and everyone laughs.

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Marisol has worked at The Alpha’s Den as a waitress and undercover bouncer for five years, and she’s gotten used to the clientele. Ninety-five percent of the people who come in are normals, occult fanatics, melodramatic teenagers dressed all in black. Every once in a while, someone wanders in who has real talent. Those people generally keep to themselves.

The last five percent is a thriving community of bartering, information-trading, and gossip between the werewolves and nymphs and vampires and other supernatural creatures who come in occasionally. She never spreads the rumors herself, but she enjoys listening to them. It’s a good way to hear great stories.

The past few evenings, a kid who’s still old enough to get carded keeps coming in and hanging around the long tables by the fireplace, spinning tales. He’s on the tall side, lanky, with spiked brown hair and eyes that sometimes shine red in the firelight. He’s not an alpha, she knows that, unless he’s damned good at hiding his presence. So either he’s something else, or he’s got a neat pair of contact lenses. In this bar, either could be true.

He speaks a lot of languages. She’s heard him chatting with a variety of people in English, Spanish, and Portuguese, all of which are fairly common in Brazil. But she’s also heard some French and something she thinks is Dutch, and other, more foreign languages that she can’t recognize.

At the moment he’s speaking Portuguese, her native language, embellishing on a story that she heard him tell the locals the previous night. He’s talking to a group of enraptured faeries about someone called the boy in red. The epithet seems vaguely familiar to her.

“So then,” the young man says, glancing up and nodding in thanks as Marisol puts his refill down next to him, “the boy in red took all that power that Stone was using against the town, and he turned it back on him.”

“No,” several of the faeries gasp. Marisol gives them a glance and smiles slightly. Pixies love good
stories.

“What happened?” one of them pipes up.

“Well, it ripped the murderous fiend apart, of course,” the young man says. “Tore apart his mind. Nobody knows what happened to him after that. He was never seen again . . .”

“Ooooooh,” the pixies chorus in unison.

Marisol shakes her head and smiles slightly, going about her business. It’s nearly an hour later before she’s in that part of the bar again. She tends to be needed more towards the front; the back is always quieter. The young man is still there, although the pixies are asleep in a clump in the corner. Now he’s talking with a willowy old woman.

“Did that really happen?” she’s asking as Marisol refills the stranger’s drink again.

“Sure it did. The spell can’t work without the person’s real name, right?”

“But they knew his real name,” she protests.

“Yes, but they didn’t know his Real Name,” the stranger says, in a way that emphasizes the capital letters. “Here, look at this,” he adds, and scribbles a strange combination of mostly consonants down on a napkin. “If you were trying to do a spell with that name, would you know how to pronounce it?”

“I suppose not,” the woman agrees. “So he really got away from a bunch of faeries?”

“Sure. But that’s nothing compared to what happened at the Conclave . . .”

About an hour later, Marisol heads back over to find the young man by himself, staring pensively at the fire with a slight smile on his face. “Settle up, stranger,” she says. “It’s closing time.”

“Of course.” The man stands up, pulls out his wallet, and pays for his drinks.

“So how do you know all those stories?” Marisol asks. “About the boy in red.”

“Oh, he’s a dear friend of mine,” the stranger says, his smile growing wider. “I like to help improve his reputation by spreading the rumors. Fanning the flames, as it were.”

“Well, you’ve done a good enough job of that,” Marisol says, tucking the money into her belt. The young man turns, eyes glinting momentarily crimson as the light catches them, and heads towards the bar’s exit. She has a strange feeling that she won’t see him again. “Hey, what’s your name?”

“My name?” He half-turns back, then says, “You know, I didn’t have one for the longest time. But you can call me Ian.”

~ ~ ~ ~

Wilkins knocks on the door of his lieutenant’s office. He’s a twenty-year veteran of the FBI, and he has a reputation for taking absolutely no bullshit from anybody. He solved the case of the Cleveland Strangler and has worked on half a dozen other high profile cases. That’s what people know about him.
What people don’t know about him is that cases that go into his department sometimes don’t come out again.

“Finished up with that Beacon Hills report?” he asks his right hand man, who is actually a woman named Anita, short, stocky, and with nerves of steel. She had transferred into his department two years previous and immediately worked her way up into the position right below him. He’s extremely fond of her in an entirely professional sort of way.

Anita looks up and tucks a red hair behind her ear. “Yeah. But it’s nothing to write home about it.” She shoves a folder towards him. “Matt Daehler. Eighteen, human, serial killer, solved, dead.”

Wilkins frowns. “Just . . . a human serial killer?”

“That’s exactly what I said, but yes,” Anita says. “I had a detailed discussion with Sheriff Stilinski about it. He held a grudge over something that happened a few years ago. All the killings were done with mundane means, and he got killed when he tried to take the sheriff’s family hostage and demand they erase the evidence of his involvement.”

“That’s . . . not what I had expected,” Wilkins admitted.

Anita gives him a wry smile. “Work with the zebras long enough, and you sometimes overlook the horses.”

“Didn’t the sheriff’s son end up in the hospital again, though?” Wilkins says. “That can’t be a coincidence.”


“Huh.” Wilkins chews on that for a few moments. “Okay. File it.”

“Done and done,” she says, taking the folder back. “Oh, on that subject, though, there might be one hitch. The field agent who got sent in, Rafael McCall? He seems to have gotten a bee in his bonnet about how Peter Hale might still be alive, and he’s determined to track him down. Now, in the long run this might not be a big deal, because McCall also behaved terribly and harassed a bunch of people and he’s getting busted down to janitor, probably, but he doesn’t seem the type to let it go.”

Wilkins grimaces. “Well, he isn’t going to find him, so I suppose there isn’t any harm in letting him look.”

“He won’t find him living,” Anita says. “That doesn’t mean he won’t find him.”

Wilkins chews this over. That’s always the bitch about supernatural cases. People who can’t handle the truth start pushing their noses in, and then he’s the one who has to make hard decisions. “I take it that you’ve got a suggestion.”

“Thought we might call in a specialist. Someone who can make sure that he forgets all about Peter Hale.”

“Do it,” Wilkins says. “Say, when you talked to Sheriff Stilinski, did you happen to ask him about my offer?”

“I didn’t need to,” Anita says, amused. “He said, without my prompting, ‘and tell your boss that the answer is still no. I’m needed here.’”
“Figures,” Wilkins says. “Damn, it’s hard to get good help.”

Amused, Anita says, “Thanks, boss.”

“You know what I mean.” Wilkins picks up his jacket. “I’m out for the day. Call me if you need anything.”

“Will do.”

~ ~ ~ ~

“But you were at the Conclave, right?” Ashley says. “So you actually saw all of this happen. You know, presuming that it actually did happen.”

“It did,” Lucy “Wednesday” Arnelle replies, not looking up from what she’s typing. “I don’t understand why people treat it like it’s some sort of myth. It wasn’t that big a deal.”

“Wasn’t that big – ” several werewolves blink at her. “He got up in front of the most dangerous hunters in the world and told them to kiss his ass. How is that not a big deal?”

“No, he didn’t,” Wednesday says evenly. “Everyone blows it out of proportion. He didn’t tell them to kiss his ass. He told them that werewolves are people too.”

“That’s . . . basically the same thing as telling them to kiss his ass,” Ashley says, and several of the other werewolves nod solemnly.

Wednesday sighs and finally looks up from her laptop. “It wasn’t going to come down to a fight and he knew it. He was in public, in a hotel convention room packed with people, at least a quarter of whom would’ve taken badly to someone else pulling a gun. Plus there was a police presence. Anyone who wanted to start something knew that it would end with a bloodbath. Not everyone is a quick, accurate shot. In a setting like that, they would go for a torso shot rather than a head shot, and I’m sure he was wearing a vest. People talk about this like he just went crazy and started screaming in a room full of hunters, but he didn’t. He planned it all out. It was a calculated risk.”

“Sounds like you’ve got a crush, Lucy-Loo,” the boy sitting behind her says, and reaches out to poke her in the ribs.

Wednesday turns to give the boy an icy stare. “Touch me again and you’ll lose a finger, Calvin.”

“Man, we are never getting to second base,” he replies cheerfully, and several of the werewolves start to snicker. Calvin ‘Sketch’ Maguire is, technically, Wednesday’s boyfriend. She had spoken to the alpha of the local pack about the possibility of setting up a permanent alliance with his pack, and given him a list of criteria for her theoretical mate. Sketch did not meet a single item on that list. She asked for someone her age or older (Sketch was a year younger) who was preferably still in school (Sketch had dropped out of high school at the age of fourteen) who had been turned with consent (Sketch had been bitten by a rogue alpha when he was eight) and a number of other criteria, including a non-smoker. Sketch had taken up smoking just to make sure he didn’t meet a single item on her list, then asked her out on a date. She told him to fuck off. Their relationship was, to put it mildly, a tempestuous one.

Wednesday ignores his commentary. “And it isn’t like it didn’t earn him enemies. It did. Like what
happened in Oregon this past winter.”

“We’re not supposed to know about that,” the alpha, an older man named Ray, reminds her.

This clearly doesn’t bother Wednesday. “My point is just that if he’s trying to start a hunter civil war, he’s doing a damned good job. And I’m worried. Martin Drake’s been nipping at my God damned heels lately. He keeps sending me letters about how he’s sure that covering all this territory is ‘difficult’ for me and wouldn’t I rather be in school or going out on dates. Probably because he’s never met the eligible bachelors around here.”

“You think he’s going to try to take over your territory?” Ray asks, ignoring Sketch as he mimes a shot to the heart.

“That’s what he’s angling for,” Wednesday says. “I’ve got Julien Argent on my south border and he’s a nice guy, and the Winchesters on my west have too much territory to worry about trying to get a hold of mine. Henry Argent’s to my north and he’s just a fucking idiot. But Drake . . . he isn’t from a hunting family, so sometimes the others give him shit, and he’s an ambitious asshole. Oh, and he also has a teenaged son about my age. Because of course he does.”

“You want I should work him over for ya?” Sketch asks.

Wednesday just gives him a withering look. “If he finds out that I chose to try to forge an alliance with the local pack to cement my hold on my territory, rather than deciding to share with him, he won’t be pleased.”

“You give a fuck what he thinks?” Ashley asks. “We’ve got the legendary boy in red on our side, remember?”

At this, Wednesday just sighs and goes back to her computer. She doesn’t like asking other people for help, and part of her agreement with Ray was that she would keep other hunters out of their territory. She doesn’t want to have to call Stiles, or anybody, to keep up her end of the bargain.

“Hey,” Sketch says quietly, leaning forward to nuzzle at the back of her neck. “It’s gonna be okay. We’ll work it out.”

Wednesday tilts her head back and smiles at him. “Yeah,” she says. “I know.”

~ ~ ~ ~

Most supernatural conventions are booked under rational, boring names that no sane person would ever want to attend. They don’t advertise and tickets can only be bought through specific, trusted sources. The annual PASTA con (Psychological and Sociological Teaching Advances) was no exception. It was a popular convention, though, booked with thousands of visitors, over a hundred of whom were currently sitting in a lecture hall, listening to a woman speak.

“PTSD is an insidious disease under any circumstances, but particularly troublesome when focused around supernatural events,” the woman said. A sign on the door labeled the lecture as ‘The Treatment of PTSD Under Extraordinary Circumstances’ and named the lecturer as Dr. Gwen Mulroney. “The problem is twofold. First of all, the patient’s ingrained inability to accept what happened. Someone who was carjacked or raped or seen battle in Afghanistan knows that their experiences were real. To a certain extent, they will self-validate. People who have suffered
supernatural trauma doubt their own experiences. They ‘know’ that werewolves and vampires don’t exist, so they question themselves. This causes them to question their reaction, which can cause a downward spiral.

“The second problem comes from the same source, and that’s isolation. Even if the person is confident in their experiences – either through outside validation or their own memories – there’s often nobody they can talk to about it. They think ‘anybody I told about this would think I was crazy’. And, of course, they’re quite often correct. Furthering this problem is the psychological community’s inability to direct these people to the correct counselors and support services, since so many of our own do not acknowledge these very real problems. This is why identifying people with supernatural trauma is so important . . .”

The talk lasts about an hour, and she takes half an hour of questions afterwards. Then there’s a luncheon, where Gwen sits at a table with two other psychologists, a social worker, and a psychiatrist. “An interesting talk as always, Dr. Mulroney,” the social worker says. “Do you have any advice on the placement of children who have lost their parents to supernatural causes?”

“Well, placement with a family familiar with supernatural issues is always a good idea, though it might not be feasible,” Gwen says, and is drawn into a lengthy discussion. “It would really be quite helpful to have a directory,” she says, several minutes later. “Word of mouth and references really aren’t enough anymore, given the population.”

“Oh, hey,” a doctor says, looking up. “Did you hear about that new app that someone put out, that offers information on all the hunters?”

“I haven’t,” the social worker says.

“It’s set up,” the doctor says, and he starts laughing. “It’s set up like Yelp. Like, there’s a brief summary and then people can leave reviews. That say things like ‘I dealt with this hunter in 2010 and he was a total dick about the whole werewolf thing’ and then I read one that said ‘Just came and chased an ogre out of my house, 10/10 would use again’.”

“Oh God,” Gwen says, letting her eyes fall closed.

“Where did it come from?” the social worker asks.

“Nobody’s sure. It’s free, but you can only get to it if someone sends it to you. It’s not on any of the lists or anything. Popular theory is that the Boy in Red put it out, because of some choice words spoken about a few hunters everyone knows he’s dealt with. But if it’s his, he didn’t put his name on it. Which was probably smart of him. There are a lot of hunters who are not happy about its existence.”

“Shocking,” Gwen murmurs.

“Now there’s someone I’d love to do a case study on,” a psychologist at the table chimes in. “Hey, you’re from around there, right, Dr. Mulroney? Isn’t he somewhere near Fresno?”

“I believe he’s a few hours north or east of Fresno,” Gwen says. “I’m not sure exactly.”

“Sure would be interesting to be that guy’s therapist,” the doctor says.

“Yes,” Gwen says, “I’m sure it certainly would be.”
Tomasz glances over at his wife and then sighs before finishing off his drink. Only Milena, he thinks, could somehow sit down at a table full of faerie prostitutes and make herself welcome. They had run into the group as they had entered the casino, and she had whispered, not at all quietly, “Look, Tomasz, nymphs!”

“Some of us are succubi, actually,” one of the young ladies replied, and the next thing Tomasz knew, he was sitting in a casino bar while his wife gossips with the young ladies about recent events in and around the country.

“That’s my grandson!” he hears her exclaim proudly.

Tomasz orders another drink.

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The corner table at the Roadhouse is getting a little loud, but between the music from the jukebox and the people playing pool and darts, nobody really notices. It’s common enough for arguments or fights to break out when a lot of hunters gathered in one place, and there were always a lot of hunters gathered at the Roadhouse.

“All I’m saying is that it’s bullshit,” Theo says. “Everyone makes it sound like this Stilinski is some sort of saint just because he doesn’t hit first. Okay, he might not start fights, but he sure as hell finishes them. Everyone who’s trespassed on his territory has wound up with a serious case of dead.”

“So what?” Nori asks, quaffing her beer. “Are we supposed to be upset that he killed Sebastian Stone? Jesus, we’d been trying to do that for over two decades.”

“I’m not upset,” Theo says. “I’m just pointing out that he doesn’t exactly wear a halo.”

“No body said that,” Lin points out. “They just said that he doesn’t go around killing people without provocation.”

“We’re supposed to give out medals for that now?” Tabitha asks. “Pretty sure we don’t give out points just for not killing people.”

“But we take points away for defending himself?” Nori retorts. “Let’s say Sebastian Stone came into your town and started picking fights. You’d expect us to get pissed off because you put him down?”

“It’s different,” Tabitha argues.

“How is it different?” Lin asks, arching his eyebrows.

“He – he’s a werewolf,” Tabitha says.

“Well, putting aside the fact that he technically isn’t because there’s no point in splitting hairs,” Nori says, “so fucking what? Why should werewolves have to uphold themselves to a higher code of morality than we do?” She sees Tabitha about to protest and continues, “Look, you want to hold them to the same standards as us, okay, that’s cool. But if they have to be better than us, that’s not
only not cool, it makes you a giant fucking hypocrite.”

Tabitha flushes pink and Theo squeezes her wrist. “They’ve got instincts that we don’t. They have to be in control of themselves.”

“Well, as far as I can see from everything the boy in red has done, he is,” Nori says flatly. “All I’m saying is that I don’t give a shit if he wears a halo or not. So he’s killed some people. You going to find anyone in this bar who can say they haven’t? As long as he’s killing the right people for the right reasons, I really don’t give a shit. Nobody in our world wears a white hat. He may not be my friend, but he’s sure as hell someone I would want on my side in a fight. And if that means making sure I’m on his side in what’s coming, then yeah, that’s what I’ll do.”

“You make it sound like it’s going to be a war,” Tabitha says, with a nervous laugh.

“No, it’s not going to be a war,” Lin says quietly. “It already is one.”

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Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

For the many people on tumblr who asked me to write more about Boyd. =D

I know he has a tendency to fall into the background of this ’verse. I'll try harder! And thank you for all the helpful prompts! This one starts after The One You Feed (when Boyd joins the pack) and is a series of snippets that would end just about the same time Thicker Than Water ends (so it covers a lot of time, heh, but mainly operates independent of the events taking place in the series).

A special thank you to Maelace for beta-ing this for me since I was way out of my depth <3

“Am I being punk’d?” is Boyd’s reaction when Stiles and Erica sit him down and tell him about werewolves. “I mean, seriously, is this shit going on YouTube?”


“No way,” Boyd says, eating another Dorito. “If you’re waiting for me to say I believe you, so you can tell everyone you got me, you’re gonna have a long-ass wait, Stilinski.”

Stiles sighs. “Okay, look. Normally we go for believing first and then proof, because when people just turn into werewolves and start lifting up backhoes, other people start freaking out a little. But if you’re really gonna make us do this the hard way . . .” He elbows Erica. She gives Boyd a sunny smile and holds up one hand, letting her claws come out.

“Whoa,” Boyd says. “How’d you do that?”

“Werewolf,” she says.

“Ha ha, yeah, but seriously,” Boyd says.

It takes a full shift, all the way to wolf form, before Boyd stops believing that they’re trying to pull his leg. Then he has to sit down and hold his head in his hands for several long minutes while he wrestles it into his worldview. Finally, he looks up. “And you want to make me one of you?”

“Naw, man,” Stiles says. “We just want you to come over for dinner.”

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School mornings have a very specific routine in the Boyd household. Given the amount of things to
get ready, they basically have to. Boyd is the oldest, at sixteen. He has two younger brothers, thirteen and nine, and two younger sisters, twelve and seven. Boyd’s father works nights, so he doesn’t get home until about fifteen minutes after Boyd needs to leave for high school. He’s home in time to see the younger kids off to the bus, but making sure they’re ready is Boyd’s job. His mother’s part time job at a nursing home gets her out of the house at six AM, so the morning responsibilities are largely Boyd’s.

It’s his job to get all of his younger siblings up. His job to do Lakeisha’s hair. Keelie’s is in cornrows right now, so that saves him some work. She had saved up her allowance for months to get them done professionally, and they’ll hold a while. Will hates getting up early and moans and bitches the entire time, using words that Boyd would prefer he didn’t know.

When he has time, he makes school lunches the night before, but given all his school work and now pack responsibilities on top of it, he usually ends up making them in the morning. It’s a row of turkey sandwiches, carrot sticks, juice boxes, and little bags of cookies from Stiles.

Boyd knows that Derek would give him the money to buy better groceries. He says no because it’s a point of pride for him, for all of them. They’re doing fine; they don’t need anyone’s charity. But he lets Stiles provide the cookies, partly because the kids love them, partly because Stiles’ alpha nature makes him want to provide for the pack and by extension, their families, and partly because Stiles’ baking is a force of nature.

So he makes their lunches while Will makes peanut butter toast for the two younger kids. He and Boyd just eat cereal, and Keelie doesn’t eat anything at all in the mornings. She’s not a morning person, and all she ever wants before nine AM is coffee. He makes sure they’re all dressed appropriately (Will has an unfortunate love of T-shirts with slogans that get him sent home from school, and Keelie has reached that stage of adolescence where she can’t be trusted to dress herself), that they all have their lunches and have done most of their homework, and then he hears Stiles honk the car horn outside and leaves, knowing his father will be home in ten or fifteen minutes to make sure they all get on the bus.

This has been Boyd’s routine for so long that it’s not anything particularly noteworthy to him, which is why it’s funny the first night Isaac stays over.

It’s the night after Sebastian Stone threatened them, and Stiles has decided he doesn’t want anyone alone. Derek will stay with him, of course, and Allison will stay at Scott’s, leaving Lydia with Erica and Isaac with Boyd. They’ll swap out a few times, he’s guessing, but nobody wants to give parental headaches with opposite sex sleepovers (Scott and Allison being the notable exception, because Melissa long ago gave up trying to separate them at night).

Isaac moans when the alarm goes off at five thirty. “Jesus, why,” he mumbles into his pillow.

“You can sleep another hour if you want,” Boyd says, but he’s already up and heading for the shower. He always showers in the morning, so the rest of the kids can take turns before bed. Trying to get them up early enough to shower in the morning isn’t going to happen.

By the time he gets out of the shower, Keelie’s banging on the door demanding he hurry up so she can start her morning primping routine. And then it’s impossible for Isaac to sleep because the entire house is a swirl of noise and chaos. He stumbles downstairs with his hair looking disheveled, and blinks sleepily as kids run around. Boyd makes sandwiches, Will makes toast, Keelie complains about her math teacher, Trey whines about how he doesn’t want an apple in his lunch because he’s sick of apples, Lakeisha practices her dance moves, Will finishes his history homework, Keelie checks her makeup for the eighteenth time, Boyd quizzes Trey on his spelling since he has a test later, Lakeisha remembers she has show and tell and starts running around the house looking for
something to bring.

At seven sharp, there’s a horn honking outside, and Boyd shoulders his backpack. “Okay, see you guys later,” he says, to a chorus of ‘bye!’ and ‘see you later!’

“Jesus, how do you manage it every morning?” Isaac asks.

“Manage what?” Boyd asks, genuinely puzzled, and Isaac just shakes his head and looks bewildered.

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Stiles is a big fan of board games with the pack, especially after they’ve introduced a new member. The ‘wolf games’ they play in the forest are good for helping the newbie learn control over their wolf, but it’s nice to get to know the human side, too. Besides, they can’t be outside all the time. Sometimes it rains.

He has a particular liking for games like Loaded Questions and Say Anything, that actually involve learning about each other. Boyd is still getting used to thinking of Stiles as the sort of person who cares about that kind of stuff, but he does. He’s even invented a version of Trivial Pursuit where everyone in the pack wrote question/answer cards about themselves, and each of them is assigned a color.

“Oh, this one’s easy,” Erica says, after drawing her card with a flourish. “What do I want to be when I grow up? A teacher, right?” she asks Boyd.

“Yeah,” he says, with a nod. She makes a fist pump and colors in the square on her little card. (Inventing a game is one thing, but Stiles wasn’t about to have game pieces and chips made to go with it.)

“What age?” Derek asks, as he grabs the dice to take his turn.

“Third or fourth grade,” Boyd says decisively.

“Thought about that a lot?” Allison asks, laughing a little at his quick answer.

“It’s the best age,” Boyd says, with a nod. “It’s after they’ve learned all the really basic stuff, like how to read and how to do basic arithmetic, so you’re actually teaching interesting stuff. But before they become preteens and go insane. I would seriously stick my tongue in a beehive before I would teach junior high.”

“Truth,” Erica says, nodding. “I don’t have a lot of fond memories of those years.”

“Well, it’s a nice dream,” Boyd says, with a sigh.

“Why do you say that?” Scott asks. “I mean, when most people talk about their ‘dream job’ they mean like . . . chocolate-taster or lingerie designer. Teacher is a pretty achievable goal.”

“Not for me,” Boyd says. “You need a college degree for that shit.”

“Why wouldn’t you get one of those?” Stiles asks, his mouth full of Cheetos.
Boyd opens his mouth, shuts it, and then sighs. He’s never been an open person, never had a lot of friends, and sharing stuff like this is hard. He doesn’t think he would do it under normal circumstances, but something about the pack... it makes him want to trust them, tell them his secrets. He’d mentioned that to Isaac at one point, and the other teenager had wholeheartedly agreed. In the end, he says, “I’d rather Will and Keelie get to go.”

Stiles is still frowning, so Scott elbows him and rubs two fingers together in the classic gesture for money. Comprehension dawns on Stiles’ face, then he says, “Oh, well, if that’s a problem –”

“Take your turn, Derek, you’re slowing us down,” Allison says loudly, seeing that Boyd is growing increasingly uncomfortable. Derek immediately rolls the dice, lands on one of Scott’s spaces, and gives a grimace that has everyone laughing at him. Boyd’s financial troubles are forgotten, or at least put aside.

The game concludes about a half an hour later with Lydia crowned the victor, and they’re talking about watching a movie, but it’s a school night and they’re all a little sick of being crammed into Derek’s apartment. Derek says he’s going to go down to his studio, and that he’ll drop Boyd off at home on the way, since he goes through Boyd’s neighborhood.

“Sorry if we embarrassed you earlier,” Derek says, keeping his eyes on the road.

“It’s not a big deal,” Boyd says.

Derek glances at him and says, “Look, I’m not good at shit like this. So I’m just going to put it out there. If you want to go to college, I’ll pay for it. I could pay for all five of you to go to college and not miss the money. So just – you don’t need to give me an answer, just – know that’s an option for you. If you want to take it. If you’d rather I make it a loan and pay me back, that’d be fine.”

Boyd folds his arms over his chest and says nothing. He doesn’t know what to say. Derek means the offer in good faith, and it’s hard to get angry. But it’s equally hard to get over that sting of resentment that comes from someone who can afford to just throw money at other people. He knows it’s not Derek’s fault that he’s rich, any more than it’s Boyd’s fault that he’s poor.

“I’m applying for scholarships,” he finally says. “So I guess we’ll see what happens.”

“Okay,” Derek says, and with that, he changes the subject, and Boyd knows that he won’t mention it again, not unless Boyd brings it up.

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Stiles is loading the dishwasher when his phone rings, and he picks up to find Boyd as frantic as he ever gets. That is to say that he actually interrupts Stiles’ casual greeting of, “Stilinski Asylum, you –”

“Stiles, I can’t – I can’t find Lakeisha,” Boyd interrupts. “She was with me just a minute ago, but I turned around and she –”

“Where are you?” Stiles grabs his keys and heads out the door.

“I’m down at the mall. We were doing Christmas shopping and I just – I tried to track her by scent but there’s too many people here and I’m not, not good with that kind of thing yet –”
“Where exactly?” Stiles asks.

Boyd lets out a shaky breath. “Right in front of the JC Penney. Second floor.”

“Okay. You stay where you are in case she comes looking for you. I’ll be right there.”

“What if she – ” Boyd can barely speak the words. “What if something happened to her?”

“I’m sure that’s not it,” Stiles says. “She probably just got distracted by something and wandered off. I mean, she’s only seven.”

“But what if someone took her?” Boyd asks.

“Then we’ll find her and take her back,” Stiles says, with a note of steel in his voice. “I’ve gotta drive now, okay?”

“Yeah, I – yeah, okay,” Boyd says, and hangs up.

Stiles doesn’t like talking on his phone while he drives, but he sets it on speaker, dials Derek, and tosses it into the passenger seat. It only takes a minute to update Derek, who says he’ll call the others and meet them there. The more people the better, especially in the mall at Christmas time. He’s sure the place will be packed.

It’s been fewer than ten minutes when he makes it into the JC Penney, after parking illegally and hoping that he only gets ticketed, not towed. Boyd is pacing back and forth in front of the JC Penney. He’s got Trey with him, one hand wrapped around the younger boy’s wrist. “Okay, where was the last time you saw her?” Stiles asks.

“We were walking from the food court and heading towards the Barnes and Noble,” Boyd says. “I thought she was right behind me but when I turned around to make sure, I didn’t see her. I’ve gone back and forth like four times, but I haven’t seen her anywhere.”

“What was she wearing?” Stiles asks, as Derek jogs up.

“A pink ballerina shirt and a turquoise skirt,” Boyd says. “I sent Keelie and Will over to security to ask if anyone’s seen her or if she’s gone there, right before I called you.”

“Okay,” Stiles says. He knows that Boyd can’t just stand there and wait any longer, so he says, “I’ll stay here in case she comes here because someone saw you waiting or something. Trey and I can hang out together, right, my man? Derek, take Boyd and retrace his steps. Are the others here yet?”

“They’re on their way,” Derek says, with deceptive calm. “Come on, Boyd, we’ll sniff her out.”

Stiles spends several tense minutes in front of the JC Penney, mind already racing through the possibilities of what might be going on. Then his phone rings, and he looks at the screen to see Allison’s number. “Hey,” he says.

“Hey, we’ve got her,” Allison says, her voice calm and soothing. “Lydia knew exactly where to find a little girl at the mall. We’re reconverging on your location.”

It’s somewhat amusing that Allison talks like it’s a mission even when it’s just a lost sibling at the mall, but Stiles is too relieved to comment on it. “I’ll call Boyd if you haven’t already,” he says, and when she says she hasn’t, wanted to let him, he hangs up. Boyd has a cell phone that he let Derek get him, basically because it’s a pack requirement to have a cell phone and he wasn’t allowed to argue. Stiles taps his screen a couple times to call him. “She’s fine,” he greets Boyd. “Lydia and
Allison found her. Head back to the JC Penney, okay?

“Okay,” Boyd says, his voice a little choked. “Okay, yeah.”

He’s back a few moments later. Derek has gone to the security substation to find his other two siblings and reassure them that everything is fine. Seven-year-old girls don’t move as quickly, so it’s another minute before they spot Allison and Lydia coming back, each of them holding one of her hands. She spots Boyd and bursts into tears. “Verrrmnnyyy,” she wails, throwing herself into his arms. “I s-stopped to look at the puppies and then I followed someone but he wasn’t you and I didn’t know where you were so I went to the nice lady at the teddy bear shop and she was going to call Mom but I couldn’t remember her number and, and, and,” she says, and breaks out into another sob.

“The nice lady at the teddy bear shop let you walk off with her?” Stiles asks Allison in an undertone.

“She knows me,” Allison says. “Well, she knows us. You know.”

Stiles nods. They do have something of a reputation around town.

Keelie and Will come trotting up a few minutes later, with Derek a few paces behind them, and there’s a lot of hugging, and Boyd declares that that’s quite enough excitement for one day, they’ll have to finish their Christmas shopping over the weekend. Stiles says he’ll walk out with them. The others exchange waves and goodbyes and head for the various entrances they had parked near.

“Thanks,” Boyd says, as they’re walking outside.

“Hey, no problem,” Stiles says.

“Not for – I mean, yes, thank you for helping me find her, but – thanks for not making me feel like some overreacting worrywart.”

“Dude,” Stiles says with a snort. “When my dad gets a paper cut at work, I go into anxiety overdrive. I could teach a class called ‘Advanced Family Panic’.”

“Yeah, well,” Boyd says, trying not to get emotional. “Thanks anyway.”


“It’s cute,” Stiles says.

“It’s for little sisters only,” Boyd says.


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The problem with Stiles and Boyd’s younger siblings is threefold. The first is that Stiles is, and always has been, impulsive. That’s not to say that there aren’t times where he can step back, rationally assess a situation, and make informed decisions. But when things aren’t do-or-die, he has a tendency to just do whatever jumps into his head. The second problem is that Stiles has money. Since he and Derek have basically opened a joint account for ‘pack expenses’, he has lots of money.
And the third problem is that he has the overriding alpha instinct to take care of other people, take care of Boyd, which by extension means taking care of Boyd’s younger siblings.

He means well, and Boyd knows that. So he tries not to let it bother him when Stiles does things like bring over eight bags of groceries that includes all the things that the kids have been whining about wanting. He doesn’t complain when Stiles shows up with a gift certificate to Sports Authority because Boyd had mentioned that Trey’s sneakers were getting really worn out. He doesn’t say anything when it’s back to school shopping time and somehow Stiles winds up taking the girls shopping and buying them half of a new wardrobe.

The problem is, it grates on him, Stiles providing all the things he couldn’t provide. He knows that Stiles doesn’t mean it that way, that Stiles would be genuinely bewildered by the fact that it bothers Boyd.

Making it worse is the fact that the kids have clearly pegged Stiles as a pushover and someone with money, and they clearly don’t have the same reservations about it that Boyd does. He’s not sure why it’s different. Maybe it’s because he’s the oldest, and every dime he’s earned over the past few years has gone straight into the house fund. Maybe it’s because the others were so much younger when the family fell on hard times, and they don’t remember what it was like not to worry about these things.

Boyd knows that Derek’s offer to pay for him – to pay for all of them – to go to college was genuine. And he knows that a sane person would jump at that chance. So what if it’s charity, a little voice inside him whispers. Why should you punish yourself because they want to do something nice for you?

He nearly blows his stack when Stiles buys Keelie a phone, and only says vaguely, “Oh, well, she said she really wanted one, and you won’t have to worry about the bill ‘cause I just put her on the family plan with Derek and Isaac and stuff.” This of course leads to Will bitching and moaning until he gets a phone, too. But he manages to keep his temper in check, only saying to Stiles, “Check with me before you buy them stuff like that, okay?” and Stiles says sure, a little puzzled but not upset.

But when it really comes to a head is the day that Stiles is there after school, along with Danny, Isaac, and Scott. Derek is at his studio, and the girls are doing their own thing at Lydia’s house. Trey is doing a book report on their ancient computer, and it gives him a blue screen of death. “Aw, man!” he says, smacking it, and it goes dark.

“Don’t hit it, that won’t help,” Boyd says automatically. He walks over and starts fiddling with it. Most of the time he can get it to come back to life, but this time he can’t.

Danny comes over to help and proclaims the motherboard dead. “I can probably salvage the data off of it by taking out the hard drive and plugging it into another computer,” he offers, “but the computer itself is pretty much fried. You’ll need to get a new one.”

“Great,” Boyd says, running both hands over his hair, thinking about how much that’s going to eat into their budget. “How much do they run these days?”

“You can actually get a pretty decent desktop for three or four hundred bucks,” Danny says. “I mean, you wouldn’t need to get a new monitor or anything – ”

“Here, look at this,” Stiles says. He already had his laptop out, working on something of his own, and now he’s got a website pulled up. “I’m not a Mac guy, sorry, but HP’s website has a deal right now to get a desktop for six twenty-nine that could handle just about anything, I could – ”

“No,” Boyd snaps, and Stiles blinks at him. Boyd has to stop and take a breath. “I appreciate it,
Stiles, really, but you can’t just buy us a new computer.”

“I – I can’t?” Stiles is genuinely bewildered. “You know that Derek has – ”

“Yes,” Boyd practically shouts. “I’m aware that Derek is richer than God, okay? You can stop rubbing it in!”

The house goes silent. Stiles is left with his mouth slightly open, his expression a combination of surprise and hurt and the tiniest bit of anger, the smallest hint of ‘I’m an alpha and I won’t be spoken to that way by one of my betas’ before he locks that down. “Wow, okay, I’m sorry,” he says, lifting his hands in surrender. “I didn’t mean to, you know. Rub anything. Anywhere.”

Boyd squares his jaw and looks away. “It’s not – I know you mean well, Stiles, but I just – we can’t be dependent on the charity of other people. We’ll get it figured out.”

For a minute it seems like Stiles might argue, and Boyd can practically see the arguments scrolling across his face – ‘you can depend on me, I’m your alpha’, and ‘I know that you work hard but you can never keep your money for yourself’ and ‘I only want what’s best for all of you’ – but for once he manages to remember that discretion can be the better part of valor. “Okay,” he says, and after that, Stiles doesn’t buy them things anymore beyond a book here and there or a few pizzas on occasion, and he doesn’t say a word about it.

And somehow, Boyd feels even worse.

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“This is the worst day of my life,” Boyd moans.

“What’s wrong?” Erica asks.

Boyd doesn’t look up from where he’s trying to suffocate himself in the couch cushions. “Keelie has a crush on Edward Cullen.”

Lydia gives a theatrical shudder. “Don’t worry,” she says, with smooth confidence. “I’ll handle this.”

~ ~ ~ ~

“Look,” Erica says, leaning against the counter as Boyd serves hot chocolate to dozens of enthusiastic children, “you have to understand that he doesn’t mean anything by it.”

“I know that,” Boyd says.

They’re talking about this again, despite the fact that he really doesn’t want to, because Stiles came within inches of offering to buy him a car. To be fair to Stiles, he had managed to rein himself in. To continue being fair, it had only come up because there had been a pack thing and he wanted Boyd there but there wasn’t anybody available to go pick him up. To be increasingly fair, it is an incredible hassle getting the kids to all their activities by foot but still making time for the pack.
It’s not like he’s the only pack member without a car. Erica doesn’t have one and won’t be able to get her license until she’s been seizure free for five years, under California law. Scott only has one available if he drives his mother to work for the day and picks her up afterwards. Isaac doesn’t have one, either.

But Isaac lives with other pack members, and Scott’s house is only three quarters of a mile from Stiles’, and Erica’s mom is a stay-at-home mom who can almost always be relied upon to get Erica places she needs to be. It’s Boyd who’s the problem, Boyd who lives on the poorer side of town, almost twenty minutes away, Boyd who has parents who work a lot, Boyd who has to worry about the kids’ schedules and deal with the fact that the time he forgot to pick Trey up after soccer practice, CPS got called.

So the car thing had come up pretty legitimately, and Boyd had just flatly said he was sorry, but a car wasn’t in his future. He had seen Stiles shift, open his mouth, and then look away. The awkward tension had persisted even after the subject was changed.

“He’s just – it’s the alpha thing, you know?” Erica continues. “He wants to take care of you. And your family is like, an extension of you. It’s not about him having more than you. It’s not about pity, you know?”

Boyd glances at her, knowing that she’s hit the nail on the head and hating it. “It’s not,” he starts, and sees the look on her face. He sighs. “Okay, yeah, it is. I hate feeling pitied. It’s a point of pride, okay? We’ve all worked hard and now Stiles comes in and he can just – give the kids anything they want, in a way I never could.”

“You know,” Erica says, sucking soda through a straw, “you remind me of my dad.” She sees Boyd’s eyebrows go up. “He was jealous of Stiles, too. Because getting the bite made me healthy, and that was something he could never give me.”

“How’d he get over it?”

“Oh, he didn’t,” Erica says cheerfully. “He’s still mad about it.” She takes another drink. “Kinda silly, right? I mean, it’s not like he wouldn’t have done anything to help me. It’s not his fault that he couldn’t, and Stiles could.”

Boyd shakes a dishrag at her. “I see what you’re doing here. You’re reframing the problem in a way that makes me look ridiculous.”

“No, I’m reframing the problem in a way that might help you see it the way Stiles does,” Erica says. “Look, I get it, okay? You don’t want to be a charity case. And I know that Stiles can come on a little strong, and that he can be impulsive and totally clueless about things that every other normal person would get. And I get that he was causing some problems for you, by doing stuff like buying Keelie a phone without thinking of Will getting jealous, and making you worry that the kids were going to take advantage of him. I’m not saying that he wasn’t out of line. I’m just saying, maybe there can be some sort of compromise.”

There’s a long pause while Boyd serves three more customers at the ice rink’s refreshment stand. When he’s finally free again, he lets out a sigh. “You know,” he says, studying the counter as he meticulously wipes it down again, “sometimes I think people equate being poor with being deaf. Like we won’t hear what they say about us. Like the women at the grocery who see us using food stamps and make snide comments about how maybe we should spend less of our money on drugs. Or the woman at the church we used to go to, who said that maybe we wouldn’t be as poor if my mom had learned to close her legs. This one time, Will got a Nintendo DS for Christmas, right? The whole family saved up because he wanted it so badly. And then this teacher at school took it away
from him, saying he must have stolen it. My mom had to go get it back for him. She was so embarrassed that day. It’s like . . .” He lets out a gusty sigh. “People seem completely unaware of the concept that things can just . . . go bad.”

Erica quietly drinks her soda. “Your mom was hit by a car, right?”

“Yeah,” Boyd says. “When I was thirteen. My dad worked for this private company. He was a security guard. It was a good job and paid well, but the insurance wasn’t good. My mom had to have two different knee surgeries and then six weeks of intensive rehab and it just . . . wiped us out. And then two months after that, the company my dad worked for folded and he lost his job, no severance pay, no nothing. And it’s like . . . everything changed overnight. But it wasn’t our fault. It wasn’t anyone’s fault.”

“Except the jerk who hit your mom,” Erica says.

“Yeah, if only we had ever found out who that was, our lives would be easier,” Boyd remarks.

Erica nods a little and grimaces. “Okay, well, look. I’m gonna tell you a story. Something else to keep in mind. After I got the bite, I went on this shopping spree, right? ‘Cause none of my clothes fit and I didn’t own any makeup or hair supplies or anything like that, but I wanted to be pretty. So we’re talking complete non-necessities, right? But Derek paid for the whole thing. Because – let me finish, I see you about to interrupt me – he paid for it because he likes to spend money on the pack. He’s got tons of money, you know that, but had you ever thought about where it came from? It’s his family’s money. The insurance money from the fire and everything. Just – sometimes I think it makes him feel dirty, to have it, to profit off their deaths. I know that’s not really what it is, but that’s how he feels about it. Which is why he likes to spend it on us, on the pack. It’s why he’s building that ridiculous house out on the preserve and doesn’t try to stop us when we add things to it. Because when he spends that money on us, he can feel a little more at peace with everything that’s happened to him. So it isn’t just Stiles, you know. Derek wants to help you, too. And it’s not because he pities you, because if there was anyone who could ever understand bad luck and bad times, it’s Derek fucking Hale. You know?”

Boyd thinks about this, then gives another sigh. “Yeah, I know,” he says.

“I’m just saying, compromise,” Erica says. “Don’t let Stiles buy the kids anything they want, because he is a pushover, and has some problems with impulse control, and the whole alpha thing means he’ll go to ridiculous lengths to make people happy, and we don’t want your sibs learning they can get anything they want. Don’t let them buy you some forty thousand dollar car with heated seats and an all leather interior. But, you know, if they want to take you down to the used car dealership and drop a few grand on a piece of crap Honda Civic with hand-crank windows . . . maybe that would be good for everyone in the long run.”

“I guess you’re right,” Boyd says, glancing up as another customer comes up to the window. He makes their cocoa and gives them their change.

“The thing is that Stiles, for all his brilliance, is also kind of an idiot,” Erica says. “And, you know, socially incompetent. You’ve just gotta be clear with him on what your boundaries are, that’s all. Because otherwise he doesn’t know what’s okay, and he gets flaily and weird about it.”

“So true,” Boyd says, with a snort.

He’s still mulling it over when his shift ends, and Scott picks them up and they head over to Stiles’ house for the night. Stiles is cooking, so Boyd doesn’t interrupt him after their initial hello, but once they’re sitting down at dinner together, he buckles down and says, “So, I thought maybe we could
swing by that used car lot downtown this weekend, if you wanted. Get me some wheels.”

He still feels pretty iffy on the whole concept, but when Stiles looks up with an enormous, dorky grin, he feels a lot better about everything.

~ ~ ~ ~

“You’re laughing at me,” Stiles says.

“No,” Boyd responds automatically, then chuckles. “Well, yeah, a little.”

“Dude,” Stiles says. “If you know a better way to peel potatoes –”

“Seriously?” Boyd asks. “You seriously think I don’t know a better way to peel potatoes?”

“Well, if you did, you could have told me about it twenty minutes ago instead of watching me do this for ages. This is why I normally just make baked potatoes, but noooooo, Scott just has to have mashed potatoes for Thanksgiving, and God forbid I leave the skins on, because my dad won’t eat them if he thinks I’m trying to sneak something healthy into his diet.”

Boyd shakes his head a little. “Doesn’t being so dramatic ever get tiring?” he asks. He has to admit that he doesn’t envy Stiles having to do the cooking prep for a Thanksgiving dinner that will have to feed so many people. He’s done it for his own family of seven, and it’s not fun. “You have to boil them first.”

“How the hell am I supposed to peel it after it’s boiled?”

“Boil one and I’ll show you.”

Stiles gives him a somewhat suspicious look, like he’s wondering if Boyd is trying to pull one over on him and make him waste one of his precious potatoes, but then he throws his hands up in the air and puts a pot of water over to boil. Boyd just gives a snort of laughter and goes back to his math homework, but keeps an eye on his watch. When the potato has been in long enough, he stands up and heads into the kitchen. Stiles watches him, still with suspicion, as he fills a mixing bowl with water, then dumps some ice into it.

He grabs a pair of tongs, grabs the potato out of the boiling water, and dunks it into the ice water. Then he slowly counts to five before lifting it out. Stiles’ eyes grow wide as Boyd grips the potato in both hands and twists. The peel splits in half and slides smoothly off the end of the potato.

“Dude,” Stiles says. “Dude. That was the sexiest thing I’ve ever seen.”

Boyd gives him a look. “I’m going to tell Erica you said that.”

“Are you kidding? She’d agree with me.”

~ ~ ~ ~
“What’s that you’ve got there?” Erica asks, jumping up to rub her cheek against Boyd’s as he enters the den.

“Letter from UC: East Bay,” Boyd says, with something of a grimace.

“Oh my God!” Allison bounces over to check it out. “What’s it say?”

“I haven’t opened it yet,” Boyd admits. “I guess I just wanted to be here in case there’s bad news in it or something.”

“Aaw, come on, you’re not that worried about getting accepted, right?” Scott asks. “Your grades are probably good enough to get into any school you wanted!”

“Yeah, I know,” Boyd says, as other pack members are drifting in from their individual pursuits. About half of them have already gotten their college acceptance letters and decided where they’re going. Lydia’s going to Stanford, because of course she is, and Danny’s going to Berkley. Allison’s gotten her acceptance to San Francisco State, but she’s waiting to see if Scott got in, too, before making a final decision. The others still have answers pending.

Personally, he’s already gotten accepted to San Jose State, where Stiles is headed, but he’d rather go to UC East Bay, because they have a great educational program. That’s why he couldn’t bring himself to open the letter as soon as he found it. It just seemed right to open it with the pack.


Boyd shoves the envelope at Stiles. “You do it,” he says.

Stiles grabs the envelope and opens it without waiting to see if Boyd will change his mind. He unfolds the paper and a wide grin appears on his face, answering everyone’s question before he even starts reading. “Dear Vernon Boyd. We are pleased to inform you that you have been accepted into the University of California . . .”

He keeps reading, but nobody can hear him, because they’re all cheering and hugging Boyd. Erica gives him a kiss on the cheek. Even Derek is smiling.

“When do you find out about the scholarship?” Isaac asks, when the furor has died down somewhat.

“Probably not for another couple weeks,” Boyd says. “But even if I don’t get it, the financial aid will get me through, since I won’t have to pay for housing.”

“Awesome,” Scott says, thumping Boyd on the back.

“Break out the champagne,” Allison says to Stiles, grinning, and Stiles laughs and starts handing out cans of ginger ale.

A little while later, everyone is back to what they were doing when he got there, and he’s settled down at the table to finish up some of his homework. He’s a little surprised when Stiles plops into the chair next to him. He knows that Stiles’ mind is a million places right now, what with his grandparents being in town and everything. “What’s up?” he asks.

“I just wanted to say I really am sorry about the whole thing with the money,” Stiles says earnestly. “I know that I was kind of a clueless, insensitive prick about it a lot of the time.”

Boyd gives a little shrug. “I was a little touchy, maybe.”
“Yeah, but it’s not like you didn’t have your reasons, and I was stepping all over your toes and shit.” Stiles gives a huffing sigh. “I, uh, someday I’ll learn impulse control.”

Boyd shakes his head a little. “That’ll be the day,” he says, and Stiles laughs. They both glance up as Derek walks in, sitting down next to Stiles and wrapping an arm around his waist. “Anyway,” Boyd says, “I guess it’s nice to know that you guys care. Even if you step on my toes.”

“I’ll probably do it again,” Stiles says, with a wince. “Just bitch slap me if I get out of line. Deal?”

“Deal,” Boyd agrees. “But I just . . . I know I’m going to be okay. You know? I’ve got a really good shot at that scholarship, and even if I don’t, with the financial aid, I’ll make it. And things are getting better for us, too, I mean, Dad just got a raise so my mom might be able to work fewer hours once I’m away at school. I just . . . I want the kids to have this moment, too. Of getting a letter from college, of having a dream that they know is in reach. I mean . . . Lakeisha wants to be a dancer, and she’s good, she really is, and I want her to be able to go to the best school. And if that means letting go of the idea that we can’t ever ask for help, of this idea that I have to be able to do all of this on my own . . . I think maybe I can get used to that.”

“Well, we’ll always be there,” Stiles says cheerfully.

Boyd shakes his head and says, “This is getting sentimental. I’m outta here.”

~ ~ ~ ~

“Is that you, honey?” Boyd’s mother Sharon calls out as he comes in through the front door, and he calls back an affirmative. “Are you by yourself?”

“Yeah,” Boyd calls back. His parents have gradually gotten used to the fact that he often has one or two people with him these days. But it’s a Monday night, everyone’s tired and has loads of homework to do, and so they split up early. He comes into the kitchen and says, loudly, “All I brought with me are these chocolate chip cookies.”

Feet are heard pounding all over the house, and a minute later, cookies are disappearing into mouths while Sharon says, “Only one each! It’s nearly time for dinner!”

“Okay,” the kids chorus, with full mouths.

Boyd leans over and gives his mother a kiss on the cheek. She smiles up at him. “How was your day, honey?” she asks.

“Good,” Boyd says, smiling. “My day was good.”

~ ~ ~ ~
“Hey.” Derek comes up behind Stiles while he’s putting away the groceries that he just bought. “Got a sec? I want to show you something.”

“Sure. Let me just stow the rest of this crap.” Stiles shoves a few more things in the pantry, and Derek grabs some boxes of cereal and goes to help. It only takes another minute. “Oh, leave those out. I found this recipe for cranberry nut bread that I want to try.”

Derek wrinkles his nose. “Cranberries are too sour.”

“It’s not for you, fuzzbutt.” Stiles prods him in the ribs. “It’s for my dad. Anyway, the recipe has a cup of sugar in it, which should mitigate the sourness some. So what’s up?”

Derek huffs and turns to walk towards his studio. Stiles follows, curious. It’s not that he doesn’t like looking at Derek’s work, but he usually just sees it on his own when he wanders in and out. It’s rare for Derek to purposefully show him something. But he’s been working on a painting that he hasn’t wanted Stiles to see for a while now. It’s still covered in a sheet as Stiles goes into the studio.

“Okay.” Derek pulls the sheet aside and stands back, arms folded over his chest. He doesn’t say anything else or even ask for Stiles’ opinion. He just stands there.

Stiles leans in to take a look at it. It’s a beautiful painting, despite how dark it is. It shows a naked, skeletal man sitting in the ruins of a burned, abandoned house, and another man in a red hoodie extending a hand to him. Their faces aren’t really visible, but it’s clear who it is and what it represents. “Wow,” Stiles breathes out. “Derek, this . . . this is amazing.”

A rare smile touches Derek’s face. “Thanks.”

“I mean . . .” Stiles feels his eyes start to prickle with tears. He turns away and hastily wipes his eyes. “I don’t deserve this.”

“What?” Derek is clearly taken aback.

“I didn’t really do anything that special, you know. You helped me a lot more than I helped you. I mean, okay, technically everything is Peter’s fault, not the point, but you tried to help me and Scott, and what did we do? We accused you of murder, made you a fugitive, dug up your sister’s body which you had just buried. That must have been so painful for you.” Stiles is crying now despite his best efforts. “Oh, and let’s not forget when I made you strip to bribe Danny to help me with computer stuff, or sent him pictures of your naked butt. Or the part where I threw a mug at you and
shoved you out my window. We were class A assholes to you!”

Derek rubs a hand through his hair. “Look, I won’t lie and say that I wasn’t pissed at you about some of that. All of that. But you were confused, and you didn’t know what was going on, and I didn’t exactly help matters with my own behavior, you know?”

“I know, but Christ, Derek, have you ever actually thought about your life?” Stiles wipes his eyes again. “You’ve got the kind of back story that would make a supervillain jealous, but you never – you never let it make you any less of a good person. You were always trying to help us, help other people, even though you would’ve had every right to just say fuck it and walk away.”

There’s a long minute of silence. Derek studies the painting and then says, “You know when I sketched the draft for this?”


“It was the day your dad apologized for all the sex jokes. You know, how he used to accuse me of ‘taking advantage’ of you. Even knowing that he didn’t mean anything by it, it stung. Then out of the blue he just pulled me aside and said he was sorry, that he thought of me as a son, that he trusted me with you and was really glad that I was helping take care of you.”

“Oh . . .” Stiles tries not to look as confused as he feels.

“I know he did that because you talked to him. Because you told him the way he was hurting me, even by accident. You were trying to protect me, even from your own dad, who didn’t even realize he was doing something wrong. That must have been one of history’s most awkward conversations, but you did it. For my sake.”

“Well, he was being a jerk,” Stiles says.

Derek huffs out a sigh. “You don’t get it. Or you’re actively trying not to.” He reaches out and flicks Stiles’ nose. “You saved my life.”

“But I didn’t do anything.”

“You gave me a family.”

“You gave you a family! Hell, you pretty much actively proclaimed us your brothers and then refused to go away.”

Derek snorts. “Well, that’s true enough. But you’re missing my point. Remember when you started hugging me and climbing on me all the time?”

“Yeah.”

“I made one comment about wolves being tactile creatures. You put that together on your own with how starved for contact I had to be, and you set out to fix it. I never asked you to. You just . . . you saw that I was hurting and you tried to fix it. Yeah, you screwed up in the beginning, but we were all getting to know each other and you had no idea about what was going on a lot of the time. But since then, every time you’ve seen that I was hurting, you’ve tried to fix it.”

“Okay, but anyone would have . . .”

“No, not anyone would have, because literally nobody else did.” Derek rolls his eyes. “Want to know a secret that somehow nobody else in the pack has figured out?”
“Uh oh. Sure.”

“You don’t like gingersnaps.”

Stiles squirms. “It’s not that I dislike them.”

“No, but if you’re going to bake something for yourself to eat, it’s never that. You used to make them because your dad likes them, and now you make them for us. You saw how much I liked them, so you started making them all the time. Should I keep going? Because I can. For a year after I joined the pack, any time the conversation turned to the topic of my possible sex life, you immediately leapt in to change the subject so I wouldn’t feel bad. You went to New York City with me to get Laura’s things and you told me that story about your mother when I had trouble going into the apartment, and I knew that can’t have been easy for you.

“In the beginning, when it was you and Scott and Lydia, the reason I kept shoehorning myself in was because I knew it wouldn’t last. I knew Scott didn’t like me – not that I’d ever given him a reason to – and that once things had settled down, you guys would be a pack of your own, alpha or no alpha. And there was no place for me in that. I thought sometimes about how after I’d solved Laura’s murder, after I’d done something about it, I was going to be – so alone. There would be nobody left for me. Then you – you just walked up to me and hugged me for no reason whatsoever, and I told you to let go and you didn’t and it was like – like the sun had finally come out of the sky after a century of rainy days.”

“Oh, Jesus.” Stiles tries to wipe away his tears, but they’re falling too fast for him to keep up.

“I thought I would never stop hurting. That there would never be a day in my life when I wouldn’t be in pain. I thought I deserved that, after what happened with Kate. But you looked at me and you said ‘no, that’s not going to happen’ and you tried to make it better. And I still hurt, a lot, maybe even most of the time. But there are moments when I don’t. When I’m sitting with the pack and Scott has told some stupid joke and I can laugh. When I’m sketching one of those silly pictures of all of you while I sit on the counter and you’re baking. I’m not over what happened to my family. I’ll probably never be completely over it. But when I wake up in the morning, I actually want to get out of bed. I can open my eyes and look at you and think ‘today is going to be a good day’. And that is all on you, Stiles. That’s what you gave me.”

Stiles is crying too hard to talk by this point. He wraps his arms around Derek’s shoulders and hugs him so tightly that he’s afraid he’ll lose circulation in his arms. Derek wraps his arms around Stiles’ waist and hugs him back almost as hard.

When he finally stops crying, Derek says, “You know, none of that should have come as a surprise to you.”

“Sometimes I’m not very bright.” Stiles picks up one of Derek’s painting rags and blows his nose.

“Gross,” Derek says.

“Screw you, buddy. You’ve got nobody but yourself to blame after a speech like that.” He tosses it into the pile of dirty rags. “You helped me too, you know.”

Derek smiles. “I know.”

“A lot.”

“I know.”
“I mean, I don’t think I could have survived my dad being in the hospital if it hadn’t been for you – ”

“I know, I said.”

Stiles snickers. “So . . . are you going to hang that somewhere?”

“I haven’t decided yet. It’s going up for display at my exhibition next month, but I’m not going to sell it, obviously. But it’s a little too morbid to hang it up somewhere that we look at it every day.”

“I don’t think it’s morbid. I think it’s beautiful.”

Derek’s cheeks went faintly pink. “Then we can hang it in the library. You’re in there more than I am, anyway.”

“Sounds good.” Stiles wipes his cheeks one final time. “Well, the cranberry nut bread calls. You coming?”

“You should bake something you want. You don’t like cranberries either.”

“True,” Stiles admits. “Maybe while it’s baking, I’ll make some double chocolate cookies and eat all of them without letting the pack have any.”

Derek huffs out a quiet laugh. “Except for me.”

“Yeah, you can have one or two.”

Derek leans over and rubs his cheek over Stiles’ hair. “It’s a deal.”
Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

So I got asked a while back if we would ever get to see any of the profiles Stiles had written for the hunter app. The first few came out pretty amusing so I went ahead and wrote a few more! (If you're wondering why the three elders aren't in there, it's because they're retired and this only lists active hunters).

This can serve as something of a preview of some of the characters you'll be meeting in the hunter war. Don't worry, though, there will not be a quiz later and you can always come back to check on who's who. =D

Rose Argent

Based out of: Peoria, Illinois

Territory: Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, Michigan

Status: You know how some women you meet, and you're just like, wow, I love a woman with such cutting authority, who really makes you believe that she can follow through on her threats and leaves you shaking in your boots but strangely turned on? Yeah, Rose Argent isn’t that woman.

Other: Smarter than her husband. Which isn’t saying very much.

Henry Argent

Based out of: Peoria, Illinois

Territory: Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, Michigan

Status: He got stuck in my tiger pit. What else can I say? It’s a fucking *tiger pit*. Also, he’s a bigoted jerk. Avoid if possible, but don’t worry for yourself if you can’t.

Other: Ask how his son is doing. It’ll really piss him off.

Julien Argent

Based out of: Savannah, Georgia

Territory: Carolinas, Georgia, Mississippi, Alabama

Status: Surprisingly mellow.

Other: That doesn’t mean he can’t/won’t kick your ass if you fuck around in his territory.
Sam Argent
Based out of: Savannah, Georgia
Territory: Carolinas, Georgia, Mississippi, Alabama
Status: He calls people ‘sir’ and ‘ma’m.’ Honestly I didn’t think people like that still existed. You’d think it’s a front, to get you to let your guard down. It isn’t.
Other: I think I heard his biceps mocking me last time I saw him.

Chris Argent
Based out of: Beacon Hills, California
Territory: California/Nevada
Status: Don’t even front with me. You know this guy.
Other: Let me give it to you straight: if you’re in the right, and you need help, Chris is a great guy to come to. If you’re in the wrong, you’re better off on the other side of the galaxy. Actually that might not be far enough away. How’s the Andromeda Nebula this time of year? Pack a sweater.

Victoria Argent
Based out of: Beacon Hills, California
Territory: California/Nevada
Status: The baddest housewife you’ll ever meet.
Other: See, while you’re paying attention to Chris, Victoria is removing your spleen. She’s stealthy like that. She’ll probably make it into a lovely soufflé.

Lucy Arnelle
Based out of: Bowling Green, Kentucky
Location: Kentucky/Tennessee
Status: Mean right hook, good with knives, smarter than most, willing to listen to all sides of the story and not make prejudgments, an all around good hunter and decent person.
Other: Please don’t ever tell her I said that.

Mikael Aronsson
Based out of: Rapid City, South Dakota
Territory: Montana/Dakotas/Minnesota

Status: Generally can be relied upon not to be a dick, but sometimes needs a swift kick in the ass to remind him of that.

Other: One of the few men to lead a hunting family. You’d expect him to be a misogynist pig. But actually it’s because his sister died on a hunt, and if you say something sexist in front of him, he’ll clean your clock.

**Jonas Aronsson**

Based out of: Rapid City, South Dakota

Territory: Montana/Dakotas/Minnesota

Status: Not gonna lie, this guy is just fucking nuts. Avoid if at all possible.

Other: But don’t kill him. His dad will righteously fuck you up if you do that.

**Annika Aronsson**

Based out of: Rapid City, South Dakota

Territory: Montana/Dakotas/Minnesota

Status: May, in time, someday develop into somebody who doesn’t send me into a frothing rage every time she opens her mouth.

Other: I’m thinking it’s going to need a lot of time, though.

**Stella Jones**

Based out of: Bend, Oregon

Territory: Oregon/Washington/Idaho

Status: She really, really hates werewolves. A lot. You’re not going to get any sort of fairness or mercy from her. She’s got enough backup to make it stick, too. So basically, avoid at all costs.

Other: Couldn’t she have had territory somewhere boring and lame? Why did it have to be some of the most beautiful scenery in the country? God, life isn’t fair.

**The Gutierrez family**, from oldest to youngest: Francisco, Luis (incarcerated), Cesar, Ruben (deceased), Marcos, Aresbeth, Hector, Carmen

Based out of: Sierra Vista, Arizona

Territory: Arizona/New Mexico
Status: Their motto seems to be ‘shoot first, ask questions never, give each other handshakes and trophies for whoever kills the most werewolves in a month’.

Other: There are eight of these motherfuckers. Or at least there used to be. How is that fair?

**Martin Drake**

Based out of: Clarksburg, West Virginia

Territory: Ohio, Virginias, Maryland, Delaware

Status: Have you ever met a guy and you think ‘he’s just got to be a used sleazy car salesman’? That’s Martin Drake to a T. But he cultivates that persona of charm and slime to get close to people. Underneath it, he’s ruthless, ambitious, and lethal. Don’t try to work with him. He’s the type that will take all you’ve got to give and then put a knife in your back.

Other: On the upside, Drake isn’t liked by most of his fellow hunters, either. In a world of straight shooters (see what I did there?), he’s a snake. The territory was freed up after the hunting family that lived there was demolished, and he took it over without asking permission. They don’t trust him.

**Jim Stoddard**

Based out of: Springfield, Massachusetts

Territory: New England/New York/Pennsylvania

Status: Big shot, hardcore. Good at what he does. He’d probably work with you if he was out of other options, but don’t expect mercy afterwards. He’s got a lot of territory, but also a lot of guys. Don’t assume you can sneak around unnoticed.

Other: Being the other patriarch in a primarily matriarchal world, you’d expect him to be a misogynist pig. You would be absolutely correct.

**Ned Stoddard**

Based out of: Springfield, Massachusetts

Territory: New England/New York/Pennsylvania

Status: Jim’s younger brother. He’s not quite as smart or strategic as his brother, but he’s a better shot and a better fighter.

Other: I’ve heard he at least has some scruples. Or at least a scruple. Is there such a thing as a singular scruple?

**Sally Stoddard**

Based out of: Willy Wonka’s chocolate factory
Status: She bitched about how we had the wrong bottled water. How does someone even notice something like that?

Other: She’s actually pretty decent in a fight, though.

Angela Peretti

Based out of: Ocala, Florida

Territory: Florida (isn’t that enough?)

Status: She has to deal with so much weird shit that, to be honest, she probably wouldn’t bat an eyelash at a werewolf giving her a hand. I mean, come on, she lives in Florida. She probably has to fight off weregators.

Other: Pretty sure that she’s single, in case anyone wants to give an alliance a try. Also pretty sure she bats for the home team, so take that into account.

The Order of St. James

Based out of: Abilene, Texas

Territory: Texas/Louisiana

Status: To use words not my own, “a group of Bible-thumping crazies”. They have a front as a group home and take in orphaned or troubled kids and convert them to the cause. They’ve got more firepower than half the other hunting families put together. Then again, they are from Texas. Maybe that’s normal there?

Other: Like most of the hunter families/cooperatives, they’re run by a woman. Her name is Agnes, and she is a stone-cold bitch. Do not, under any circumstances, no matter how appropriate, use the c-word in front of her.

Not *that* c-word. I mean ‘cult’.

Hannah Winchester

Based out of: Leavenworth, Kansas

Territory: Iowa, Missouri, Arkansas, Kansas, Oklahoma, Nebraska

Status: You don’t fuck with them, they won’t fuck with you. Not sure how an alliance would go over, so if anyone tries one, let me know.

Other: Yes, the TV show is based on one of them. Yes, they’re very sick of people asking them that.

Ariah Nazario
Based out of: Casper, Wyoming

Territory: Wyoming/Utah/Colorado/other enormous empty areas

Status: She is pretty much willing to kill anything that moves. She is also very good at it.

Other: The Nazario family is the original hunting family from the United States. They are not at all afraid to tell you this.

**Vanessa Nazario**

Based out of: Casper, Wyoming

Territory: Wyoming/Utah/Colorado/other enormous empty areas

Status: About as matter-of-fact as they come. Doesn’t like werewolves, but also doesn’t like hunters who cause trouble. Actually, she doesn’t really like anyone.

Other: Her daughter, Vivien, was the leader of the alpha pack hunters until her death at Kali’s hands. Could be she’s holding a grudge, but this is as of yet unconfirmed.
Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

A few people were sending me messages about how they 'didn't get' Derek and Stiles' relationship in TSOIP, so I decided to write 7500 words of pure, domestic fluff. Seriously, this will give you cavities. Pure schmooop, right here.

Thanks to everyone on my tumblr who made suggestions - there were so many amazing ideas, I wrote as many as I could. <3

No real timing issues on this one. It's a series of scenes spread out throughout the fic, with very few references to any dramatic events. (There are a couple references to Kate, though, so there might be some mild triggeryness for sexual abuse.)

It’s been a long time since Stiles has slept in a bed by himself, to the point where he can’t even do it anymore. It’s funny when he looks back on things, because he can remember the first few times Derek or Lydia crashed in the same bed with him and how natural it felt. It should have been awkward or weird, but it never really was. It was the sort of intimacy that came with the pack bonds, and they had all accepted it without complaint.

The others come and go, sometimes sleeping at the den, sometimes sleeping at their family’s houses or each other’s, but no matter what else is going on, Stiles always wakes up with Derek beside him. Sometimes he’s a wolf, especially when everyone’s there and space is limited, but more and more lately, he’s been sleeping in his human body when it’s just the two of them. Stiles can’t help but wonder how much of the time he’s spent in his wolf form previously was a defense mechanism left over from years of needing to be ready to fight or flee at a moment’s notice.

“You look very serious,” Derek mumbles, reaching over to rub his thumb over Stiles’ cheek. “What are you thinking about?”

“You,” Stiles says, grinning at him. Derek rolls his eyes. “No, seriously. You’ve been sleeping as a human-shaped-human a lot more now. I guess I was sort of wondering why. Is it a good thing? It feels like a good thing.”

Derek’s quiet for a moment. “Things are . . . simpler. When I’m a wolf. It’s hard to describe, really. Animals just don’t think as much, so I’m able to . . . to just be, without getting bored, like I would as a human. For a long time, I couldn’t really fall asleep if I was in my human form. But that’s gotten a lot better lately.”

“Good.” Stiles rolls over onto his side, taking Derek’s hand between both of his and hugging it to his chest. He’s quiet for a minute, and then says, “You don’t have bad dreams as often.”

“Neither do you,” Derek replies.

“Yeah, but I’m getting intensive psychotherapy and sometimes take medication to help me sleep. You don’t have any of that.”
“I’ve got you,” Derek says. He pulls his hand back, taking Stiles’ with it, and presses a kiss against Stiles’ knuckles. “That’s enough.”

Stiles flushes pink. “You know, everyone sees your scowling and your leather and they think you’re such a hardass, but I know better. You’re nothing but a gigantic softy.”

Derek scowls at him. “Problem?”

“Nope,” Stiles says, grinning. “No problem.”

“Good, because people think you’re some kind of mystical badass when I happen to know that you’re a klutz with underdeveloped self-preservation skills who tends to flail his way into the right decision more often than not.”

“God, that is so accurate,” Stiles muses. He rolls over again so he can sprawl out on top of Derek, resting his chin against Derek’s chest. Derek responds automatically to this familiar position, one hand coming up to rub up and down Stiles’ back. “They don’t know my real secret. That I could never do any of this without you, and the pack, and my dad . . . but definitely not without you.”

“Now who’s the softy?” Derek says, smirking at him.

“Me,” Stiles says. “Every damn day.” He yawns and sits up, stretching. “How do you feel about some waffles for breakfast?”

“I feel good about waffles.”

~ ~ ~ ~

Derek’s been through a lot, and Stiles never holds it against him that he doesn’t like action movies with a lot of explosions and fire and loud noises. That makes sense to him. Derek doesn’t like chick flicks, either, and although he doesn’t dislike fantasy or science-fiction, it’s not the first thing he’ll go for. No, Derek likes . . . boring movies. There just isn’t a better way to put it. He either watches documentaries, or he watches weird British stuff with people who talk at each other about nothing for hours on end.

Which is why Stiles is curled up on the sofa with Derek watching a movie about crossword puzzles. To be fair, it’s about as interesting as a movie about crossword puzzles could be. And Derek is clearly enthralled, his gaze never wavering from the television. Stiles stifles a yawn and rubs at Derek’s feet, which are in his lap. Werewolves don’t really get sore feet, but they can appreciate a foot rub like anybody else.

The others are all out doing their own thing, because absolutely nobody else was interested in seeing the movie. Stiles can sympathize. But that’s okay. He likes it when the two of them have a little time all to themselves. He loves the pack and wouldn’t give them up for anything, but he’s the alpha, so he’s constantly trying to split his attention ten ways. Making sure that everyone is comfortable and happy is just something he does, so if the pack is there, that’s what he’s focused on. Now he can focus one hundred percent of his attention on Derek. He can just sit there while Derek’s attention is focused on the movie, with Derek’s feet in his lap, and feel that pulse of warmth and contentment coming through the bond they share.
When the movie rolls to a halt, he finishes off the last of the popcorn. Derek leans over and nuzzles his ear. “Thanks for watching it with me,” he says. “I know it’s not your kind of movie.”

“No big,” Stiles says. “I like watching movies with you.”

Which is one hundred percent true. And it could be worse, after all. Once they had watched a movie about fonts.

~ ~ ~ ~

It’s hard to sketch Stiles, Derek complains, because he’s constantly in motion. Even when he’s sleeping, he moves around. He growls about it, particularly when he’s working on his first paintings of Stiles. “I just need one or two decent sketches I can use as a reference,” he says.

“Just take a picture,” Stiles says.

“It’s not the same.”

Stiles makes a face at him and then, mystifying Derek completely, he says, “Do you know if there are any tennis matches on TV right now?”

“What?” Derek asks, but he pulls out his smart phone to check. They have an expansive cable package, due to the eclectic tastes of the pack, and he manages to find a sports channel that’s broadcasting tennis. “I didn’t know you cared about tennis,” he says.

“I don’t,” Stiles says. “Give me half an hour.”

Now Derek is truly stumped, but also extremely curious about what Stiles is up to. Half an hour later, Stiles flops on the sofa and proceeds to stare at the tennis match without moving a muscle.

“What is happening here?” Derek asks.

“I took some extra Adderall,” Stiles says, and after a beat, he says in a wondering tone, “The ball just . . . goes back and forth.”

Derek draws him for two hours.

~ ~ ~ ~

“Really?” Derek asks.

Stiles whines and nods.

“No, but, really?” Derek repeats.

“Don’t make me say it again,” Stiles says. “Come on. Let a man have his dignity.”

“No, I just . . . how bad can it be?” Derek asks.
“Oh, geez,” Stiles says. “I forget that you’ve never been to the dentist. Okay, no, it’s probably not anywhere near as bad as I think it is, but I just . . .” His voice lowers to a mumble. “Am really, really afraid of the dentist. So please come with me and be a service dog so I can cuddle with you because this tooth has been killing me for two weeks and I can’t ignore it anymore and it’s an impacted wisdom tooth so they’re going to cut my mouth apart and everything is terrible.”

Derek bites his lip to keep from smiling. “Okay,” he says. “Sure.”

Later, he’ll privately admit to himself that the dentist is terrifying. All the tools are made out of shiny, sharp metal. The drill has a high-pitched whine that makes his ears cringe, and the smell of a drilled tooth is not anything he’s going to forget any time soon. And the size of the needle that goes into Stiles’ mouth, holy shit! And Stiles just lets himself be stabbed with it, one hand twisting in Derek’s fur but otherwise giving no reaction.

Derek has never been so glad to be a werewolf.

“You’re sure you don’t want to go under for this?” the dentist asks, sounding dubious.

“Oh huh,” Stiles says. He had told the others earlier that he didn’t want anesthesia, because, to quote, ‘fuck our lives’. Derek has to admit that it’s unlikely that some werewolf hunter/sorcerer/assassin will attack Stiles while he’s sedated and getting his wisdom teeth out, but unlikely is not impossible.

So he’s less woozy than he could be when they leave the dentist’s office, but still wobbly and (Derek has to admit) whiny. “You look like a chipmunk,” Derek tells him.

“Fuh yuh,” Stiles replies.

Derek just shakes his head a little and drives him back to the den and steers him onto the sofa. Stiles grabs Derek by the shirt and pulls him down as well, so Stiles can sit in his lap with his back against Derek’s chest.

“Muh fuss huts,” Stiles says, so Derek gives him painkillers and some applesauce. “Dentiss ah da wusst,” Stiles declares, and Derek has to admit that he agrees.

~ ~ ~ ~

“It’s hideous,” Stiles says.

Derek scowls at him. “Well, I like it.”

“It’s a blue velour sofa,” Stiles says. “That violates at least three laws of fashion. I don’t think Lydia would ever allow herself to be seen on it.” He tucks an arm around Derek’s waist and absenty rubs his cheek into Derek’s upper arm. “But if you like it, why don’t you get it for the studio?”

“The studio?” Derek blinks at him. They’ve bought a lot of furniture in the past two days, now that the den has been completed, but he hadn’t bought anything for the studio yet. The meager amount of furniture he had moved in from his small apartment had mostly gone into either the bedroom or the living room.

“Yeah. Won’t you want a place to sit occasionally?” Stiles pokes him in the ribs. “Don’t lie to me. You’re going to realize halfway through a painting that you’ve been on your feet for ten hours
straight and pass out on the nearest piece of furniture. So if you like that, get it.”

Derek thinks it over and then says, “Yeah, okay.”

“Okay.” Stiles turns around and flags down a salesperson. “Excuse me, we would like to buy this hideous blue sofa,” he says, and Derek claps a hand over his mouth.

~ ~ ~ ~

“Shove over,” Stiles growls. He’s surly in the morning.

“I’m brushing my teeth,” Derek says, with his mouth full of toothbrush.

“I have to get to school, you have all morning to do that,” Stiles says, elbowing him. “I still have to shave.”

“Go one day without.” Derek spits into the sink and reaches for his cup of water. “Nobody’ll notice.”

“Hey now,” Stiles says. “Just because you possess the manliest of stubble doesn’t give you the right to malign mine. You could skip shaving. You do all the time.”

“I could,” Derek says, reaching for the can of shaving cream. Stiles scowls at him. “Actually, I do see a single hair on your upper lip. Give it a few years and you might actually manage a mustache.”

Stiles waits until Derek has squirted some of the shaving cream into his palm before he reaches out and swipes it. “Hah! Victory is mine – no shoving! Foul! Ref!”

“I was here first!”

“But I have school!”

Derek squirts more shaving cream into his hand and immediately rubs it into Stiles’ hair.

“Oh, it is on, you jerk,” Stiles says.

He’s late to school. Derek has to clean up the bathroom.

~ ~ ~ ~

Everyone snickers behind their hands when Stiles gives Derek bath crayons for his birthday. It’s adorable and pointless and silly, and Stiles seems to have scoured the entire internet so he can find a good variety of colors. ROYGBIV is not good enough for an artist, Stiles points out, and somewhere in the bowels of Etsy he’s found sets that include pink and turquoise and a whole host of other colors.

Derek just rolls his eyes and says ‘thanks, Stiles’ and gives him a brief cheek rub before continuing on to the ‘much cooler’ present that comes next, which is a DVD set from Scott.
Much later that night, everyone is getting ready for bed when Isaac mentions that Derek has been in the bathroom for an awfully long time. Stiles says, “I’ll go see what he’s up to” even though he knows quite well, and gives the bathroom door a brief knock before going in. (Modesty died a quick and painless death in the pack; unless someone has explosive diarrhea, people walk in and out of the bathroom on each other all the time.)

He finds Derek reproducing The Starry Night on their bathroom wall and takes a few moments to admire the work of art. “Not gonna do an original Derek Hale?” he teases.

“Just practicing,” Derek says, not looking up.

“Are we going to have to sell our bathroom wall?”

“Nah,” Derek says. He glances over at Stiles and says, “I think there’s some beauty in temporary art. Like the sand mandalas I was telling you about.” He looks back at his work and says, “Nothing lasts forever, so, we cherish things while they’re around.”

Stiles nods and gives him a small grin. “I knew you’d like those.”

“I do like them.” Derek leans in and presses a kiss against Stiles’ temple. “Thank you.”

~ ~ ~ ~

Stiles is curled up on his side, hacking and sniffling, when his door creaks open. “Leave the light off,” he mumbles into his pillow.

“Hey,” Derek says quietly, sitting down on the edge of the bed. He reaches out and runs a hand through Stiles’ hair. “Gross, you’re all sweaty.”

“Love you too,” Stiles croaks. He opens one eye to see the tray Derek is carrying. It has a mug, a bowl, and several pill bottles on it. “What’ve you got there?”

“I just – made you some tea,” Derek says, scowling. “It’s lemon ginger. And some oatmeal. That’s what you gave me when I was sick. And, uh, I brought you some medicine. I wasn’t sure what you would need. Werewolf, et cetera.”

Stiles struggles to sit up against the blankets that are weighing him down. “I already took some cough medicine, some Tylenol, and some decongestants,” he said. “Just waiting for them to kick in.”

He studies the array of bottles, which includes, among other things, Tums and Immodium. “Did you bring me every bottle in the medicine cabinet?”

Derek’s scowl deepens. “I don’t know what you need! You probably need all of these things.”

“You’re adorable,” Stiles says, grinning despite how terrible he feels. “Seriously, though, I took some stuff already. I just need to get some sleep.” He takes the tea and sips it slowly. “I’ll eat the oatmeal later.”

“Are you sure you don’t need more medicine? You sound, look, and smell terrible.”

“Thanks for that,” Stiles says. “No. It’s just a virus, big guy. What I need is my softy wolf taking a nap with me.”
“I’m not a softy,” Derek grumbles, shucking off his pants so he can crawl into bed with him. He’s still muttering imprecations as Stiles curls up next to him, resting his disgusting, phlegmy face right on Derek’s chest, and falls right to sleep.

~ ~ ~ ~

“It’s not a difficult question,” Stiles points out.

“I didn’t say it was a difficult question,” Derek replies, scowling.

“There are only six choices.”

“I’m aware of how many choices there are.”

“I’m not going away until I get an answer.”

Derek’s scowl deepens. “Why are you hounding me about this?”

Stiles shrugs. “Because it’s fun.”

“Fluttershy, okay? My favorite is Fluttershy.”

Stiles grins. “Everyone in the pack owes me five dollars now. Bye!” he adds, jumps off Derek’s lap, and sprints for the door.

“Get back here!” Derek shouts, and leaps after him.

~ ~ ~ ~

“Happy birthday!” the entire pack choruses, jumping out from behind chairs and tables where they weren’t at all hidden, given that Derek could hear their heartbeats and smell their scents. But it’s the thought that counts, in regards to a surprise birthday party, according to Stiles. And even if the pack itself wasn’t so surprising, there are streamers and a banner and an enormous cake.

Derek looks at Stiles and says, flatly, “What.”

“Happy birthday,” Stiles says, beaming benevolently.

“Stiles,” Derek says, “today isn’t my birthday.”

“I know that,” Stiles says. “Your birthday is December twenty-fifth. I remember that very specifically from last year, when somebody said ‘it must be so much fun to have your birthday on Christmas’ and you said ‘sure’ in that way that meant you hate your birthday being on Christmas. Because who wouldn’t, am I right?”

A smile twitches at Derek’s lips despite himself. “It can cut down on the total amount of presents,” he says.
“And your birthday is supposed to be about you, but Christmas is about everybody,” Stiles says. “Therefore, I officially declare this, June twenty-fifth, to be your pack birthday. The day that the pack celebrates Derek. Because every pack should have a celebrate-Derek-Hale-day.”

Derek scowls at him, his cheeks turning pink. “That would just be ridiculous.”

“Well, we’re going to have one anyway,” Stiles says, and leans over to give him a hug, hooking an arm over Derek’s neck. “Happy Derek Day. Now let’s have some cake.”

~ ~ ~ ~

“Hey, check it out!” Stiles bursts into the studio, full of excitement, carrying a small plate. “I made you something.”

“What is it?” Derek asks, looking up from his work in interest.

“Try it!” Stiles says, holding out what looks like a sandwich cookie. Derek takes it and sniffs it carefully, before biting into it. He doesn’t stop to ask questions. Stiles may be a lot of things, but a bad cook isn’t one of them.

“Is that carrot cake?” he asks.

“It’s carrot cookie,” Stiles says. “I found the recipe online! And I added a bit of extra ginger and nutmeg for you. But check it out, you can put the cream cheese frosting between two cookies and then you have, like, a portable carrot cake you can bring with you wherever you go!”

“Because you never know what sort of situation you might find yourself in, needing a carrot cake on the go,” Derek says seriously.

“Exactly!” Stiles declares, and Derek huffs out a little laugh. “Come on, Derek. This is us. It would not surprise me at all if we someday ran into a situation that necessitated an on-the-go carrot cake.”

Derek eats the rest of the cookie and says, with his mouth full, “Fair point.”

~ ~ ~ ~

There’s a certain kind of rainy day in the fall that always makes Derek quiet and melancholy. Not heavy rain, but that vague sort of mist that clings in the air and chills everything. He only reacts like that in the autumn, though; it’s something about the scent. It was an autumn day like this when the school administrator had called him into the office to tell him that his family had been killed in a fire. Laura had picked him up later that day, and the chill had still been in the air when they got to what was left of the house they had grown up in.

Derek doesn’t say anything to anybody about it, because there’s nothing that anyone can do. Days like this are just hard for him, that’s all. It’s not their problem. He just has to wait it out. Besides, they probably can’t even tell when he’s affected. He covers it up pretty well.

But Stiles covers some things up pretty well, too, and it takes Derek a couple years to figure out that
Stiles does know, and that he probably even understands why even if he doesn’t know the details. Because Stiles is always just a little bit more cuddly, a little extra attentive, on days like that. He brings Derek tea before he asks for it, sits with him even after he would normally have gotten bored and wandered off, keeps his music quieter. He’ll sit with Derek and read and absently rub his back while he pretends to work.

He never says anything about it, because he understands that Derek doesn’t want to talk about it, that talking about it won’t help. He just makes sure he’s available, and more than that, makes sure that Derek knows he’s available. That whatever Derek needs, he’s there. Whether it’s a hug or some cocoa or a movie to distract himself with.

~ ~ ~ ~

Derek used to go out on windy days and fly kites with his family, and on a whim he decides to make a kite of his own one sunny spring day. It looks sort of like a bird, although he definitely still needs to work on the details. Stiles thinks it’s fantastic, and immediately tugs Derek out of the house and to a large clearing in the preserve.

The problem is, Stiles can’t quite get it off the ground. Derek thinks the clearing is too sheltered; the wind isn’t really as strong, but Stiles insists that he’ll be able to do it. He runs and drags it along and flings the kite into the sky with reckless abandon. Derek just watches him in amusement.

“Okay, wait, I got it!” Stiles says, jogging along and looking over his shoulder as a gust of air finally catches the kite in just the right way and starts to lift it up. Stiles runs even faster. “I got it, I got it, I – ”

wham

Stiles runs face first into a tree. He reels backwards, the kite flops to the ground, and he lands hard on his butt, looking stunned.

“Jesus, are you okay?” Derek asks.

“Yeah, I – I think so,” Stiles says, patting himself down.

Derek promptly sits down in the dirt and starts to howl with laughter.

“Hey! Hey, you jerk – ”

“Oh my God,” Derek says, wheezing. “My kingdom to have gotten that on film, holy shit, you should have seen your face – ”

“Shut up, you asshole!” Stiles says, but he’s laughing, too. “You could have warned me!”

“I thought you would notice you were running full tilt towards a tree – ”

“I was focused on the kite!” Stiles protests, and Derek just laughs harder. “Oh, man. That one could have gone up on You Tube. The Boy in Red versus a tree. Victor: tree.”

“The great legend, defeated at last,” Derek agrees, shoulders still shaking.
Derek knows he’s attractive, although it’s not really the kind of thing that matters to him. Women flirt with him all the time. Depending on his mood, he’ll either give them the polite brush-off or explain that he’s not on the market. He’s careful never to encourage them. After a while, the ladies of Beacon Hills all get the idea. He’s pretty sure that they assume he’s gay, and a lot of them have concluded he’s in a relationship with Stiles, so he doesn’t have to deal with it.

Once they’re in San Francisco, however, the landscape really changes. He doesn’t know if the women there are more pushy or if it just feels that way because he’s often out and about without the pack, which can make him edgy. And he doesn’t like to be impolite. Which is how he ends up standing in a Whole Foods while a woman makes very suggestive comments about the ripeness of the melons.

Normally, that kind of thing might roll off him, but the problem is, well. She’s blonde. Blonde and kind of sharp-faced with a vivacious smile that really reminds him of Kate. So instead of just blowing her off, like he normally would, he’s found himself caught in a strange paralysis, letting her hit on him while he tries to pick out a cantaloupe and just gets more and more flustered.

He doesn’t actually realize how he’s frozen up until Stiles rounds a corner, catching up from where he’s been perusing the deli, and Derek sees that the younger man looks extremely worried. He sees the woman and looks between the two and then his face clears as he figures out what’s going on. “Hey, babe, what’s taking so long?” he asks, sliding an arm around Derek’s waist.

“I was just, uh, picking out a melon,” Derek says.

“Got it.” Stiles turns to the woman and gives her a friendly smile, which belies the tension underneath. Both Derek and Stiles know that there was no way she knew how uncomfortable she was making Derek, but Stiles can’t help but get uptight about such things. It’s a territorial response, if nothing else. But Stiles tries to keep his tone neutral. “Oh, was Derek helping you with the fruit? He’s the best at picking out melons.”

“Somehow I doubt that,” she says, somewhat waspishly, grabs a watermelon, and walks away. Stiles wrinkles his nose after her.

“You okay?” Stiles asks Derek.

“I’m fine. I just – yeah, I’m fine. Thanks.”

“Okay. Hey, grab some peaches. I’ll make pie.”

~ ~ ~

Stiles is moaning as he gets out of the car. “I regret everything,” he says, leaning against the hood of the Jeep. “Carry me.”

“What is wrong with you,” Derek says, although it’s not really a question. He scoops Stiles up reverse piggy-back style, and Stiles hooks his chin over Derek’s shoulder and groans again.
“Don’t jostle me,” he mumbles.

“I’m not sorry for you at all,” Derek tells him. “I told you that you were going to make yourself sick.”

“But they were sooooooo goooooood,” Stiles says.

“They would have been just as good tomorrow!”

“You don’t know that,” Stiles mumbles into his shoulder, and Derek rolls his eyes. Two days previous, he had mentioned that he missed going to pick strawberries with his family. Smaller farms tend to use fewer pesticides, and the fruit is handled by fewer people, and it just tastes more natural to him. With most things, it doesn’t bother him, but strawberry-picking had been a Hale tradition, and he missed it.

Stiles being Stiles, he had immediately gone online to find a place that was offering ‘pick your own’ strawberries, bundled the available pack into cars, and gone out to the farm. There he had decided it had nothing to do with pesticides or werewolf senses; fresh strawberries really were twice as good as store-bought. He had eaten more than he had picked, and his fingers had been stained pink by the end of the day.

Derek had warned him several times that if he kept devouring them, he was going to end up sick, but Stiles had brushed him off, and now he’s paying for it. Derek shakes his head a little as he carts his woeful alpha inside, the rest of the pack trailing along and laughing at Stiles’ misfortune.

“There,” he says, setting Stiles down on the sofa. “Better?”

“Mm hm,” Stiles says, grabbing Derek by the shirt and pulling him down onto the couch so he could flop across his lap. “You stay here with me. The others can unload.”

“Okay,” Derek says, as Stiles shifts and groans and sprawls out on him. “You’re an idiot.”

“Uh huh,” Stiles agrees. “Gonna make you strawberry shortcake. Soon as I can move again.”

Derek shakes his head and smiles fondly, “Okay, but you’re still an idiot.”

“And strawberry ice cream. Maybe strawberry jam.” Stiles opens one eye. “You’re supposed say ‘but you’re my idiot’.”

“You’re an absolute sap,” Derek says.

“Uh huh,” Stiles says.

Derek can’t help but smile. “But . . . you’re my absolute sap.”

~ ~ ~ ~

“Are you coming to bed any time this decade?” Derek asks.

Stiles is scowling and typing on his laptop. “I can’t,” he says, and then declares in an impassioned tone, “Someone is wrong on the internet.”
Derek rolls his eyes. “And you’re teaching them the error of their ways?”

“Yes. Through pointed speech and hilarious gifs.”

“You know that’s pronounced with a ‘j’, right?” Derek asks.

Stiles glowers up at him. “It stands for ‘graphics interchange format’, so it’s a hard g, and I don’t care what the guy who invented it says. If he doesn’t know how to pronounce ‘graphics’ that’s not my problem. Anyway, that’s not what I’m arguing about.”

“What are you arguing about?” Derek asks, curious as to what has Stiles riled up like this.

After a moment, Stiles huffs out a sigh. “So there’s this website I found a while ago, after, you know, you told me that you were asexual. I was doing some research and talking to some people so I was, you know, sure I was respecting your feelings and everything. Anyway, the point is, someone posted on the forum about how the person they’re in love with is asexual and having questions about how to handle it. And I was just trying to help them out when suddenly this troll comes in and starts telling me that the relationship I have with you isn’t ‘real’, he pauses to make air quotes, “because we don’t have sex. And I’m shutting him the fuck down because how dare he.”

Derek considers this for a few moments, while Stiles goes back to typing and muttering to himself. “Imagine if he knew that you have a fuckbuddy.”

“Well, he does, that’s how it got started, because I mentioned that open relationships are a valid way to deal with being in love with someone asexual and then this guy starts trying to convince me that I must actually be in love with Erica and we should, like, settle down and get married – ”

Derek chokes on his tea.

“ – and I’m very insulted, and how dare he imply that you don’t deserve a real relationship just because you aren’t interested in sex, or that I’m taking advantage of you by sleeping with Erica, he doesn’t know anything about it – ”

“Wait.” Derek blinks. “He actually said that?”

“Yes!” Stiles jabs a finger at his laptop. “Right here! He said that our relationship is abusive and that I don’t get what it means and that since I’m a teenaged boy, as long as I’m getting laid, I don’t care if you’re unhappy!”

Derek leans over his shoulder. “Okay,” he says. “Show me your gifs. This motherfucker is going down.”

~ ~ ~ ~

“Przemysław.”

“Close. It’s more of a hard ‘s’ in the middle. You’re slurring it.”

“Przemysław.”

“Better. That vowel should be about halfway between an ‘ee’ and an ‘ih’ if that makes sense.”
“Przemysław.”


“Przemysław,” Derek says again, carefully, committing the pronunciation to memory. “Am I saying it right? I mean, I know I’m saying it right, but am I saying it right?”

“Well, you’re not saying it exactly how my mom said it,” Stiles says with a shrug. “But that’s okay.” He smiles at Derek and adds, “I like the way you say it.”

Derek considers this, then nods. “I’ll take it.”

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The thing is, it’s not like Derek doesn’t know how to cook. He had to fend for himself for a while after Laura’s death, and it wasn’t like she had been Martha Stewart. Sure, there was a lot of take out and frozen dinners, but even with those, he had to cook some of the time. So when Stiles is coming up on his first set of college finals, Derek decides he’ll cook dinner for the pack as a surprise. Everything he’ll need is already in the den. It doesn’t have to be five star cuisine as long as it’s edible.

Stiles had been planning to make tacos, and that’s easy enough. There’s approximately a hundred pounds of hamburger in the refrigerator. Derek estimates that five pounds should be enough for ten people, and the packages are about three pounds each, so there should be plenty.

He’s seen Stiles make tacos dozens of times, and the younger man doesn’t even measure anymore, which Derek thinks is kind of impressive. He just dumps in a bunch of garlic, a bunch of chili powder and cumin and oregano, and starts cooking. Derek decides to find a recipe instead. He has the internet. He carefully measures out the spices and mixes them in. He chops garlic and onion.

While it’s cooking, he sets out things the way he’s seen Stiles do. Tortillas at one station. Bowls of lettuce, cheese, black olives. Stiles makes his own guacamole, but he just does it by squashing together some avocado and some store bought salsa, so that’s easy enough.

The pack start getting home when the meat is about halfway done. He’s had to do it in several batches, because six pounds of hamburger doesn’t fit in one frying pan. “Hey, that smells great,” Scott says. He sounds surprised, and Derek growls at him. Scott raises his hands in surrender. Derek remembers that Mac won’t eat the meat, and finds a couple cans of beans in the pantry, so he opens those and rinses them before dumping them into another bowl for anyone who wants some.

By the time he’s done with that, the door opens and Stiles jogs in. He blinks around and says, “You cooked!”

“I figured that you had enough on your plate right now,” Derek says.

Stiles grins. “Pun intended?”

“Maybe a little,” Derek says. He shrugs. “You had two finals today and another tomorrow. You should be focusing on that. I can cook dinner once in a while.”

“Well, it smells great,” Stiles says, and leans over to plant a kiss on Derek’s temple. “Let me go put
my stuff down.”

Ten minutes later, the kitchen is full of people, everyone is making their tacos and stuffing their faces. Derek keeps half an eye on Stiles as he finishes up with the last of the taco meat, but he’s making his taco with his usual diligence. He keeps stopping to talk with the others, though, and refreshing his memory on the exam he has the next day.

In fact, he’s only eaten about three bites when everyone else is either finishing up or going back for seconds. Derek frowns a little, but it can’t be that the food isn’t good, because everyone else is eating and several of the pack have complimented him on the meal (with a little more surprise than can be considered flattering). It’s as if Stiles has forgotten that he needs to . . .

Oh. Derek leans in to elbow Stiles and says, “How much Adderall have you had?”

“What? I don’t know. A lot?” Stiles goes right back into his speech about his criminology final without missing a beat. Derek shakes his head a little and finishes eating. Stiles abandons his mostly full plate with absolutely no idea that he had barely eaten anything, and even gives Derek a hug and thanks him for cooking. Two minutes later, he’s immersed in his books.

The next morning, Stiles gets up like everything is normal and heads off to his last final. Derek goes to drop some art off at the gallery and gets home around one. Stiles is back at the apartment by then, talking about what they’re going to need to take back to Beacon Hills for the month long break, rambling away as he stands in the kitchen and fills his face with tacos. He eats four of them without ever breaking stride and then falls asleep in a kitchen chair.

~ ~ ~ ~

Wedding preparation is a lot of work, so when Stiles is done dancing around the room at the announcement of his father and Melissa McCall’s impending nuptials, he volunteers to help out. Naturally, what he ends up doing is the food. It’s not going to be a big ceremony, Tom stresses, but once Melissa’s friends and colleagues are accounted for along with half the county’s police force, relatives on either side, and of course a bunch of werewolves, there are going to be about a hundred people in attendance.

That’s too many for even Stiles to cook for, so he goes in search of a caterer. He figures he’ll narrow it down to a final two or three and then have his father and Melissa choose. Same with the cakes. He loves baking, does it almost every day, but elaborate, decorated cakes aren’t in his wheelhouse. So he goes to Yelp and Google Reviews and sets up a few taste-tests.

He brings Derek along because of course he does, and they walk into The Cake Whisperer are greeted by the woman behind the desk. “Hey, I called earlier about the Stilinski wedding?”

“So what’s the date for the wedding?” Julie asks.
“October first,” Stiles says.

“I love autumn weddings,” Julie says, with a wistful sigh. Then she smiles and says, “So how long have you two been together?”

Derek and Stiles blink at each other. “Oh, well, we’re not – I mean, we are, but we’re not,” Stiles stammers, and sees Derek roll his eyes. “Uh, it’s not my wedding. It’s my father’s.”

“Oh, I’m so sorry!” Julie says. “I didn’t mean to offend.”

“No, no, I’m not offended,” Stiles says. “I mean, we are a couple, we’re just not getting married. I mean, not right now. We’re going to. Eventually. When I get out of college, probably. We, uh. We haven’t set a date or anything.”

“Well, let me tell you that you two make an adorable couple,” Julie says, regaining her smile.

Stiles smirks at Derek. “Yes, we do,” he says, seeing the tips of Derek’s ears turn red.

“Remember us when you set a date!” Julie says cheerfully.

About half an hour later, when they’re leaving, Stiles reaches out and twines his fingers through Derek’s. “Obviously we should have spice cake at our wedding,” he says. “It’s the closest thing we can get to gingersnaps.”

Derek is still blushing, and takes a moment to scowl at Stiles. “Not everything is about your gingersnaps.”

“Oh? Do you want something else?”

“No,” Derek says. “I like spice cake.”

“Me too,” Stiles says, and grins at him.

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“You know, I don’t mind the fact that you wander around naked all the time,” Stiles says, “but you leave your clothes freakin’ everywhere. What is up with that?”

Derek scowls at him. “I pick them up.”

“Yeah, like, six days later, once an entire pile of them has gathered,” Stiles says, exasperated. “They form drifts and colonies. Once I’m pretty sure I saw a tumbleweed full of them blowing past me while I studied.”

“That did not happen,” Derek says.

“It could have.”

“Look, I’ll wash them when I get to it,” Derek says. “They don’t smell, so what do you care?”

“Derek, do I need extra excuses to fall over? I really don’t need to have to go to the ER and tell Doc Kirby that I tripped over a pile of laundry and busted up my face. He’ll call social services on me just
“You could just watch where you’re going,” Derek retorts.

“You could just not leave clothes everywhere!”

Derek snatches the shirt that Stiles is waving at him. “Okay. But in return for that, you have to stop putting containers back in the refrigerator with two swallows left in them. Next time I pull out a carton of orange juice and find that you’ve left me the least possible amount of orange juice, I’m going to flip my shit.”

“I don’t want to waste orange juice!”

“Then just drink it!”

“Fine!” Stiles glowers at him. “Then you have to stop ‘leaving dishes to soak’ until someone else decides to deal with them. Dish duty is dish duty, buster!”

“You can say that because you never have dish duty – ”

“That’s because I do all the cooking!”

“ – but fine, I’ll stop soaking dishes so they come cleaner in the dishwasher, for which you’re welcome, by the way, when you actually replace the roll of toilet paper on occasion, and no, putting a new one on top of the rack does not count – ”

“I only do that because the last time I put it on backwards and you acted like it was the tenth sign of the apocalypse, and if we’re going to go into bathroom etiquette do we even need to talk about the hairs you leave all over the sink and oh my God we’re married.”

“I don’t – wait, what?”

Stiles sits down abruptly and starts laughing like an idiot. “Are you even listening to us? We are bickering about household chores like the marriedest married couple to ever be married.”

Derek’s mouth works for a few moments. “Is that bad?” he finally asks.

“No, it’s hilarious,” Stiles says, still chuckling. “I’m all in for it. As long as you stop leaving your laundry everywhere. And I’ll try not to drink all your orange juice.”

Derek leans over and kisses him on the temple. “It’s a deal.”

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Some nights, all the green tea in the world doesn’t help Stiles sleep, and he’s not even sure why. His sleep cycle is just screwed up sometimes, and it’s impossible to tell if it’s ADD or PTSD, if it’s nightmares or stress, or if it’s just something that’s happened. He shifts a little, trying not to toss and turn too much, because Derek is sprawled out next to him and he doesn’t want to wake him.

He rolls over at one point and sees Derek lift his head slightly, so he whispers, “Hey. You awake?”

“Yeah,” Derek murmurs. “You okay?”
Stiles settles on his stomach, resting his chin on his hands. “Yeah, I’m okay,” he says. “Just can’t sleep.”

“Want to go make some tea?”

“Not really,” Stiles says. “Do you believe in genies?”

Derek gives him a sideways look. “Where did that come from?”

“I don’t know, it popped into my head. I was thinking about all the different supernatural creatures we’ve had to fight. If you had a genie, what would your three wishes be?”

“No wishing for more wishes?” Derek asks, amused.

“And no wishing for more genies,” Stiles confirms.

Derek’s quiet for a moment. “I would wish to keep the pack safe and healthy and happy,” he says. “I don’t know that I would really need two more wishes after that. It’s all I really care about. You can have my other two.”

“What, I don’t get my own genie?” Stiles asks. But then he goes quiet. “I would wish . . . to be able to talk to my mother one more time. Just to tell her how much I love her, and how much I miss her, and, you know . . . see what she thinks of who I’ve become.”

“That would be nice. Talking to my family again.” Derek lets out a breath. “Okay. That still leaves us one wish to share.”

“Hm . . . can we assume that people like my dad and Melissa are included in ‘the pack’ being safe and happy?” Stiles asks, and Derek nods. “Well, we could just wish for world peace.”

“We could do that,” Derek agrees solemnly.

“It would probably be selfish not to,” Stiles says. “You know, we could end world hunger, stop violence and rape, cure all those nasty uncureable diseases . . . maybe get the minimum wage raised.”

“I think some things are beyond the powers of even a genie,” Derek says with a snort.

“True. Personal wishes only?”

Derek takes Stiles’ hand and kisses him on the knuckles. “Personal wishes only.”

Stiles thinks that over. “But I don’t need anything else,” he says. “I’ve got you and the pack and my family.”

“Yeah,” Derek says. “Me neither.”

“How about we give that last wish away?”


“Yeah, good idea,” Stiles says, yawning.

Derek reaches out and caresses Stiles’ cheek with his thumb. “You ready to go to sleep?”

“Uh huh,” Stiles says, curling up against Derek’s shoulder. A few minutes later, they’re both asleep.
Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

Hello everybody! This isn't exactly a chapter, but....

I've done OC profiles through Charahub.com for all your original character needs! I know that TSOIP has a ginormous cast and it can be intimidating to keep track of. And as soon as I found Charahub, I was pretty much sold. Suuuuuuch a useful tool.

You can find the TSOIP characters here!

Some notes…

These profiles are NOT SPOILER FREE. Anything and everything up through The Devil’s Luck might be mentioned here.

There are also a few characters on here that you haven’t seen yet but are going to play major roles in TSOIP 14 - Martin and Marty Drake, Calvin Maguire (Wednesday’s boyfriend), and Ray Parr (Calvin’s alpha). However their profiles won’t spoil anything in 14, it's mostly generic stuff or stuff that’s already been mentioned.

I did include deceased characters as well as some minor characters that might or might not be seen again, just to keep you on your toes. ;)

Obviously not all of the casting is going to be perfect, but I’ve tried to get about as close as I can for everyone. Some of them were really easy (Jack Gleeson for Jonas XD) but some of them I feel like I was kind of grasping at straws, and there were two I just couldn’t manage at all: Ariah Nazario (couldn’t find a Native American actress the right age) and Eli Whitaker (who is fancasted in my head as Tom Waits, who has apparently never taken a decent picture in his life if Google Image Search isn’t fooling me).

Sebastian Stone gave me a lot of trouble until I remembered the villain in RED 2 (which, by the way, if you haven’t seen RED and RED 2 they’re awesome) where he plays a very cheerful psychopath. Perfect!

I think that’s it! You can refer back to this whenever you need. If there’s anything/anyone I’ve forgotten, just let me know.
Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

By popular request on tumblr, a short fic in which some guy tries to assault Erica, and she beats the shit out of him, and misogyny happens.

Trigger warnings definitely for sexual assault, police officers behaving badly, and misogyny. Also many thanks to the various feminists of tumblr for helping me with Erica's dialogue.

Stiles isn’t a huge fan of college parties, but they’re part of the lifestyle, so he figures he should try them once or twice. He doesn’t like to drink very much. His tolerance is higher, even though he’s not actually a werewolf, and he often skips straight from sober to sick without a stop at ‘pleasantly drunk’ in between. It doesn’t seem to bother the others. Stiles remembers his father sometimes joking about his mother’s liquor tolerance, so maybe it’s just something he inherited.

Erica is the only one who really likes the parties. Most of the other werewolves don’t like the scent of so many horny and wasted people crammed into such a small space. Erica doesn’t seem to mind it, though, and it’s an easy way to get laid. It’s that or Tinder, and she says that the fuckboy ratio is a lot higher on Tinder than at the parties.

This is a party that Danny got invited to by some of his college friends, and he says it’s probably going to be more fun than most. It’s a Halloween party, and Stiles loves Halloween. About half the pack dresses in a variety of costumes, hops into the Jeep and heads up to Berkeley.

Stiles is dressed as Spiderman, and he finds himself having a relatively good time. There’s not as much booze as some college parties, and it’s less crowded. He dances and sticks to soda and eats a bunch of chips. The costume is a little warm, but he’s handling it. Erica is dressed in the skimpiest pirate outfit that’s ever been designed, so she’s doing a lot better, flirting with everyone with a pulse.

Around one AM, Stiles is yawning so widely that he can barely see. Scott and Allison are ready to pack it in, too. Danny’s vanished with a cute boy. Boyd and his girlfriend left about an hour ago. Scott’s the most awake, so he says he’ll drive. Erica says she’s going to stay, and not to wait up.

The streets are mostly empty, and they’re about to get on the San Mateo bridge, when Stiles’ phone rings. He yawns again and sees Erica’s number. “I swear, if she’s changed her mind and wants us to turn around and pick her up . . .” She picks up. “Hey, what’s up?”

“Stiles, I – ” Erica’s voice is breathy and higher-pitched than usual. “I think I might have – there was this guy, and he wouldn’t – and I hit him, but I hit him too hard, I don’t feel right – ”

Scott already has the Jeep turned around in a screech of wheels, making an illegal U-Turn that would have been at home in Grand Theft Auto. He races back towards the party at three times the speed they had left it at.

“Erica, slow down,” Stiles says, taking care to keep his voice calm and firm. “Is he breathing? Check to see if he’s breathing.”
“Y-Yeah,” Erica says. “Pulse is steady. I slammed his face into the window.”

“What window?” Stiles asks. “Where are you?”

“His car window. He walked me back to his car. I wasn’t feeling well, but I started to – I didn’t want to go with him, but when I tried to pull away, he tried to make me get into the car. That’s when I hit him.”

“Okay. I want you to take a deep breath. Okay? Just breathe with me. We’re going to be there in a few minutes. Are you hurt?”

“No,” she says, voice trembling, but evening out.

“You said you felt weird. Weird, how?”

“Just kind of – like, unfocused? Floaty? Like, he was talking to me but I wasn’t really listening, like it didn’t matter somehow? It’s a hard sensation to describe.”

“Sounds like he slipped something into her drink,” Scott says, glancing over for a bare moment before redirecting his attention to the road. “It messed her up long enough to go with him, but wore off a lot faster for her than it would for a regular human. Probably made her control over her powers slip up. That’s why she hit him so hard without meaning to.”

Stiles nods a little. “How are you feeling now?”

“Better. C-Calming down a little. Shit, I think he’s coming around.”

“Okay. We’ll be right there.”

They pull into the parking lot a minute later. Stiles has been so focused on keeping Erica calm that he hasn’t had much of an emotional reaction so far. When he sees her standing there, makeup smeared by tears, the shoulder of her tiny blouse half torn off, he nearly flips his shit. Only Scott’s hand squeezing his shoulder keeps him from losing it.

“Hey, you,” he says, cupping her cheek in one hand. Scott is crowding in, trying to take a look at her. He looks at her eyes and takes her pulse and proclaims that she’s okay. Then he kneels down beside the man Erica had hit. He’s groaning and cradling his face in one hand. There’s a spiderweb of cuts from where his cheek jaw slammed into the window, and it’s already grotesquely swollen.

“Does he need an ambulance?” Stiles asks.

“Nah,” Scott says, feeling the man’s face. “Nothing’s broken. Not hard enough that he would have a concussion, either. Hey, you all right?” he adds, getting the guy on his feet. There’s quiet rage in Scott’s voice, but he treats the man like any other patient. “Hey, look at me. What’s your name?”

“What? ‘SFrank,” he says, with a slur that’s caused more by his split lip than any head trauma.

“Look at the light, okay?” Scott asks, producing a pen light that hangs on his keychain with professional sleight-of-hand.

“Ow, what the fuck, man.” Frank reels back from the light.

“Count backwards from ten,” Scott says, and Frank does it. “Yeah, he’s okay.”

He starts forward, half expecting Scott or Allison to grab him. Neither of them do, so he winds up with Frank’s shirt in both of his hands, yanking the guy up from where he’s been leaning on the car. He’s just about to beat the shit out of the guy when a new voice says, “What’s going on here?”

Stiles turns to see a police officer standing in the parking lot entrance, pointing a flashlight at them. He reluctantly lets Frank go. “Hey, Officer, this man just drugged my girlfriend and tried to abduct her, so I’m glad you’re here.”

“This bitch broke my fucking face!” Frank interrupts. “And my fucking car!”

“Okay, settle down,” the officer says, taking a few more steps forward. He shines the flashlight at Frank, frowning when he sees his injuries, then up and down Erica. “You did that to him?”

“He tried to force me into his car,” Erica says.

“Yeah?” the officer says. He looks her up and down again. “Have you been drinking?”


“You don’t really look like you’ve been drugged,” the officer says.

“Really?” Stiles can’t help but interrupt. “Is that what you really think we should be focusing on here? Uh, sir. Come on, he tried to force her into his car.”

“I did not!” Frank says. “She wanted to go. She’s been hitting on me all night. Then suddenly she went crazy and slammed my head into my car!”

“I flirted with you for literally three seconds!”

“Well, I can see how he might have gotten the idea that you were interested,” the officer says.

“Are you fucking kidding me – ” Erica starts.

As much as Stiles would love to let her rip the police officer apart, he’s not sure it’s the best idea. He tries to rein things in. “Okay, Officer, can we maybe focus less on what my girlfriend wore to a Halloween party and more on the fact that this man tried to abduct her? Can we call an ambulance? If you want proof of what the guy tried to do, how about we take Erica to the hospital and do some blood tests on her?”

The officer gives him a thousand yard stare, but then he does get on his radio and request an ambulance. When he puts his radio back down, he gestures to Frank and says, “That’s for him. Need to make sure he doesn’t have a concussion. You,” he adds, reaching for Erica’s elbow, “are going to come down to the station with me.”

“What the fuck, no, I’m not going anywhere with you,” Erica says, pulling away.

“I’m assuming that this young man is going to want to press assault charges, so – ”

“Listen to me, you son of a bitch, he was going to rape me, and to be honest he’s luck that I didn’t put the tailpipe up his ass – ”

“Dressed like that, I’m surprised he’s the only one who got that idea,” the officer says.

“Oh, you did not just say that – ”

Stiles steps forward and takes Erica’s hand. “I’m going with her,” he says.
“Kid, you’re not going anywhere. She’s under arrest. Go home.”

“Then arrest me too, for all I care.”

“Go home, kid,” the officer says. “Spend some time thinking about why you let your girlfriend dress like a –”

Stiles draws back and punches him across the face.

A bare moment later, he’s pinned to the hood of the officer’s car with the breath knocked out of him. He has a feeling that the officer is lucky that Allison didn’t put an arrow in his throat for this manhandling of their alpha, but she somehow managed to refrain.

“Fine, if you want to be arrested so badly,” the officer growls, getting Stiles in handcuffs and tossing him into the back of the cruiser. Erica joins him there a moment later, pissed as all hell.

“Let me explain some things to you,” Erica says, once the car is on the road. She somehow manages to refrain from vulgarity, and Stiles is impressed. “Let me go back to the beginning and explain why judging a girl by what she’s wearing is an old-fashioned, misogynistic attitude. It goes back to bodily autonomy.” Stiles glances up front and sees the cop doing his best to ignore her. “See, just because someone is cooking a steak in front of you doesn’t mean you have the right to eat it. Just because a guy is standing at a bank counting his money doesn’t mean you’re entitled to take it. We can all agree on that, right? So by that logic, even if I was walking around naked, it doesn’t mean that any guy is entitled to my fucking body.

“And by saying a girl who’s dressed a certain way is asking to be raped, what you’re saying is that a girl should change her behavior to avoid being raped. But the problem with that logic is that what you’re really saying is ‘make sure he rapes some other girl’. Frank wanted to get laid tonight regardless of what the girls thought about it, right? So he picked a girl in a short skirt. If I hadn’t been there, he would have just picked someone else.

“Plus, maybe I was trying to get laid tonight,” Erica continues. “I mean, I did sort of have it in mind. So yeah, I dressed up to look sexy. That doesn’t mean he gets to fuck with my drink and try to drag me out to his car. Hell, he wasn’t even that ugly, if he’d actually tried to have a conversation with me, he might’ve gotten lucky without the need for fucking pharmaceuticals.”

“You wanna shut up back there?” the cop finally says. “I thought this guy was your boyfriend.”

“That doesn’t mean I tell her what to do with her vagina,” Stiles retorts. “And you’re gonna hear a lot more than this, buddy. Just wait until you get to your departmentally mandated sensitivity training. Because you have no idea who you just arrested.”

“Oh, yeah? Your dad some lawyer, politician bigshot?” The cop sneers at him.

“Worse,” Stiles says. “He’s Sheriff Thomas Motherfucking Stilinski, and you’re going to eat every misogynistic word you spewed tonight.” He settles back into his seat and pulls Erica against his shoulder.

From an academic perspective, getting processed is actually kind of interesting. He gets his fingerprints done and tries to give the camera his best Blue Steel look during his mugshot. He’s put in one of the holding cells, but Erica is only a door down, and they can still talk. The cops on duty don’t seem to care if they do. Stiles doesn’t like the cell, because it’s pretty small and he can feel his claustrophobia starting to kick in. But he’s so angry that he can mostly keep it at bay.

“Bet the others are climbing the walls by now,” Erica says at one point.
“Yep,” Stiles says. He’s also willing to bet that they woke Mac up so she could hack into Frank’s records and ruin his life. But he’s not about to say that where cops could hear. If they didn’t want to arrest Frank, fine. The pack had their own brand of justice. “Sometimes I think my dad must be disappointed in me,” he says thoughtfully.

“For this, are you kidding? He’s going to give you a medal.”

Stiles laughs. “Nah.” He says, underneath his breath, “Just thinking about the revenge we’re going to enact.”

Down the hall, Erica giggles.

Ten minutes later, they can hear shouting out in the main office. “ – did you think you were doing? I did not want to spend the entire night with a pissed off country sheriff shouting in my God damned ear!”

“But sir, the guy’s face –”

“I don’t give a damn about his face! Send them both to the hospital and sort it out there! The girl says she was drugged, and you just brush that off because she was wearing a sexy outfit? On Halloween? Jesus Christ, Jenkins! Have you looked at a Halloween costume store lately? If there’s a single women’s costume that covers more than thirty percent of her body, I’ll eat my fucking badge!”

“She didn’t act like she was drugged –”

“Because every girl on the planet reacts to Rohypnol or GHB or Special K the exact same way, right? You didn’t tell me that you had a degree in pharmacology, Jenkins! Maybe she’d taken some speed earlier that night. Maybe she has a medical condition. Maybe you should have taken her to the hospital so a professional could figure it out!”

“Sir, I didn’t think –”

“No, you didn’t fucking think, and now I have eight different people breathing down my neck about how this department treats sexually assaulted young ladies, and by tomorrow morning it’s going to be eighty different people. Just go wait in my office. I have to deal with this.”

There’s silence for several long minutes. Then a middle aged man comes back into the holding cell area. He unlocks Erica’s cell. “Follow me,” he says. “You’re being released.”

“What about my boyfriend?” she asks.

The man glances down the hallway. “Your boyfriend is going to be here a little longer while we process the paperwork. He assaulted an officer of the peace.”

“Oh, man, am I actually being charged?” Stiles asks, wincing.

“You punched an officer in the face, son,” the senior officer says. “Frankly, you’re lucky you didn’t get shot.”

“Yeah, I’ve been shot, it’s no fun,” Stiles says.

The officer doesn’t respond to that. “Your friend is paying your bail,” he says. “We’ll have you out of here in a half hour or so. But yes, you are being charged with assault and resisting arrest.”

“But I didn’t resist once he actually agreed to arrest me,” Stiles points out.
“Let the lawyers hash that out,” the man says, then sighs. “Look. I talked to your dad, I know he’s a cop. He’s getting things straightened out. You’ve got a clean record and hell, you’ve done a fair share of your own police work from everything he told me. It’ll just be a misdemeanor since you weren’t carrying a weapon. They’ll slap a fine on you and everyone will forget all about it.”

“Except my dad,” Stiles says, groaning.

The man shakes his head and gestures for Erica to follow. Stiles paces around the cell. He’s released about forty minutes later and comes out to find the pack gathered in the parking lot. Derek pulls him into an embrace, giving a low growl, and the rest exchange greetings with him. “Better call your dad,” Derek says. “I talked to him half an hour ago and he’s furious.”

“Great,” Stiles says, and pulls his phone out of his pocket. It’s nearly three AM at this point, but his father is certainly up, so he dials home. “Hey, Dad.”

“What is wrong with you?!” Tom greets him. “You hit a cop?”

“He wouldn’t let me go to the station with Erica,” Stiles says.

“You couldn’t have, I don’t know, followed him in your perfectly functional car?” Tom sounds incredulous.

“Uh. I guess I wasn’t thinking clearly enough for that.”

“Well, no shit, son,” Tom says. He gives a long groan. “Jesus. Well, I’ve talked to the lawyer, he says it’ll probably only be a fine, due to your record and the circumstances, your ‘girlfriend’ having been assaulted and all. Should’ve just hit the kid who did it.”

“Don’t worry, I have plans for him,” Stiles says.

“Christ, don’t tell me that.” Some warmth returns to Tom’s voice. “But if you had to be arrested for something, you know what, I’ll take it. I’m real proud of you, bucko.”

Stiles feels his cheeks flush pink. “Yeah, uh, I’m proud of me too. I think. Is that the right response?”

“Not by a long shot.”

“Didn’t think so.”

“Go home and go to bed. We’ll talk tomorrow.”

“Okay. Love-you-bye,” Stiles says, and waits for the words to be echoed before he hangs up. He gets one arm around Derek’s waist and the other around Erica’s shoulders. “So that happened,” he says.

Derek rolls his eyes. “You’re an idiot,” he says. But then he leans down and presses a kiss into Stiles’ temple. “Let’s go home.”
So a while back on tumblr, a bunch of us were discussing a Leverage/TW crossover and how funny it would be to watch the Leverage crew interact with Stiles and his pack. Then this happened. I know how much you guys love outsider POV, so ...

First things first: if you've never seen Leverage, it's amazing. It's basically a show all about competence porn and bad people getting their comeuppance. The characters are complex and awesome and it's just, seriously, a great show. But if you haven't seen it, here's what you need to know. There are only three characters from Leverage in this short fic. They're a crew who run cons on rich assholes. Alec Hardison is the genius hacker, Parker is the master thief, and Eliot is the master-of-hitting-people-in-the-face-a-lot. These three people are the closest to a canon OT3 I have literally ever seen. Like, you might think I'm exaggerating, but no, basically everyone in fandom agrees that these three are an OT3.

On tumblr we were speculating that Eliot must be a werewolf, because he takes a lickin' and keeps on tickin'. But we were also speculating that he might be a hunter, because of how badass, good with weapons, and generally ass-kicking that he is. So I went the extra mile and made him both.

For Leverage fans: this takes place after season 5, so no Nate or Sophie. Trying to cut down on variables.

In regards to the "Lycanthropy for Dummies" forum, that's something my girlfriend and I have been giggling about for a while. It just seems very Stiles. "Czerwony-piernik" is Polish for "crimson gingerbread", and a Prickly Leather-Jacket legitimately is a kind of fish, which my girlfriend and I giggled about being a perfect name for Derek after seeing the sign at the aquarium, because we are children.

Sadly, this cannot actually be considered part of TSOIP canon. I mean. The Leverage crew existing in TSOIP would be a real problem for my storyline, since Stiles would probably just call them and be like "hey, can you fix this problem I'm having with this girl named Sally?" and the crew would sweep in and destroy the entire Stoddard family. It would be awesome, but not really conducive to what I have planned. XD

Last but not least: this got so long, like, so long, but I didn't want to divide it up into chapters because it's just a little sidefic, so enjoy!

The thing is, Eliot Spencer has been out of the game for a long time. Over five years now. Or at least, he’s been in a different game. He left all the hunting stuff behind when he joined up with Nate’s crew. They had such a knack for finding danger and disaster that he didn’t ever want to get werewolves involved into the mix. Once or twice, they’d had a case with supernatural ties, and he’d had a lot of work to do to make sure that nobody on the team ever found out about it.

But just because he’s been out of the game doesn’t mean that he isn’t still just as capable. So when an old hunting buddy calls up and asks if he can help out with a job, he says sure. He even tells
Parker and Hardison the truth. “Going hunting with an old friend,” he says. Hardison hates that sort of thing anyway. And he’s not Nate. The team doesn’t feel the need to tag along with him on everything he does, just to make sure he doesn’t go off the rails.

So it’s just a quick commuter flight from Portland to Beacon Hills, California. He’s heard rumors about the place, but he’s been off the supernatural radar for a while, so he hasn’t really kept up with them. He gets off the flight with his carry on and glances around as he exits the terminal before spotting Chris Argent.

“Hey,” he says, lifting one hand in greeting. Chris gives it the right kind of shake, firm but not one of those macho ‘I can outgrip your grip’ handshakes. “Long time.”

“Yeah, no kidding,” Chris says. He looks older than Eliot would have expected. “Eliot, you remember my daughter, Allison?”

Well, he remembers Chris Argent having a daughter. She would have been eight or nine the last time they had seen each other. The young woman standing before him is not what he remembers; she’s tall, beautiful, and looks like she’s been slapped in the face by a fish for a few brief seconds before the expression disappears into a bright smile. “Hi,” she says, holding out a hand to shake. “You used to seem a lot . . . taller,” she adds, and looks about ready to die of mortification. She shoots her father a quick glare and smooths her hands down over her skirt, trying to make it longer.

Chris looks totally unaware of the fact that his teenaged daughter is ready to kill him. “Hungry?” he asks.

“I could eat,” Eliot says.

“There’s a great diner downtown. I’ll give you the lowdown.”

Eliot clears his throat. “I need to meet the local alpha. You know. Get . . . permission,” he says, and God, how that word rankles him, “to be on his territory.”

“I cleared it with him,” Chris says.


Allison shrugs. “I’ll give him a call.” She takes out her phone and then glances between the two men. “Unless you want to wait?”

Eliot just shrugs, and Chris says, “Have him meet us at Ernie’s.”

Allison nods and hits the call button, putting the phone to her ear as she climbs into her father’s SUV, letting Eliot have the front seat.

“He probably won’t come alone,” Chris warns Eliot. “He, uh, he tends to have an entourage. A lot of bad things have happened around here.”

Eliot just gives a little nod. He knows all about bad things. Then he changes the subject. “What’ve we got?”

“Warlock,” Chris says. “Keeps summoning up monsters, who keep kicking my ass before I can get anywhere near him.”

“Throwing weird constructs at us,” Allison adds. “Some even fly. I hate that.”
“So you want me to handle the constructs while you take out the sorcerer?” Eliot asks.

“That’s the plan,” Chris says.

Allison is nodding. “Between the two of us, we should be able to keep the sorcerer busy enough that he won’t notice my dad. But I can only shoot these things down so fast, you know?”

“Uh huh,” Eliot says, frowning slightly. “How old are you?”

“Nineteen,” she says, frowning right back.

Eliot looks at Chris. “Thought you decided not to bring your daughter in to the family business.”

“No,” Chris says, “I decided not to bring her in until she was old enough to make choices for herself. That happened a couple years ago. And she’s the best damned hunter I’ve ever trained.”

Eliot grunts. “Take your word on it.”

Allison gives him an eye roll that she’s clearly picked up from spending too much time with Derek. “I promise that this isn’t the first sorcerer I’ve helped take down.”

“Didn’t say it was,” Eliot says, amused at her defensiveness.

Chris laughs quietly. “So you haven’t kept up on all the supernatural news, I take it.”

“Not really. Why?”


“What the hell is a Stiles?” Eliot asks.

Now even more amused, Chris says, “Stiles is the name of the alpha of this territory. He’s kind of . . . mixed things up. Tried to get more hunters and werewolf packs to forge alliances.”

“Yeah, well, I can tell him that it doesn’t work out,” Eliot says.

“Yes, it does,” Allison says, perfectly serious. “At least sometimes, as of recently. If people aren’t being complete dicks. And I mean both the hunters and the ‘wolves.”

Eliot grunts and gives Chris a sideways look. “She know about me?”

“Nope,” Chris says. “Your secrets aren’t mine to tell.”

“Should I just not ask?” Allison asks, pondering texting Erica and asking her to wear something that doesn’t make Allison look so underdressed. But then she changes her mind. Given the weather, Erica will probably show up in little enough. If Allison sends that message, she’ll probably show up in a bikini.

Eliot shrugs. “I grew up a hunter. Now I’m a werewolf. You do the math.”

Allison sighs. “Yeah, I don’t have to. I get it in the face often enough. I’m sure it’s not as bad for me, but a lot of hunters don’t want to work with someone who’s part of a pack. But there are a growing number of hunters that don’t really think it’s all that bad.”

“Huh,” Eliot says. Then it sinks in. “Wait, you’re part of a pack?”
Allison nods. “Stiles’ pack.”

“Huh,” Eliot says again, and rubs a hand over his hair. “I guess I really have been out of the loop.”

Chris gives a snort of laughter and pulls up outside the diner. “It’s been an exciting couple of years.”

Allison grins. “Educational, even.”

Eliot just shakes his head as he gets out of the car and heads into the diner. He can’t help but scan the room quickly, looking for exits or possible dangers, but everything looks normal. The hostess knows Chris and puts them at the back of the restaurant in the corner, so both Eliot and Chris can have their backs against a wall. He approves.

“Allied didn’t you get into gourmet food and that kind of thing after you retired?” Chris asks, watching Eliot look over the menu, which is standard fare.

“Yeah,” Eliot says. “Doesn’t mean I can’t enjoy a good diner breakfast, though.”

Allison doesn’t mind having her back to the room, especially given that the pack, with their superior hearing, will be arriving soon. She does pause to tell the hostess that at least three more people will be joining them. She looks up from her menu when she hears her father mention the gourmet food and blinks at Eliot. “You cook?”

“Yeah,” Eliot says.

The waitress smiles at them and asks Allison, “Is Stiles coming?”

Allison smiles back. “Yeah, he should be here soon.” Once the waitress has left with their drink order, she turns back to Eliot. “You and Stiles shouldn’t have any trouble making conversation, then.”


Chris gives a snort of laughter. Before he can say anything, the waitress comes back with beer for Eliot and Chris, an iced tea for Allison, and a pot of coffee that she just sets down on the table.

“We didn’t ask for coffee,” Eliot points out.

“It’s for Stiles,” the waitress says, with a small grin.

“He has his own coffee maker at the den,” Allison says, laughing. “And then another one for the rest of the pack.”

Eliot has to laugh at that, too, thinking of Hardison’s refrigerator that is literally packed full of bottles of orange soda. “So you’ve fought sorcerers before, huh?” he asks Allison.

“Yeah. Three. Four?” She takes a sip of her tea and decides, “Three and a half.”

“How d’you fight half a sorcerer?” Eliot asks, eyebrows raised.

“Common enemy, so hostilities were suspended,” Allison says.

Eliot nods. “Got it.” He’s about to say something else about sorcerers – he hates fighting them, so he’s more than happy to be the one handling the constructs – when the door to the restaurant opens and the unmistakable presence of alpha floods all his senses. He turns around, hands curling slightly as he fights down the natural instincts, making sure to keep his breathing slow and even. He’s the
What he doesn’t expect to see is a gawky teenager wearing a shirt that says ‘I support single moms’ with a picture of a pole dancer with a red sweatshirt thrown over it, with two other teenagers and an honest-to-God wolf, wearing a blue – is that a service vest?

Allison turns the second the door opens, wearing her one thousand watt Disney Princess smile. She stands and exchanges the usual pack greetings with Stiles and Erica, crouches momentarily to do the same with Derek while pretending it’s just a quick scratch behind the ears, then stands and gives Scott a quick kiss. “Eliot, this is my alpha, Stiles. Stiles, this is Eliot Spencer.”

“Hey, I know that name!” Stiles says, with his usual sense of propriety. “You’re the only hunter to keep hunting after getting turned.”

Eliot’s eyes narrow. “That a problem?”

“No. You were crossing lines before it was cool.” Stiles sticks his hand out for Eliot to shake. “Nice to meet you. This is Derek, my lupa,” he adds, gesturing to the wolf, “and this is Erica and Scott.”

Eliot shakes their hands, ignores the way that the blond is eyeballing him, and instead focuses on Scott. “Boyfriend, huh?” he asks, shooting a glance at Allison.

“Yeah,” Allison says, taking Scott’s hand as they sit down. He gives her a sappy smile in return. Derek sits down besides Stiles and watches. It’s nice not to have to make conversation.

“Hey, coffee, sweet,” Stiles says, pouring himself a mug. “So you and Chris are old war buddies?” he adds eagerly.

“Yeah, something like that,” Eliot says. “Look, I just need to get your okay to hunt in your territory. That’s all.”

“Sure, sure, any friend of Chris’, et cetera,” Stiles says, then smiles as the waitress comes up. “Hey, Betty! Can I get the number six breakfast platter?” he says, leaving everyone else scrambling to decide what they want.

“Does number six have bacon?” Erica asks. “If it has bacon, I’ll have that, too.” Scott just shakes his head at both of them before finding a sandwich to order. Allison, for her part, refuses to be rushed.

Eliot orders a breakfast platter, too, before giving Stiles and his enthusiasm the side-eye. He’s thinking about saying something when Erica leans over the table, just close enough that she’s still being polite but she’s obviously trying to get a better hint of his scent. “I’ve got a few things I’d like to order off your menu,” she says, smirking at him.

“What, what are you, fifteen?” Eliot scowls at her. “Come back in ten years.”

“Eighteen, fully legal,” Erica tells him.

“Erica, I’m pretty sure that he’s not interested,” Allison points out. It’s in a half undertone; Eliot will hear it, but the other patrons won’t.

Erica just makes a face at Allison. “You were thinking it, too.”

Allison turns a death glare on Erica. Derek decides it’s best to hide under the table. Scott tries not to look at Eliot, because he thinks he might growl.
“Come on, now, who wouldn’t be thinking it?” Stiles asks cheerfully. “I was thinking it.”

Eliot looks at Chris. “You didn’t tell me that they were crazy.”

Chris shrugs. “I’ve gotten used to it.”

Scott elbows Stiles. “You’ve fallen another point on the Kinsey scale,” he says, and Derek sighs the sigh of the long suffering.

Stiles just shrugs and turns back to Eliot. “Word was, you’d gotten out of the game,” he says.

Eliot’s eyes narrow. “Whose word?”


“Your name doesn’t come up,” Allison adds. “And after all the restructuring and some hunters and supernaturals starting to form working alliances, we kind of would have expected it to.”

Eliot wonders exactly what kind of searches they’re running. He knows that there’s very little reliable information about the supernatural online, at least last time he checked. Although, come to think of it, that was a while ago now. “Why were you looking for me?”

“Oh, I was looking for everyone,” Stiles says. “I made a directory of every hunter in the entire US.”


Stiles takes a sip of his coffee and looks unfazed.

“It helps keep people alive,” Scott says. “Hunters and supernatural creatures.”

“And I’m in there?” Eliot demands. “What the hell does it say about me?”

Stiles takes out his phone and touches the screen a few times, slowly and deliberately. “See for yourself,” he says, holding it out for Eliot to view.

Eliot has the urge to snatch the phone, but he doesn’t do it. Hardison has taught him, if nothing else, that handling other people’s electronics is a no-no. But there’s something else, something he wouldn’t admit, which is that he finds Stiles strangely unsettling. He went from cheerful and upbeat to quiet and unconcerned in a heartbeat. It’s like seeing a grifter in action – a grifter with a core of cold steel and alpha power to back it up. He’s met other alphas since getting the Bite. None of them have had power like this.

So he leans over to see the file, which is pretty short. ‘Eliot Spencer. Originated Oklahoma. 10/10 on the Argent scale. Extremely dangerous, do not engage. Only known hunter to have received the Bite and not committed suicide directly afterwards; is now an alpha. Code status unknown. Works alone, has no pack. Last encountered 2007, inactive but presumed alive.’

Eliot sits back in his chair. “That’s not so bad,” he mutters. “What’s this ‘code status’ bit?”

Allison decides to field that one. “Your moral and/or operational code. Like the Argent Code, versus the Gutierrez family, who just likes to point and shoot.”

Derek, underneath the table, lets out a little huff that’s clearly canine for ‘those fuckers’. Stiles gives him an amused glance and adds to Eliot, “Actually, since you’re here, we could update it with your current info – ”
“No!” Eliot glowers at him. “I don’t even want to be in your stupid directory.”

Erica gives him a narrow-eyed look and shifts slightly. Allison looks from Eliot to Stiles, to gauge Stiles’ reaction, then decides that a point blank question is the best way to go. “Why not?”

“Because people don’t need to know stuff about me,” Eliot says. “I mean, is this on the web? Could someone doing a web search for my name find this stuff?”

Stiles isn’t batting an eyelash. “No. It’s a paid app that you can only get through referral from another person. So it wouldn’t come up under a standard websearch.”

Eliot grunts. “That’s better than nothing, I guess.”

Erica relaxes, thought she stays watchful. Allison sighs. “The listings are so people know who they can go to for help. Or who to avoid if they don’t want to get shot in the face for breathing, or what territories are safe so they can live in peace.”

“Okay, but I don’t need to be in there. I’m not a hunter anymore.”

“And yet, here we are,” Stiles says, with a pleasant smile.

Scott rolls his eyes. “Dude, stop taunting him.”

“I’m not taunting him,” Stiles says. “That would be if I was trying to actively make him angry.”

“So you’re poking him with a stick to see what he does?”

Stiles gives a shrug. “So call me curious.”

“I’ll call you something,” Eliot growls.

Erica’s eye twitches. Derek sighs. Loudly. Then he stands up, emerging from underneath the table and nosing at Stiles’ elbow. Stiles glances at him. “What’s up?” Derek leans up, nudging Stiles’ coffee mug, and then licks his chops. “Oh, you want a drink? Sure,” Stiles says, and glances around for the waitress. “I need more coffee, too.”

Eliot then realizes that the entire pot is gone. “What is wrong with you?”

“Oh, so much,” Stiles says, back to being cheerful.

Derek looks over at Eliot and nods.

“Fine, forget the damn directory,” Eliot says. He’ll have to find a way to get Hardison to hack it and erase his data from it, somehow without tipping him off as to what it was. That’ll be a fun afternoon. “What’s the Argent scale?”

“A scale of badassery we use,” Stiles says. “There are only a handful of tens.”

“You, Dad,” Allison says, gesturing to her father, who’s been watching this with amused tolerance. “Mikael Aronsson. Who else?” She glances at Stiles. “Anyone else?”

“Uh, Hannah Winchester and a couple of her people, those guys do not fuck around,” Stiles says. “Katarina Nazario. And Ned Stoddard.”

“So not many,” Allison says, smiling at Eliot and sipping her tea.
Thinking about how he’d have to explain all of this to Hardison, Eliot decides to take another stab at getting them to take him out of the directory. “Look,” he says, “I see what you’re doing, but I shouldn’t be in there. I don’t do that kind of stuff anymore. This is just a favor to a friend. Supernatural creatures don’t need to worry about me, and I don’t want people finding out about me and deciding to come to me for help. That’s not what I do.”

“Yes it is,” Parker says, appearing out of nowhere as is her wont. She gives him a look that’s slightly confused, with narrow eyes. “That’s what you do.” She squishes herself onto the bench seat next to Eliot. “Or is this one of those weird social things I don’t get?”

“No, it’s not – wait – what are you doing here?” Eliot scowls at her. “When did you get here? Where’s Hardison? If you’re here, Hardison’s – damn it, Hardison!”

“What?” Hardison asks as he pulls another chair over with him and nudges his way into space at the table. “Oh, I see. You thought we wouldn’t follow you.” He grins. “Bein’ all mysterious about where you were running off to. You should know better.”

“I wasn’t mysterious! I said I was going hunting with an old army buddy!”

Stiles chortles. “Well, technically, that’s pretty accurate.”

“Last time you wanted to do something outdoorsy, there were militants and nasty-ass homemade bombs and a stolen train we didn’t even get to use. And that was only fishing.” Hardison leans back in his chair. “You thought we wouldn’t follow you.” He grins. “Bein’ all mysterious about where you were running off to. You should know better.”

“You’re the reason we didn’t get on the God damned train,” Eliot growls.

“I think I want to hear this story,” Stiles says cheerfully. “But I’m confused. I thought you didn’t have a pack.”

“I don’t,” Eliot snaps.

“A pack of what?” Parker asks. “Hey, do they have donuts here? I want a donut.”

“They don’t,” Stiles tells her. “But I do know an excellent donut place, so I can by all means direct you there.”

Parker shrugs. “Maybe later when Eliot isn’t doing that angry eye thing.”

“He does look angry,” Stiles agrees, nodding thoughtfully.

Eliot abruptly stands up. “You two, with me, now,” he growls.

Parker bounces up, moving back to let Eliot stand, but stays right on his heels. Hardison also stands, shoves one hand into his pocket, and falls into step with the other two, following where Eliot leads. That happens to be out the side entrance he had noted earlier, which led into an ally. “Okay, look, I’m real glad you two are concerned about me – ”

“You don’t seem glad,” Parker interrupts.

Eliot ignores her. “But this is personal. And I’m going to handle it personally. And you two are going to go back to Portland.”

“Oh, no, we’re not,” Hardison says, then adds to Parker, “We’re not, are we?” and she shakes her head. “See, we agree. We’re not heading home until you do.”

“Why?” Hardison echoes.

“Yeah. Why? I’m not Nate. You don’t need to baby-sit me because I might self-destruct. I can handle myself. I’m responsible for keeping both of you alive. If this was a job, and I said ‘no, you’re not coming with me for this part, it’s too dangerous’, you’d respect that. So why are you on me about this?”

“Because if it was a job, we’d know what was going on. We’d know the con and we’d know the play,” Hardison answers.

“And you’re never really alone,” Parker adds, and touches his ear. “You think we don’t listen to make sure you’re okay? Just like you listen for us.”

Eliot sighs. “But there is no con. There is no play. This is just me, and a friend, going hunting.”


“It’s not – damn it, Hardison, how long were you two listening?”

“Long enough.” Hardison isn’t impressed.

“Are ghosts real?” Parker asks. “What about fairies? And leprechauns? They have gold, so, that would be awesome. What about –”

“For God’s sake –” Eliot realizes that he’s not going to get out of this. Fine. At least he’ll get to see the expression on Hardison’s face. Watch his eyes bug out of his head. “So, I’m a werewolf.”

“Pssh, we know,” Parker says, rolling her eyes.

“We - we do?” Hardison asks, blinking between the two of them. “We know what now?”

“Eliot is a werewolf,” Parker says, unperturbed.

“Y’all been hit on the head?” Hardison asks, before Eliot holds up one hand and lets his claws extend. “Whoa. Those are. Those are very sharp looking,” he says, reaching for them.

“Then don’t touch them,” Eliot says, yanking his hand back. “Seriously, are you an idiot? You’ve seen how many times I’ve been beaten three quarters to death and I just got back up afterwards and walked away and was fine the next day, did that seem normal to you?”


“Wow, that’s heartwarming. My heart is warmed. You’re an idiot.”

Parker grins like she’s won something, or possibly stolen something. “So we can stay, right? We’ll let you do the fighting thing or the hunting thing or whatever but you’ll wear your earpiece like normal and we can stay so we’re sure you’re okay. Right?”

Eliot looks at her face and then sighs. It’s no use. He’s been wrapped around their combined little finger for far too long to start saying no now. “Okay, fine. But you’d better fucking listen if I tell you to do something, okay? This kind of shit is dangerous. Chris called me here to help him with a sorcerer. So you know how under normal circumstances, the worst case scenario is death? Yeah, that’s not true anymore. Sorcerers can do worse.”
“Double death?” Hardison jokes.

Eliot doesn’t smile. “They can change you, man.”

Hardison grimaces. “Yeah – yeah, okay. We’ll, uh, we’ll stay in the van or whatever.”

Parker nods. “We won’t make you worry about us while you’re kicking butt.”

“But you gonna have to answer some questions, man,” Hardison adds, “I mean, I’ve got all the questions for you –”

“Yeah, sure, whatever,” Eliot says, and stomps back into the diner.

“Everything okay?” Chris asks, when he reaches the table.

Parker blinks at Chris exactly once. “Of course.” Then she settles in next to Eliot again. “Do they at least have cereal here?”

“They have exactly eight varieties of cereal,” Stiles says, beaming at her.

Hardison looks at Eliot and just shakes his head. Clearly, Stiles and Parker have found a weird vibe to bond over. Parker, meanwhile, tells Stiles very seriously, “I like Fruit Loops.”

“A bowl of Fruit Loops for the lady,” Stiles says, grinning at Betty. “Eliot, aren’t you going to introduce us?”

“No,” Eliot growls. Parker nods, as if this is the way it should be.

“Allow me,” Hardison says, grinning at both of them. “I’m Alec Hardison, and this is Parker. We are Eliot’s best of friends, his honored compatriots, through thick and thin, fire and water –”

“Man, shut up,” Eliot says. “You sound like you’re talking to those imaginary World of Warcraft buddies of yours.”

Stiles perks up. “Warcraft? Did you get the latest expansion pack? How cool was Imperator Mar’Gok –”

“Dude, so cool,” Hardison says. “How did you get past –”


Derek looks over at Eliot and just shakes his head. It’s clearly a lost cause. Allison stands and says, “Stiles and I can trade seats so the rest of us aren’t caught in the goblin crossfire.”

“Cool, cool,” Hardison says, clearly ready to engage in a deep goblin discussion.

“Maybe later,” Stiles says. “I want to go back to making Eliot uncomfortable. So this is your pack, right?”

“Are you – is this guy kidding me?” Eliot asks the room in general.

“Nope,” Scott says. “He never learned not to poke things with a stick.”

Eliot glowers at all of them. “I don’t have a pack, okay? They’re human. How hard is that to understand?”

“You’re – what?” Eliot blinks at him. That’s one rumor he had heard. The human alpha. The boy in red. No matter how far removed he was from everything, that had made waves far and wide. Had that been Beacon Hills? He had never asked exactly where this mysterious man had come from. Mysterious boy in red. “No. No way.”

“No way what?” Parker asks, her mouth full of cereal.

“The human alpha?” Eliot rubs his hands over his face. “You?”

Stiles smirks. “The one and only.”

“You thought he’d be taller or something?” Erica asks, clearly needling him.

“I thought he wouldn’t be . . . that,” Eliot says, gesturing to Stiles. “I mean, the rumors and everything – you’re not – what I would have expected.”

“And yet,” Stiles says, “I am exactly as I appear to be.”

“So, melodramatic?” Chris says dryly.

Derek gives a quiet snort and then realizes that on the topic of melodrama, he should probably keep quiet. He slowly sinks down out of sight.


Eliot is looking at him carefully, thinking of that cloak of alpha power that Stiles carries around with him so casually. “But they aren’t untrue, though, are they? When it comes to stuff like Sebastian Stone and the Conclave.”

“No,” Stiles says, meeting his gaze. “No, they’re true, for the most part.”

“Okay, what is happening here?” Hardison interjects. “Are y’all talking English? It’s like, I know all the words you’re using, but I don’t have a clue what the hell y’all are saying.”

“Same,” Parker says, although she seems unbothered about this.

“Of course you don’t have any idea what we’re saying,” Eliot says, annoyed. “You don’t know anything about this. It’s like you just decided to run a con on some high-tech organization without doing any of the research. You don’t know what an alpha is, or the significance of pack, or what the Conclave is –”

“Sounds awesome, though, so you’d best be telling me all about it,” Hardison says.

“I didn’t ask you to come here, so I’ll explain things when I damn well feel like it.”

“You would have done the same thing if it had been one of us doing something weird,” Hardison counters.

“How the hell is ‘I’m going hunting with an old army buddy’ weird?” Eliot retorts.

“You don’t like guns,” Parker answers evenly, before taking another spoonful of cereal.
“Yes, because all hunting is done with guns, nobody ever uses any other weapon,” Eliot says, rolling his eyes.

Parker shrugged. “What else would you use?”

“A bow and arrow,” Allison suggests, feeling like Eliot could use some help.

“Yeah, that’s one thing,” Eliot says. “It depends on what you’re hunting, I killed a snake with a knife once – it’s not important! All I’m saying is that you two can stop playing benevolent guardians and admit that you followed me because you’re nosy, not because you actually thought I was going to need your help!”

“Well, we are nosy,” Parker admits.

Stiles pours himself a mug of coffee and says complacently, “They followed you because you’re their alpha.”

Eliot gives him the most terrifying glare he could muster. “You tryin’ to make me come over this table at you, kid?”

Erica smiles at Eliot, showing teeth. “Look, I like your pretty face, but I’ll still punch you if you make a move on him.”

“Come on!” Allison thumps her glass down, completely exasperated and directing the words at the table in general. Scott just edges back from the table, intent on avoiding all the inevitable fur flying.

“Erica, please don’t,” Stiles says calmly. “Ten out of ten on the Argent scale, remember? He’d hand your ass to you.” He lifts his hands in surrender. “And okay, I’m behaving like a shit. Having another alpha all up in my face tends to make me a little edgy. But, uh, honestly not trying to be a jerk for a minute, you don’t seem to know a lot about being an alpha. You could maybe use a hand with that.”

“That’s your idea of not being a jerk?” Eliot growls, and Scott nods earnestly.

“It was just an observation,” Stiles says. “I didn’t know jack shit about being an alpha when I got started, either. If a couple people hadn’t stepped up to give me a hand, I could have been pretty bad off.”

“Well, I don’t need your hands,” Eliot says. Then he says to Chris, “So are we going to go hunt a sorcerer or what?”

Chris finishes off his beer and says, “Sure. Allison, you ready to go?”

Allison looks over at Stiles, then back at her father and nods. “Yeah.”

Hardison quickly reaches into his bag and pulls out a little box with one of their earpieces in it. He tosses it to Eliot but resists the urge to grin like a smartass.

“You’re serious with this?” Eliot asks, grumpy but not outright arguing.

“Are we seri . . . yes, we’re serious!” Hardison says. “Hell yes, we’re serious.”

“As serious as Nate’s drinking problem,” Parker says with a sage nod.

“We’re gonna have a talk about this later,” Eliot says, putting the earpiece in.

“Of course we are, I already told you, you’ve got about five hundred questions to answer.” Hardison replies.

“Soooo many questions,” Parker agrees.

Eliot just shakes his head and walks out of the restaurant, presuming or at least hoping that Chris is going to follow. There’s a brief pause while Allison says goodbye to the pack, but a minute later they’re settled back in Chris’ car. Chris gets behind the wheel, pulls out of the parking lot, and says, “Now you know why I had just cleared it with him so you wouldn’t have to meet him.”

Eliot pinches the bridge of his nose. “Just drive the car.”

~ ~ ~ ~

Against his better judgment, Eliot turns down Chris’ offer to stay at the Argent house. Even without the earpiece, he could figure out where the others are staying – they have a system – but it’s easier to just ask. Ten minutes later, he stalks into the hotel room, parks himself in a chair, and levels the other two with the flintiest glare he can muster. “Okay,” he says, “what.”

“What you mean, ‘what’?” Hardison starts. “A big old reveal like this? This is Vader being Luke’s father sort of huge. Did you really think I actually knew? Is that why you didn’t say anything?”

“No,” Eliot growls. “I didn’t say anything because ‘hey guys, I’m a werewolf’ is the sort of thing that gets you thrown into the loony bin. I had no idea Parker knew.”

Parker just shrugs, like it’s no big deal. Hardison, for his part, says, “No, see, you . . . man, the freakin’ claws made your point pretty clearly that this wasn’t just crazy talk.”

“I guess,” Eliot says. He’s quiet for a minute, and for once Hardison shuts up. “Most of the people I ever worked with would kill me just as soon as look at me, after I got bit. It’s hard to get out of that mindset.”

“Why? I mean, it doesn’t seem to make you weird or crazy or anything. Unless you were Joe Normal before, and I think we’d have figured that out by now. Also, who just goes out and bites someone? Freakin’ unsanitary. Worse than dust mites. Biting people. Who does that?”

Eliot’s lips twitch despite himself. “Well, in his defense, I was trying to kill him at the time.” He frowns and then adds, “Of course, I was trying to kill him because he was biting people.”

“So it’s not considered cool to do that. Good to know,” Hardison says, and he means it. He likes knowing what the rules are. It’s important, if he’s going to know which ones he can break.

“Well, not without permission.” Eliot sighs. “I mean, some people want to be werewolves. Makes you stronger, faster, makes you heal better. It just comes with some downsides, like, never being able to wear silver again.”

“That’s okay,” Parker says. “Sophie told me that I’m an autumn.”

“Yeah, you are, but – ” Eliot breaks off. “Wait. Are you implying you want to be a werewolf?”
Parker shrugs.

“Shit, it sounds like everyone would want to,” Hardison says.

“Well, another downside is that a lot of people like me will end up trying to kill you,” Eliot adds.

“Why?” Hardison asks. “That guy Chris didn’t seem to have any trouble sitting down to a late lunch with a bunch of werewolves. And they were werewolves, right?” he adds, squinting at Eliot. “At least some of them. Like the one with the black fur and the pointy ears.”

“Yeah, three,” Eliot says, waving this aside. “Lately there’s been, I guess you’d call it a movement, not to kill werewolves just for being werewolves. But that’s really only in the past ten, fifteen years.” He sees Hardison open his mouth and continues, “It’s not as bad as it sounds. Most werewolves, you only figure out that they’re werewolves, if they start being assholes and using their strength and speed to do bad shit. So you take ‘em out. Werewolves who live quiet and peaceful, hunters never even know they’re there.”

“What if they find out?” Parker asks.

Eliot glances at her and says, “Prevailing mindset is that they’re like ticking time bombs. They might be quiet now, but it’s best to kill them before they lose control.”

“Oh, that’s not racist at all,” Hardison says, rolling his eyes. “Or is it specist?”

“It is and it’s not,” Eliot says. He sighs and says, “Lycanthropy . . . it comes with instincts. They can be hard to control. Not everyone is good at controlling them, and not everyone is interested in controlling them. But . . .” He searches for the words to explain what he means. “How much do you know about the social hierarchy of elephants?”

“Eh,” Hardison says, making a ‘so-so’ gesture with his hand.

“Oh!” Parker raises her hand. “I know this one. I saw a special. There has to be like a mom elephant to keep everyone in line, or else the boys all turn into bullies or something.”

“Yeah, kinda,” Eliot says. “Elephants are highly intelligent and they have a very intricate social structure, like humans. Babies stay with their families for a long time and stay in touch after they’re fully grown. And that sort of helps them learn, you know, how to behave in a polite society. But then poachers came along. And killed so many elephants that their social structure started to dissolve entirely. And now there are lone elephants or small herds of young elephants that go rampaging around Africa, because humans fucked them over so badly. And that . . . that’s sort of what happened with werewolves. In the right circumstances, they’re no danger to anybody. If they’re allowed to build packs and live in peace. But the hunters killed so many of them . . .”

“That now it’s crazy town?” Hardison sums up.

Eliot gives a one-shouldered shrug. “Some areas are better than others. And some hunters are better than others. Chris is one of the good ones, always had been. He’s one of only a couple I kept in touch with after I got bit.”

Hardison nods. “So . . . not that we’re all the picture of normalcy or fitting in with anyone but each other or whatever, but . . . are you okay, man? Because every time you talk about werewolves, you keep saying ‘them’, not ‘us’.”

There’s a pause. “Am I?” Eliot asks.
“Yep,” Parker says.

Eliot grimaces and pushes a hand through his hair. “I hunted them for a long time. Grew up to it. I can’t be one of . . . them. And now I can’t be a hunter anymore, either. So I kind of got caught between the two. Just walked away from all of it. Started doing this sort of thing,” he adds, gesturing to the three of them, “instead.”

“And we like it like that,” Hardison says. “You, with us. Just. Had to ask, you know? You aren’t big on volunteering.”

“Whatever,” Eliot says, waving this aside.

“Buuuuut,” Parker says, “we don’t want you to be an orphan elephant, either.”

Eliot gives her a look. “I’m not going to start rampaging.”

“Duh,” she says. “But if there’s stuff you need, like pack or whatever that kid was saying, then you should have it. That’s why I think he’s right. We’re your pack.”

“What she said.” Hardison holds his hand out for the secret handshake.

“It doesn’t work like that,” Eliot says, complying with the gesture automatically. “You’re human, not werewolves.”

Hardison lets his hand drop. “But isn’t pack just a wolfy way of saying family?”

“Whatever,” Eliot says, waving this aside.

Parker elbows him. “You can’t. That’s his point. Remember the elephants?”

“Whoa,” Hardison says quietly. He stays still for a few moments, thinking. “Okay. Aside from the fact that I might be, just a little bit, afraid of that kid now,” he says, holding up one hand with his thumb and forefinger about an inch apart, “how do you learn werewolf 101 if there are no classes or manuals?”

Parker elbows him. “You can’t. That’s his point. Remember the elephants?”

“Look, I don’t have any werewolf pals, okay?” Eliot asks. “None of them are willing to talk to me because I used to be a hunter, and the information the hunters have can’t be trusted. It’s not like you can just type ‘how to be a werewolf’ into Google. People can’t post this shit online; it isn’t safe.”

“Well, what about the darknet?” Hardison asks.

Eliot blinks at him, then says, “I guess it’s possible that there’s some stuff there.”

“Okay. Aside from the fact that I might be, just a little bit, afraid of that kid now,” he says, holding up one hand with his thumb and forefinger about an inch apart, “how do you learn werewolf 101 if there are no classes or manuals?”

Hardison lets his hand drop. “That’s how the alpha power gets passed down. That’s how I became an alpha. And I can’t just say ‘oh, these guys are my pack’ and it magically happens.”

“So, it’s like that,” Hardison says quietly. He stays still for a few moments, thinking. “Okay. Aside from the fact that I might be, just a little bit, afraid of that kid now,” he says, holding up one hand with his thumb and forefinger about an inch apart, “how do you learn werewolf 101 if there are no classes or manuals?”

Parker elbows him. “You can’t. That’s his point. Remember the elephants?”

“Well, you never know until you look,” Hardison says, turning to his laptop.
Parker shrugs. “I just say we ask that other kid. He said we’re your pack. Not that we could be or
that we might be or that you’d have to go fight a dragon to make us that way. He just said we’re your
pack. So maybe he knows more about it than we do.”

“The woman does have a point,” Hardison says, not looking up.

“I ain’t asking that kid for help,” Eliot growls.

“Is that a thing?” Parker asks. “A werewolf thing? You can’t get along with another alpha
werewolf?”

“I can’t get along with him because he’s a smart-ass prick,” Eliot says, then sighs and admits, “and
because he’s another alpha werewolf. A – God damn it – a stronger alpha werewolf. I could kick his
ass in hand-to-hand combat but when it comes to strength, I’ve got nothing on him.”

“But you’re super Eliot,” Parker says. “Which is really normal Eliot because you’re always super,”
she adds, clearly finding it odd that anyone could be better than Eliot at anything Eliot does or is.

“It’s not just about me, though,” Eliot says. “It’s like . . . a pack is like a team. And every member
makes it stronger. You guys are both good at things that I can’t do, so together, we can do more. It’s
like the, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.”

“And his team kicks our asses because we aren’t magic?” Parker asks, then declares, “I don’t like it.”

Hardison glances up. “I don’t know, though, man. That kid seemed to want to help, despite, you
know, being a shit.”

“Yeah, well, maybe I’m just not used to people in this world trying to help anyone besides
themselves,” Eliot replies.

“But maybe he’s not so different from us,” Parker says, bumping her shoulder against Eliot’s.

He glares at her, but then allows, “Yeah, maybe.”

“Hey, guys,” Hardison says, gesturing to them, “I think I have something. Matches some of the stuff
you’ve said. It’s actually pretty specific and not weird. I mean, if you accept werewolves as a thing
that happens, I mean.” He turns the laptop around so Eliot can see. “Seem legit to you?”

Eliot takes a look. It seems to be some kind of forum, and he skims down the list of discussion topics.
‘My daughter does not like the new alpha’, ‘trouble with the full shift’, ‘omg how do I feed
everyone’, ‘is it dangerous to eat raw meat while fully shifted’, ‘how to best introduce new pack
prospects’, ‘keeping control during the full moon’, ‘SOS alpha pack just showed up and I’m freaking
out’ ‘sex ed for werewolves’, and ‘my new boyfriend hung mistletoe and I can’t figure out how to
tell him he needs to take it down’.

“It, uh,” he says, trying to keep his eyes from popping out of his head. “Lycanthropy for dummies?
Really?”

Hardison shrugs. “Hey, if it works. Does it work? Is it actually real?”

“Man, how should I know?” Eliot asks. “Don’t forget, half of what I know probably isn’t even true.”

“Well, in that case maybe we can be your pack,” Parker says, pleased, “If you don’t know for sure
that we can’t.”
“Can’t you just make us into werewolves if it’s really such a problem?” Hardison asks.

Eliot glowers at him. “No.”

“Why not?” Hardison asks, feeling a little exasperated.

“Because this – this was done to me, okay? I didn’t ask for it. So don’t ask me to give it to you. Okay? Just don’t.”

Hardison considers this for a minute, then bobs his head in a nod. “Okay.”

“Okay,” Parker echoes quietly.

“We’re still your pack, though,” Hardison adds.

Eliot sighs. “Well, see if anyone on the forum is talking about, about human pack members or anything like that.”

Hardison grins. “That I can do,” he says, taking the computer back and starting to surf through the forum with purpose. Parker bumps shoulders with Eliot again and he scowls at her while they wait.

“Well, here’s something,” Hardison says. “‘My pack has more humans than wolves,’ is the topic.”

He clicks and then reads aloud. “‘My pack started with four wolves counting me (the alpha) and two humans, but then one of my wolves got married to a human, and another’s family moved to the area and her two sisters wound up joining the pack. None of them want the bite but I can tell they’re all bonded into the pack. So now I have four wolves and five humans. Is that weird?’”

“Any response?” Parker asks.

“Uh huh, from someone whose screenname is . . . prickly-leatherjacket. The hell?”

“It’s a fish,” Parker tells him.

“Course it is,” Hardison says. “‘Human heavy packs are rare, but not unheard of,’” he reads aloud. “‘It’s more common in families, with intermarriage and children being born human, but can happen in made packs as well. As long as everyone is bonded in and nobody has a problem with people who don’t want the bite, then there’s no reason you can’t have as many humans in your pack as you want, regardless of the number of wolves.’”

Eliot grunts. “Doesn’t say anything about if the number of wolves is zero.”


“So what’s this about children being born human and made packs?” Hardison asks. “You mean some kids are born as werewolves?”

“Yeah,” Eliot says. “It’s rare. There are families full of ‘em. The majority of werewolves are turned, though, and so the majority of packs are made.”

“That’s gotta be kind of cool,” Hardison says. “Being born into, growing up with a werewolf pack.” It’s not precisely the idea of ‘werewolf’ that he likes as much as the idea of belonging somewhere, right from the beginning.

While he’s mulling over that, Parker has turned his laptop around and is scrolling through the forums. “This might be helpful,” she says. “‘Too small to be a pack’. ‘I read that you need three betas to be a pack but I only have two. Why does it matter?’”
Hardison leans over her shoulder. “Answered by . . . I can’t even read this. Czerwony-pierńik,” he says, stumbling over it. “Anyway, the answer is ‘It’s about power. You gain more power with each beta, so some people think you need at least three betas to declare yourself a pack. Which is total bullshit in my opinion.’”

“And since you don’t care about all the werewolfy stuff that much, it doesn’t matter,” Parker concludes. “Cool.”

“Yeah, assuming that whoever that is knows what he’s talking about.”

“Well, we could search for other threads he’s commented on,” Hardison says.

Eliot rolls his eyes. “Sure. You do that.”

Hardison wastes no time in doing so. “Well, he’s listed as being a moderator, along with that other pricklyfish guy.”

“Prickly leatherjacket,” Parker corrects.

“And he answers a lot of questions, so my guess would be that yeah, he knows what he’s talking about.” Hardison begins to type again. “Then there’s a third moderator, site founder and labeled as the ‘official know-it-all’, whose screenname is ‘the-boy-in-red’. Huh.”

Eliot just puts his face in his hands.


“Quit that,” he says, slapping her hand away. “That – that’s the kid. That’s his name. I mean, it’s not his name, but it’s what people call him.”

“Oh,” Parker says. “Is that bad? You’re making it seem like it’s bad aside from the fact that you don’t like him.”

“He can’t just – he can’t just run a website telling people how to be werewolves!” Eliot says. “What the hell is wrong with him?”

“Why can’t he?” Hardison shrugs. “It’s the internet. People who aren’t involved are just going to assume it’s a bunch of crazy talk and leave it alone.”

“Yeah, and hunters are going to find it and start tracking IP addresses,” Eliot says.

Hardison shakes his head. “Nah, man. The whole forum has an IP cloning system so anyone who posts, it makes it look like their post all came from the same person. Not bad work, actually. Someone who knew what they were doing made this.”

“Of course. He knows all the hunter tricks because he’s got one in his pack.” Eliot can’t decide if he admires Stiles or wants to strangle him.

“So that settles it!” Parker says. “We’ll go talk with him about it so we can be your pack.”

Eliot decides it’s time for a drink.

~ ~ ~ ~
Eliot steps into the bar slightly ahead of the others, doing an automatic danger check as usual. Nothing seems out of place, and he sees Chris sitting at one end of the bar. He heads over, letting Parker and Hardison sort themselves out, come over or not as they see fit. He takes the stool next to Chris with a nod.

“Brought your friends,” Chris says with a slight nod in their direction, signaling the bartender to get Eliot a beer.

“They bring themselves. You saw that yesterday.” Eliot accepts the beer and takes a swig.

A slight smile touches Chris’ face, and he reaches into his shirt pocket and pulls out a piece of notebook paper. “Stiles issued an invitation to the den, if they’d like to, and I quote, ‘see what a pack looks like’."

Eliot takes it and memorizes the information. “Of course he did,” he says, and holds the piece of paper between his index and middle finger, extending it out to the room. “And of course they do.”

The piece of paper is snatched up by Parker only a minute later. “What’s this?” she asks, looking at it before handing it to Hardison.

“An invitation to go plague somebody else for a little while,” Eliot tells her.

“Cool. Bye!” Parker turns and heads for the door. Hardison smirks at Eliot and waves before following her.

“And don’t steal anything!” Eliot calls after her, and hears her laughter from outside.

Chris looks on in amusement. “The whole issue of ‘pack’ aside, I’m glad you’ve found some friends.”

“What, them?” Eliot takes a drink and just gives up. “Yeah, all right.”

“Want to grab a booth?” Chris asks, and Eliot nods, so they head over to one in the corner. “Look, Stiles means well. He just doesn’t know when to quit.”

“Or he’s never had to.” Eliot settles back onto the bench. “He knows I can’t make him back off.” And that’s unnerving for him. To be outclassed by a teenager.

Chris shrugs one shoulder. “Believe it or not, he actually was trying to help you.”


“Not as a hunter or as a werewolf,” Chris says. “Just as a person. Because he’s actually a pretty good kid. And so he could tell that you were kind of . . . unsure. About all of this. So he thought he would offer some advice. Which you promptly rejected, so then he pushed, because he’s a little prick.”

“Does he have any idea how unnerving he is?” Eliot asks.

At this, Chris gives a snort of laughter. “Oh, yeah. And the harder someone is to unnerve, the better he likes doing it.”

“Yeah, well, now he has to deal with Parker.” Eliot quaffs his beer. “Joke’s on him.”

“I’ll drink to that,” Chris says, and goes to get them another round.
Eliot waits for Chris to come back and says, “So how did the Argent princess wind up in a werewolf pack?”

Chris scowls reflexively. “She fell in love with one of the slobs,” he says.

Eliot gives an amused huff. “At least he seemed polite enough. Unlike his alpha.”

“He’s a good kid. Course, if you tell anyone I said that, I’ll have to kill you.” Chris takes a long drink. “Allison’s still mad at me for springing you on her. Apparently she had quite the crush on you when she was younger.”

Eliot makes a face like he’s embarrassed on Allison’s behalf. “Yeah, I noticed the way she kept tugging at her outfit. But those clothes weren’t going to get bigger no matter what she did.”

“Don’t remind me,” Chris groans. “Sometimes I’m almost glad she’s got Scott. Otherwise she’d be elbow deep in interested parties.”

“Which from what I saw, she could fend off pretty handily.”

“Doesn’t mean I would like thinking about it,” Chris grumbles. “What about you? How’d you end up with those two?”

Eliot thinks about how to sum it up. “A long line of things I’m ashamed of. And then one honest man who taught a bunch of loner crooks that sometimes bad guys make the best good guys.”

Chris shakes his head a little. “You know, if you could get over your alpha snarling, you and Stiles really would get along like a house on fire.”

“Yeah. Tell me about him. How does a teenager amass enough power to make my teeth rattle?”

“By making it not about power,” Chris says. “Instead of trying to make himself strong, he went out and found other misfits, other loners, people who needed a family. It made them bond so much more tightly than the average pack, and I don’t know that he even realizes it. A whole bunch of people tried to hurt his family, and he decided somewhere along the way that he was done letting them.”

Chris takes another drink. “He’s an interesting contradiction. Genuinely friendly, helpful, has a good heart. But put him in a corner and he’ll become the nastiest son of a bitch you’ll ever meet.”

“That, I can respect,” Eliot says, turning his bottle of beer around in his hands. “Parker and Hardison will get along with him and his just fine.”

“Well,” Chris says, “you should give him a try. He’s a damned good cook. You two could trade tips.”

“Does Victoria know that you say that about anyone’s cooking besides hers?” Eliot asks.

“They trade recipes,” Chris replies.

“I’ve been less nervous about overthrowing actual governments than I am right now,” Eliot tells him.

“You weren’t here when he challenged a bunch of hunters in my dining room and called them all cowards, while Vicky drank her fifth glass of wine.”

“How, how is he still alive?” Eliot sputters.

“Balls of brass, being smarter than is good for him, and an uncanny knack for finding the third option,” Chris says.
“He should be a con artist.”

“Well, good fucking God, don’t mention that to him,” Chris says.

“You probably should’ve thought of that before you gave Parker and Hardison his address,” Eliot says, hiding his smirk behind his beer.

“Nope,” Chris says. “He’s going to learn from them. It’s going to be terrifying.”

~ ~ ~ ~

Hardison drives, because Parker isn’t allowed to drive Lucille unless a getaway is needed. In fact, he prefers that Parker not drive at all unless a getaway is needed; Parker’s driving is terrifying. He looks up from the GPS as the forest looms around them, the trees blocking most of the sunlight. “We absolutely cannot have sex while we’re here.”

“What?” Parker looks over at him from where her sneakered feet are on the dash. “Why not?”

“Because this is a classic horror movie setup. The black man and the pretty blonde girl lured out into the wilderness. Sex is the clincher. We’d never survive.”

Parker smiles at him. “I like it when you tell me that I’m pretty.”

“Well, then, I will tell you that as often as you’d like, baby girl,” he says, and slows the van. There’s a fence up ahead, chain link and at least ten feet high. But it’s open, so he continues on through. “Yeah, this isn’t creepy at all.”

Parker looks out the window for a minute and then shrugs. “It’s just a property line. A request to stay out. There were holes cut into the fence, for animals, I think. Big enough that a human wouldn’t be trapped.”

“Yeah, but what about all these . . .” Hardison gestures dramatically and says, “Trees?”

“You’re afraid of the trees?”

“What? No,” Hardison says. “That would be silly. I just think there are too many of them.”

Parker rolls down her window and tips her head back, nose in the air, inhaling as deeply and obviously as possible. “Can you smell it? All those pine trees?”

“Quit messin’ with me, woman,” Hardison says, hitting the button to roll her window back up.

Parker settles down into her seat, clearly amused. “Man, this is the world’s longest driveway. Maybe there are too many trees.”

“Too many trees . . . and a second fence.” Hardison slows the van again. This one isn’t anything like the first; it’s the kind of fence he’s seen around high security facilities, and there isn’t a hole or a gap to be seen. He pulls up next to it and puts the van in park, glancing at Parker to see if she has any input before they get out.

She’s already out of the van. “Nice. Custom built system, no obvious weaknesses. A couple things that look like obvious weaknesses, which are traps.” She points and continues, “And there are
“We’d know that without the cameras, actually,” Stiles says cheerfully, jogging out of the house. “Werewolves have enhanced senses.”

Hardison looks at Parker and says, “That explains so much about Eliot.”

“So much,” Parker agrees. “Anyone ever beaten this?” she asks, waving at the fence.

“Yep,” Stiles says. “Twice.” He’s hitting buttons on the remote to open a sliding panel. “Once a shapeshifter that changed into a fucking spider. And once a sorcerer who just walked right through it like it wasn’t even there.”

Parker seems almost insulted by this. “That’s cheating.” She turns to Hardison. “Doesn’t magic seem like cheating?”

“Absolutely,” Hardison agrees.

Stiles just smiles at Parker and says, “If you want, I can arm the fence and you can try it the old-fashioned way, but if you manage to break in, you have to tell me how you did it.”

Parker bounces on her toes. “Sounds like fun! But later. After we get to ask our werewolf questions.”

“Sure,” Stiles says, and gestures for them to follow him inside. “Eliot seemed a little, I want to say, overwhelmed? But I figured there was probably stuff you wanted to know.” He goes through the front hall and into a large open space. There’s a fireplace on one side of the room, with a lowered space with a bench on the edges, full of cushions and bean bags. There’re two young men on the bench, one with a sketchbook and one with a laptop, and then three wolves sprawled out on the cushions.

“Those – those are wolves. Actual wolves. Y’all can just do that? Whenever you want?” Hardison asks.

Stiles nods. “Yep. Well, I can’t, I’m human, but the others can. The powers are strongest at the full moon – and the hardest to control – but they’re there all the time.” He gestures to the pile and says, “That’s Derek sketching, Danny with the laptop, and Erica, Lydia, and Mac in the love pit.”

Erica stretches a bit and then resettles, Lydia flicks an ear, and Mac gives a canine smile. The expression is matched by Danny, and Derek makes a noncommittal noise. Hardison holds up a hand in greeting. Parker is looking around at everything in the room, although she’s keeping her hands to herself, for now. Eliot had said no stealing. “Do you all live here?”

“No,” Stiles says. “Sadly, many of us are still underage, and live at home with our parents. But we’re all here for several hours every day, and usually we all crash here on the weekends.”

Parker and Hardison glance at each other. “So it’s normal for a pack not to live together?” he asks.

“No, it’s actually pretty weird,” Stiles says. “We’ve already been talking about making arrangements to get a place together when we head to college next year. But it’s unusual for a pack to have so many underage members in it that aren’t related to each other.”

“Eliot mentioned werewolf families,” Parker says, as she slowly circles. “Where people are born as werewolves. But he said they were rare.”
“I wouldn’t say we’re rare,” Derek says, mostly to his sketchbook. “Just uncommon.”

“Dude, those two words literally mean the same thing,” Danny comments, looking up.

“They do not,” Derek says, scowling. “It’s a matter of degree. Like albino animals. Not the norm but nothing to startle over.”

“If you look up ‘rare’ in the dictionary, the definition literally includes the word ‘uncommon’,“ Danny says. “And I know because I just did it.”

“Maybe we should just agree that werewolves are something to startle over no matter where they came from,” Hardison suggests.

Derek gives a snort. “No.”

“Take it easy on them, sour wolf,” Stiles says, rolling his eyes.

“So, for real, can we be a pack?” Hardison asks. “If it was just one alpha werewolf, and I got the idea that you have to have an alpha werewolf, and two humans and that’s it? We found this forum, right, and this spiky-fish guy or whatever said that a pack with more humans than werewolves wasn’t that weird, but Eliot still seemed pretty skeptical about it.”

“It’s not spiky-fish-guy,” Derek grumbles.

Stiles gives Derek a sidelong grin and smirks despite himself, but then puts on a more serious demeanor when he faces Hardison and Parker. “The short answer: we don’t really know. The longer answer: all of this supernatural stuff is pretty fuzzy. Like, they’ll think there are things that can’t happen but then someone will come along and prove them wrong. Nobody knew a human could be the alpha of a pack until I did it. If you two and Eliot decide you’re a pack – and God knows you behave like one, trust me – then there isn’t really any authority who can come down from on high and say ‘sorry, it can’t be that way’.”

“We don’t really like authority, so that’s good,” Parker says.

“Eliot seems pretty squirrely about the whole thing,” Hardison adds. “I mean, are hunters actually gonna come try to kill us?”

Stiles shakes his head. “No. Or at least, probably not. They’re busy, you know? They don’t really have a lot of time to go out looking for werewolves. You guys are living human lives. Odds are pretty good that the hunters have no idea you guys exist.”

“Just the way we like it,” Hardison says.

“Are other werewolves going to bother him?” Parker asks. “Because he’s an alpha? He said that the power passes on when a werewolf kills another alpha. That’s not a thing we have to worry about, is it?”

“Frankly, I’d feel sorry for any werewolf who thought they could take on Eliot and win,” Stiles says. “I mean, alphas are ridiculously hard to kill under any circumstances. They’re stronger, faster – they shrug off wounds that should be fatal in about four seconds. And on top of that, Eliot has all his hunter training, so he knows all the tricks and traps. I doubt any werewolf in this hemisphere would be stupid enough to challenge him, and any that is that stupid, he’ll see coming a mile away.”

“So he is super Eliot. Even if he says he’s not.” Parker is clearly glad to have this confirmed.
“Another caveat is that if you kill an alpha, you get their pack,” Stiles says. “Some people see that as an advantage. But they don’t always think through the consequences of having to deal with a bunch of pissed off betas.”

“Which usually results in murder,” Derek states, his tone flat enough that it’s clear he’s not joking. “We would literally murder anyone who took Stiles away from us.”

“Yeah, uh, so I guess you totally murdered a guy, huh,” Hardison says to Stiles.

“Yep,” Stiles says, a hint of a challenge, of ‘what’s it to you’ in his voice.

“Why?” Parker asks.

“Do you really want to know?” Stiles replies, and Parker nods. “I killed the previous alpha of this pack. For a variety of reasons. First of all, he was actually a very, very bad man, who had killed a whole bunch of other people, turned a couple people into werewolves against their will, intimidated, stalked, and tormented a bunch of my friends, then put a cherry on top by abducting me and leaving me in the trunk of his car for two days.” He pauses, and Hardison gives a little shudder. “Secondly, as Eliot might have told you, a pack without an alpha is vulnerable, and so the people in this pack were in danger as long as we had a psycho for an alpha. Third and lastly, he was being held captive by hunters, who were torturing him, and since we couldn’t get him out alive, it seemed merciful to kill him and get him out dead.”

Parker considers this for a minute, then nods and says, “Okay.”

“Okay,” Stiles says with a nod. “You two want anything to drink? Did you have dinner already?”

“He wants orange soda,” Parker says, tipping her head at Hardison and watching Derek give Stiles a glare and a mock growl. Then she remembers to have manners, at the last second. “If you have any. I’m fine with whatever.”

“We’ve got some of everything, probably,” Stiles says, and waves for them to follow him into the kitchen.

Hardison studies the room; wide and open, tons of appliances, and the smell of something freshly baked hanging in the air. “Man, Eliot should’ve come, he’d love this kitchen.”

“He likes to cook for you, huh?” Stiles asks, and grins. “That’s an alpha thing.”

“He likes to cook for everyone,” Hardison says. “He works in the kitchen of the pub when we aren’t doing something else.”

“Yeah, but he likes to cook for us more,” Parker says, and shrugs when Hardison looks at her. “What? He does. You can tell by how much he complains about how we don’t appreciate his culinary skills, but then keeps cooking for us anyway.”

Hardison concedes the point with a nod. Stiles looks amused. “Trust me. It’s an alpha thing. We want to take care of our pack. That means feeding them, and, if I’ve read your vibe right, nagging them.”

“Do you make your pack take vitamins?” Parker demands.

“Uh, not generally, because they eat right,” Stiles says. “But I would if they didn’t, probably.”

“Wait. What’s this about vitamins?” Hardison’s expression is deeply suspicious.
“Oh, he just puts yours in your soda,” Parker says, waving a hand at him.

“He – in my soda. That ain’t right.”

“He says you’re going to get scurvy,” Parker tells him in a completely nonchalant tone of voice.

“I am not!” Hardison crosses his arms over his chest. “What does he put yours in?”

“I just swallow mine. It makes him less grumpy.”


“He says we can’t be because we’re human,” Parker says, pouting. “And then we were going to ask on this forum that Hardison found, but then Eliot found out that you ran it and he got all weird about it.”

Stiles gives a little shrug. “I ran it because there are tons of people out there who have no idea what they’re doing, and I figured any resource is better than none. Part of Eliot’s problem with me is just superficial alpha snarling. We can’t help it to some degree. He’s on my territory and it makes him uncomfortable. And I’m guessing part of his problem is that I’m a snot-nosed brat,” he adds, with a bright grin, then pulls two cans of soda out of the refrigerator, orange for Hardison and Sprite for Parker.

“He mellowed out on the forum once he noticed the IP cloning,” Hardison says. “That is some good work.”

“Oh, thanks,” Stiles says. “Danny and Mac did all that,” he adds, waving back at the other room.

Mac lifts her head up, paying a little more attention, and Danny grins. “You liked that trick? Most people don’t even know that it’s possible. We’ve figured out all sorts of interesting stuff. Mostly by the seat of our pants. And we haven’t even been arrested.”

“Hang on, now,” Stiles says, laughing. “I feel like I’ve been lied to. You told me that you knew what you were doing.”

“Well, we did. Do. In theory. Or we know that other people have done it, so it’s possible.”

“I guess you did it because you were afraid hunters would try to find the users, right?” Hardison says, and Stiles nods. “See, you ought to put in reverse tracking, so if some jackass starts running IP searches on your forum, instead of them finding you, you find them.”

“You know how to do that?” Danny asks, and climbs over the back of his cushioned seat. “Show me how to do that.”

“Sure, man, it’s easy,” Hardison says, taking his laptop out of his bag and starting to set it up on the kitchen table. “You want to give ‘em malware? Of course you want to give them malware. It won’t touch the regular uses, don’t worry. Only someone who runs IP tracking.”

“All the malware,” Danny agrees. He sets his computer down next to Hardison’s and has a seat. “You have no idea how awful some of these people can be.”


Parker stands and says, “If you’re going to do computer stuff, I’m gonna go try to break in. Bye!”

Stiles snorts and says, “I’ll go arm the fence for you.”
Danny watches and listens as Hardison walks him through the entire thing, including the malware. “I’ve seen this before. Or at least examples of it.”

“Oh, yeah?” Hardison asks.

“Yeah, a couple people I know from . . . here and there. I hadn’t figured out all the details before now. They call it the Hardison special.”

Hardison smirks. “Do they, now.”

“So you invented it?” Stiles says, looking over from where he’s getting out the ingredients to make gingersnaps.

Hardison gives a mock-bashful shrug. “It’s possible.”

Danny’s head jerks around. “You’re Hardison?” From the other room, there’s a yip and the sound of scrambling paws. Danny turns to glare at Stiles. “And you didn’t tell us?”

“Is it important?” Stiles asks, blinking at them. “You’ve met other hackers before. I didn’t do introductions then.”

Mac nearly falls over as she comes into the room, shifting as she comes. “Yes, it’s important!”

“Hardison isn’t just a hacker, he’s like the hacker,” Danny tells Stiles.

“Oh,” Stiles says, and looks at Hardison. “Congratulations?”

“Uh, thanks? You . . . you’re naked.” Hardison clears his throat and looks away from Mac, blinking at the ceiling. “Did you know that? That you’re naked?”

“What? Oh! I am. That’s probably not normal for you, sorry. I’ll just, uh, grab some clothes.” Mac scampers out of the room, but is back a few moments later, pulling on a T-shirt long enough to come to her knees.

“Werewolves that spend a lot of time in their fully shifted form tend to lose any sense of modesty they ever had very quickly,” Stiles says, for Hardison’s benefit. “Some people seem to think this is totally normal. Other people think it’s weird. The first group thinks the second group is repressed. Personally I just think it’s because of laziness.”

“Can’t both be true?” Derek asks from the other room. “Are you telling me Ravinder isn’t repressed?”

“He’s so repressed,” Stiles agrees.

“Who’s Ravinder?” Hardison asks.

“Oh, he’s one of the alpha pack. They go around and judge alphas on how they handle their packs and stuff.”

“The Lycan Review Board,” Mac adds, as she settles at the table with them. “They’re actually pretty nice. I mean, to us. Maybe they’re scary if they find an alpha who’s a dickface.”

“So are they gonna come get all judgy on Eliot?” Hardison asks. “‘Cause he won’t take that well.”

“Nah, he’ll be fine if they show up, which they probably won’t, since he doesn’t have any actual werewolves in his pack. They might not know he exists.”
Hardison nods, filing this away, and goes back to the computer work. Stiles has just finished with the cookie dough and has put it in the refrigerator when Parker comes back into the room, standing behind Hardison and leaning on his shoulder. She glances between Danny and Mac and asks, “Do they understand more of your computer talk than I do?”

Hardison doesn’t jump at her sudden arrival, because by now he pretty much always expects her to appear out of nowhere. The same can’t be said of the others in the room. “Uh, some of it.”

“Cool.” Parker redirects her attention towards Stiles. “I’ve broken in twice now. I still have some ideas.”

“W-What?” Stiles sputters. Even Derek is staring at her. “I didn’t even hear you! They didn’t even hear you! That – how did that happen?”

“She does that,” Hardison says, completely unperturbed.

Parker just shrugs. “That smells good. Eliot doesn’t really bake. He cooks. Do you want me to keep trying ideas?”

“Oh . . .” Stiles is clearly still off guard, but he rallies. “Oh, uh, yeah. Those are my famous gingersnaps. They’ll smell even better when they’re baking. But that’s beside the point. How . . . how did you get in the first two times? Or, or should I just let you keep trying things until you run out of ideas? Please don’t electrocute yourself. I have a feeling that Eliot would be really mad at me if that happened.”

“Pffff. Electric fences. Hah!” Parker waves that off and turns to Hardison. “Can I have a plane?”

“No, baby girl,” Hardison says.

“Well, that’s one idea down, then.”

Stiles opens his mouth, then closes it and turns back to putting away his ingredients.

Parker starts out of the room, then half-turns back. “What about a helicopter?”

“We would hear a helicopter coming ten miles away,” Derek says, scowling.

“Fiiiiine,” Parker says, wrinkling her nose in a pout. “No parachuting. Is the crossbow still in Lucille?” she adds.

“Yeah, just moved it to the back cabinet,” Hardison answers. Parker grins and then jogs off.

Stiles watches her go. “I’m going to have holes in my roof soon, aren’t I.”

“Maybe, maybe not.” Hardison shrugs. “Most likely not. You’d hear it, and she really hates getting caught.”

“Then what’s she going to do with the . . . you know what, I really don’t want to know.”

Eliot is in a tolerably good mood when he leaves the bar, and Chris offers to show him the way to
the den so he doesn't have to sit by himself at the hotel and think about all the trouble Parker and Hardison might get into and/or cause. Chris is smart enough to phrase this offer quite differently, and Eliot grumpily agrees. The last thing he wants to do is lie around the hotel and worry. "You could just give me directions," Eliot says, but Chris says it'd be easier to go with him for at least the first part of the drive because of the security measures. So Eliot gets in his Charger and follows Chris' dark SUV to the edge of town, where he turns down a small road and unlocks a chain-link fence.

"I called ahead and told them you're coming, so they'll open the inner gate for you," Chris tells him, and shakes his hand before getting back in his SUV to come home. Eliot scowls at his tail lights before continuing onward. The inner gate is indeed open, and he parks next to Lucille. As soon as he gets out, a wonderful smell hits him. Ginger and molasses and vanilla. He inhales deeply, enjoying it despite himself, before he walks towards the door. The gap in the fence behind him immediately closes, and a few moments later, he hears the hum of the electricity start.

The front door is propped open, so he ventures inward to find a bunch of wolves - actual wolves - lying around the living room. There's a plate of obviously fresh cookies on a side table. Hardison is clustered around a computer with two teenagers. Eliot scowls at his tail lights before continuing onward. The inner gate is indeed open, and he parks next to Lucille. As soon as he gets out, a wonderful smell hits him. Ginger and molasses and vanilla. He inhales deeply, enjoying it despite himself, before he walks towards the door. The gap in the fence behind him immediately closes, and a few moments later, he hears the hum of the electricity start.

Derek, who’s sitting on the floor with his back resting against the sofa, looks up from his sketchpad. He reaches out with his pencil and prods Stiles’ calf. “Stop trying to die. We’ve got company.”

“Hi,” he replies, swatting her hand away.

Derek turns back to Eliot and says, “Parker beat the den’s security four times and now he’s dying inside.” He stands up, dropping his sketchpad on the sofa next to Stiles’ head. “You want something to drink?”

“I spent months on that security,” Stiles moans into the pillow. “Months. She beat it four times.”

“It was tricky,” Parker says, in a tone that’s clearly meant to console him rather than convey actual fact.

Eliot looks between them and shakes his head. “No, I don’t want a drink. I’m just here to collect these two and now we’re going back to the hotel.”

Danny looks up at this. “You can’t go until after you’ve had a cookie,” he says. Wolves start to perk up at this, heads rising from the pile, some sitting up, ears at attention. “We’ve been waiting. Patiently.”

Eliot blinks around the room. Then he looks at Hardison. “What’s happening?” he asks, and then he realizes he just turned to Hardison for an answer that makes sense. Beacon Hills is clearly Opposite Land, and he really wants to get out of this place.

Hardison gives a little shrug. “I’m teaching these two here some computer skills, Parker is bored after breaking past their security and I wouldn’t get her a plane. So I deserve some sort of reward for standing up to that adorable expression right there,” he adds as Parker wrinkles her nose at him. “And the rest of these fine furry naked people are waiting for you to eat a cookie. It seems very important to them, for reasons I do not know, but the cookies are very good.”
Eliot looks at the cookies. He looks around the room. Even Stiles is sitting up, blinking expectantly. “Yeah, no thanks,” he decides. “C’mon, you two. Let’s get moving.”

Several of the werewolves start pouting. Stiles laughs and says, “For some reason, werewolves seem to particularly like my gingersnaps. We’ve never really been able to figure out why. They just want to see if you’ll like it, or if you’re the one werewolf who can resist my charms.”

“Really?” Eliot asks. “I mean, really?”

Pretty much everyone in wolf or human form nods. “Really,” Mac confirms. “His snickerdoodles are like crack and these are even better.”

Eliot sighs. It’s clear that he’s not going to get out of it, and he doesn’t want to argue. He snatches up a cookie and crams half of it in his mouth, intending to chew and swallow as quickly as possible to get it over with. He stops with it half-chewed. It’s amazing. Ginger, cinnamon, cloves - all the spices are in a perfect balance with each other. It’s not too sweet, and has a little bite of a bite to it, but it’s not too spicy. The flavors are rich and the cookie itself is dense and soft and just the right amount of chewy. He chews slower, savoring it, and finally swallows, aware that all the eyes in the room are on him. Slowly, he looks over at the plate of cookies and says, “Yeah, I’m gonna need that recipe.”

Stiles’ face breaks into a happy grin and he does a ridiculous fist-pump. “Yes! Put another in Column Stilinski!”

Derek sighs and admits shamefacedly, “He had to bully me the first time, too. By telling me that the police dogs loved them, like that’s a good selling point. Then Lydia tried to choke me with one.”

Eliot scowls at Stiles and says, “Werewolves aren’t dogs.”

He’s a little discomfited when this is met with a scattering of human snickers and wolf chuffs. “I never said you were,” Stiles replies, through his laughter.

Derek gives Eliot a look that’s all commiseration. “I don’t know how people can believe I’m a dog, service vest or no.”

“People have astonishing abilities to convince themselves of stuff that they really oughtta know ain’t true,” Hardison says, thinking of the times they’d grifted and conned through hilarious impossibilities.


Parker leans over and pokes Eliot in the shoulder. “Was I supposed to feel something when I ate the cookies? Because the cookies gave me feelings.”

“Yeah, these cookies are the kind that’ll give you feelings,” Eliot confirms for her.

“What kind of feelings?” Stiles asks, interested.

“Whatever kind she feels,” Eliot says, glowering.

Parker grins. “They’re first-moving-laser-grid cookies,” she says, taking one and breaking it in half to share with Hardison.

“That’s got to be the first time my cookies have been compared to a laser grid,” Stiles muses. “I’m not sure what that means but I’m definitely flattered.”
Eliot is back to scowling. “You gonna give me the recipe or what?”

“Sure, just give me your number and I’ll text it to you,” Stiles says.

“Just write it down for me,” Eliot says, narrowing his eyes.

“You don’t want me to have your number?” Stiles asks, blinking guilelessly.

Eliot decides not to dignify that. “Hardison, give him some alias’ e-mail address or something. Whatever.”

“Sure, sure.” Hardison pulls out his phone rather than go back to his laptop. He taps away on it for a few moments, casually keeping it from anyone’s view, and then grins to himself. “That’s a good one,” he says, and then holds it up for Stiles to write down. Stiles doesn’t question their paranoia or the implied insult, but does so without complaint.

Things go as planned the next morning. The sorcerer shows up on time. Eliot spends ten minutes beating up crocodiles while Allison shoots the ones with wings out of the sky and mutters about how much she hates lizards over the comms. After the first two waves are taken down, the sorcerer pokes his face out and immediately gets a bullet in it for his trouble.

“Breakfast?” Chris suggests, as Eliot snaps his wrist bone back into place.

“Sounds good,” Eliot says.

Allison shifts from foot to foot and says, “I’m gonna go . . . tell Scott that everything went okay. Bye!” She leans over and lands a kiss on her father’s cheek, then bounces away.

Chris looks after her sourly and mutters, “You’re not fooling anyone,” but then turns back to the issue of food. “If we go back to my place, I’ll grill us up some steaks. Do a cowboy breakfast.”

“Oh okay,” Eliot says. “If you have potatoes, I’ll make us some. Victoria won’t mind if I use her kitchen, right?” he adds. He’s met Victoria. He has to ask, for his own safety.

“No, and she’s out of town right now. Visiting her sister in Utah.” Chris gets behind the wheel and they head back to the Argent household. “You haven’t met Jake yet,” he realizes. “You’ll probably scare the shit out of him.”

Eliot cocked an eyebrow at him. “Who’s Jake?”

“My cousin Henry’s kid. He’s abysmal at pretty much everything related to hunting, except ordering ammunition. Henry’s solution to this was to treat him like crap, so now he lives with me. He’s sixteen. Try not to give him that angry face. He’s a lot better than he used to be, but he still gets nervous pretty easily.”

“I do okay with kids,” Eliot says. Which is true, even as he gives Chris a somewhat offended look.

“I didn’t say you weren’t,” Chris replies. “But Jake doesn’t like hunters very much.”

Eliot huffs. “Probably likes werewolves even less, then.”
“No, no, he loves werewolves,” Chris says dryly, “since it was Stiles’ machinations that got his parents to sign custody over to me. He eats at the den more often than he eats at home; if it weren’t for the fact that they’re all off at college most of the year, he’d be a part of their pack by now.”

“There’s some sort of joke in this,” Eliot says. “Two Argents, a teenager, and a werewolf walk into a bar.”

Chris gives a snort and shakes his head. “Yeah, hilarious,” he says, shaking his head.

Eliot rolls his eyes. “Honestly, I don’t even know what the hell could have happened to make a human the alpha of a pack in Beacon Hills. In Hale territory. On Hale property. Especially when there are actual Hales around to take the role. Argents being part of the pack just seems to be some weird icing on top of everything else.”

“Allison being part of the pack has a lot to do with how it happened, actually,” Chris says, and sighs as he pulls into his driveway. “I’ll tell you the story if you want, but it doesn’t put me or my family in a very good light.”

“I’m hardly in a position to judge,” Eliot says with a shrug. “I’d like to know, but it ain’t my business, so if you don’t want to tell me, I’ll accept that.”

“Yeah. Come on in, let’s get cooking.”

Eliot nods and follows him inside. Chris goes outside to start up the grill, and Eliot stays in the kitchen, chopping potatoes and peppers and onions. As always, he finds cooking soothing. He gets the potatoes in the oven and goes out back to find Chris waiting for the coals. “Potatoes need about twenty, thirty minutes, so don’t rush the steaks,” he says.

Chris nods. It’s too early in the morning for beer, so he’s drinking coffee. “What do you know about the Hale house fire?”

“That it happened. As far as I know, they didn’t deserve it. There were two or three survivors.” He leans back on the porch railing. “That’s about it.”

“Actually, there were five survivors,” Chris says. “Not many people know that. But still a lot of people killed. And no, they didn’t deserve it.” He rubs a hand over his head and says, “I was living in Nevada then. My sister Kate was the one who handled everything down here.”

Eliot nods to show he’s listening, but doesn’t interrupt or ask if Kate knew anything about it.

“Turns out,” Chris says, slowly turning his coffee cup around in his hands, “that my sister had gone full-blown psychotic, and after seducing a fifteen-year-old boy for inside information, she blocked all their exits and lit the place up.”

Eliot keeps a straight face, because that’s worse than a lot of the things that he had done during the darker parts of his history. “I’m sorry.”

“I’m not sure how much my father knew about it,” Chris says. “Probably everything. Kate moved away from Beacon Hills not long after that. Anyway, Derek and Laura were away at school, so they survived. Peter Hale was the only survivor from the people who were trapped inside, and wound up badly injured and comatose. Two other Hales, Cora and one of her uncles, escaped before Kate could get all the exits blocked. The uncle was killed later by other hunters. Derek and Laura went on the run. And Peter was left rotting in the hospital for six years.”

“And the others were too young and scared to come back for him,” Eliot surmises, “if they even
knew that he lived.”

Chris nods a little. “About six years later, Peter came out of his coma and decided to take revenge on the people who had killed his family. He was too weak to do it on his own, so he lured his niece back to Beacon Hills and killed her for the alpha power.”

Eliot startles at this. “No love lost there.”

“It wasn’t that,” Chris says wearily. “He was crazy. Wouldn’t you be?”

There’s a half shrug. “I’m not sure I’m sane enough now to even guess.”

“Fair enough,” Chris says, and shakes his head. “Peter Hale killed a lot of people. Some of them were bad people. Most of them were bad people, if we’re going to be honest. But he did a lot of other bad things, like turning a couple teenagers against their will to try to gain more power, trying to kill Allison, just generally behaving like a psychopath and terrorizing Beacon Hills.”

Eliot nods again, waiting. He would assume that Chris had stepped in, but the story doesn’t seem like it could be that simple.

“Meanwhile, Allison had started dating Scott,” Chris continues, “who was one of the teenagers that Peter had turned. And I was so hung up on the fact that my precious princess was dating a werewolf, and hung up on trying to not see that my sister was a complete psycho, that I proceeded to be absolutely no help to anybody.”

Eliot grimaces in a sort of sympathy, both for Chris not wanting to see his sister like she really was, but also for him having to deal with his daughter dating what Chris might have thought was the worst possible sort. Which doesn’t exactly make Eliot comfortable, given that he was, as much as he hated to admit it at times, that sort.

“Peter finally ripped Kate’s throat out and tried to kill Allison. I shot him a few times and he limped away, at which point I captured him and brought him back here to . . . face justice. I knew that my father would want to deal with him.” Chris stands up and holds his hand near the grill to test the coals, so he doesn’t have to look at Eliot. “My father kept him locked up here to keep the pack from getting a new alpha, keep them weak and crippled so he could hunt them down. And it’s not like he didn’t know they were teenagers who had never hurt anybody. He knew that. He just didn’t care.”

Eliot doesn’t think that Chris will find it reassuring that he’s known people who have done much worse. It didn’t make Gerard’s actions any better. “So much for the Argent Code.”

“Yeah.” Chris drops the two steaks on the grill. “And then . . . then along came Stiles.”

“How was he even involved? He obviously wasn’t one of the turned wolves.”

“No. He’s Scott’s best friend, has been since they were kids, so when Peter turned Scott, Stiles is the one who helped him figure out how to control it and how to hide it, even though he learned everything he knows about werewolves from Google. Plus he sort of made friends with Derek Hale, who was, of course, looking for his sister’s murderer. Long story short, in order to get to Scott and Derek, Peter abducted Stiles and left him in the trunk of his car. Since he then got shot and captured by me, Stiles wound up there for two days.”

Eliot pauses to consider what he’s seen of Stiles. “He wouldn’t handle that well. In certain cases it’s not so bad an evening, but . . .” He waves this aside. “Never mind.”

Chris gives him a look, glancing over his shoulder and seeming amused for the first time. Then he
shrugs and says, “Yeah, well, where a lesser man might not have recovered, Stiles came out of that trunk with the burning desire to never let anything like that happen again, and set about making sure of it. He proceeded to ask for hunter training. And where I wouldn’t give it to him, my father would. Because he didn’t know that Stiles ran with wolves, and I . . . I didn’t dare tell him.”

“Given what else you’ve said, that sounds like the right thing to do.”

“Uh huh.” Chris doesn’t say anything else about that. “Especially given that he killed an omega in the woods, and when he realized that the sheriff had seen him, got in his car and ran the poor bastard down.”

“You’re supposed to bribe or blackmail law enforcement, not murder them,” Eliot says, feeling professionally insulted.

“That might have been difficult in this case,” Chris says, “because the poor bastard in question was Sheriff Stilinski. Stiles’ father. He’s not very susceptible to bribes, and I’m pretty sure he would be impossible to blackmail.”

“Then you fuck with their head, you still don’t murder – wait. Your father bumped off the father of the kid he was actively training in combat?”

“Not entirely. Tom survived the crash, in part due to the fact that Stiles is overprotective of his father on a good day before all the werewolf stuff, and increasingly paranoid after his stint in Peter’s trunk, and panicked when his father wasn’t answering his texts. He wound up in the hospital with serious injuries. But otherwise, yes. In fact, would you like to know what my esteemed father had to say about the crash to Stiles? That he heard it was a hit and run, and it was terrible the way people didn’t take responsibility for their actions.”

“You know, I help ruin people like that as an actual profession.”

Chris snorts and flips the steaks. “Well, you don’t have to worry about my father. Stiles did a very professional job of ruining him without needing any help from me or from you.”

“So he has real brains to back up that power? Good to know.” And possibly terrifying, but Eliot isn’t about to say that out loud.

“Yeah. A few weeks after the accident, Stiles found Peter in our basement. He proceeded to figure out exactly what had happened, get all the evidence he needed for an airtight case against my dad, up to and including a recorded confession that he goaded out of my father right after breaking into my basement and murdering Peter Hale with a syringe full of wolfsbane.” Chris slaps the two steaks down on plates and says, “Hope you’re still hungry.”

“Did he know he’d be the alpha?” Eliot pauses and considers the question. “I guess he couldn’t have known, being human and all.” Which meant that Stiles had genuinely done it for the good of the pack, not for power.

“No, he thought, everyone thought, that it would revert to Derek,” Chris says, leading the way back inside. Eliot glances at his watch and takes the potatoes out of the oven. “To this day, nobody’s one hundred percent sure why it happened. Maybe that’s just what happens when a human bound into a pack kills the alpha. Maybe Peter willed the power to him because he knew he’d handle it better than Derek. Maybe it was just Stiles being Stiles.”

“And Derek wasn’t pissed?” Eliot grabs a spatula from one of the canisters at the back of the stove and stirs the potatoes to make sure they’re done, then sets them down for Chris to serve himself first.
“I think he was at first, at least some, but he got over it. He never really wanted to be an alpha, so it wasn’t a big deal to him. He was more upset that Stiles hid the fact that we had Peter captive than he was about Stiles being an alpha.” Chris dishes himself some food and starts eating.

“He wanted revenge for his sister? Or was family still family even after everything?”

“I don’t think even he really knew,” Chris replies.

Eliot shrugs. “Some people just don’t.”

“Fair.” Chris cuts into his steak and says, “Stiles proceeded to safe guard his territory from hunters by blackmauling the shit out of me with the video his father had taken of me standing by while my father killed the omega. Good times.”

“See, that’s how you deal with law enforcement,” Eliot says.

Chris snorts and shakes his head. “Thanks for your support.”

“You like him too much for blackmail to be the basis of your relationship.”

“Yeah, well. You ever meet Vivien Nazario?”

Eliot nods once. “Charming as a rattlesnake.”

“Well, she showed up here when the alpha pack came for Stiles and proceeded to step all over my pride and insinuate that Vicky had ‘settled’ by marrying me and ‘some people’ just aren’t good enough to be ‘real hunters’,” Chris says.

“Clearly she doesn’t know that Victoria keeps a box of poisons next to the spices.” Eliot had seen the box while getting out the potatoes.

“Remember the meal I told you about where Vicky only drank wine and Stiles called a bunch of hunters cowards to their faces? Yeah, that was Vivien and her snotty posse.”

Eliot’s starting to understand. “She didn’t try to have him killed?”

“Well, she probably would have in that moment, if Allison hadn’t already had her crossbow pointed at her. Instead she waited until they were in the forest doing one of the trials and she and her goons shot up half the trees. And several of the pack members. Did you happen to notice that Stiles only has one earlobe?”

“It seemed rude to comment.”

Chris rolls his eyes. “Yeah, well. That was a bullet. Allison got hit, too, though it wasn’t serious, thank God. So picture this. You’ve got a werewolf pack holed up in an abandoned house in the woods, pinned down by a bunch of hunters with rifles. What does Stiles do?”

“I honestly have no idea. Get shot?”

“He calls the fucking police,” Chris says, laughing. “Just fucking calls 911 and has the troops sent in.”

Eliot gives a startled laugh, too. It’s not a solution he expected. But maybe he should have. Law enforcement is something their team has used to their advantage often enough. “If a guy named Nate Ford ever comes to town, make sure he and Stiles don’t meet.”
“Noted,” Chris says, pouring himself another cup of coffee. “Anyway, after everything that happened with the alpha pack, nobody could deny Stiles’ right to the territory. It was basically affirmed by the highest power around. And I . . . I could have intervened. The blackmail wouldn’t have stopped me, you know that. But I didn’t, because Stiles can be a hyperactive spaz and he can be a ruthless son of a bitch, but he’s still a good person underneath it all.”

“Nothing wrong with ruthless as long as it’s applied the right way,” Eliot says. “As long as you know where to draw the line.” He takes a minute to eat. “Still a pushy brat, though.”

“Oh, yeah,” Chris says, and laughs. “You should see him get going on the subject of his father’s cholesterol. Tom Stilinski has the most long-suffering face I’ve ever seen.”

That gains an amused snort. “At least he doesn’t have to slip vitamins into anyone’s soda.”

Chris shakes his head. “I guess it’s an alpha thing.”

Eliot gives him a dirty look.

Chris takes a sip of his coffee and says complacently, “See that, right there? That’s why Stiles keeps pestering you. Because you have this look, like, you don’t want to be an alpha and it shows. So he’s trying to show you what a pack is, why being an alpha is a good thing. Because for all his many faults, that little prick loves being an alpha.”

“Maybe he loves it because he’s done good things with it. But when I was turned, that wasn’t the road I took. So maybe it’s something I shouldn’t have, but it’s not like a gun. I can’t just decide to put it back down. So no, I don’t like it.”

There’s a long silence while Chris considers this and says, “But since you can’t put it down, wouldn’t you like it more if you did good things with it, too?”

“What would it change?” Eliot asks. “I protect my crew, and I don’t die. I’d like to think I’m doing that anyway. I’m not looking to build a pack or make things any more complicated than they already are.”

Chris shrugs. “Maybe you’d sleep better at night. Or smile more. Or worry less. I don’t know. But it might be worth finding out.”

“Do you really want to see me smile more? Does that seem right to you?”

“Hey, this isn’t about me,” Chris says smirking. “Ask your pack if they want to see you smile more, see what they say.”

“Asking their opinions is not always a good thing,” Eliot says. He can’t even imagine what they would say if he posed that question to them. But he supposes he could reword it, and they could have a talk about what’s best for all of them, and leave smiling out of it.

“Well, at least you’re done denying that they’re your pack,” Chris says, dishing himself up more potatoes. “That’s a start.”

“It’s an argument I’m going to lose. Parker and Hardison usually get what they want.” Eliot pauses, then adds gloomily, “Always get what they want.”

“Well, then it looks like you already have your answer.” Chris finishes off his cup of coffee and says, “Want Stiles’ number?”
Eliot growls. “Fine. But if you gloat, I’m turning Parker loose on your security.”

~ ~ ~

Stiles takes one look at Eliot’s scowl and says, “You’re overthinking it.”

“What?” Eliot narrows his eyes.

“You think you’re here because we’re going to do some mystical voodoo bullshit and change the fiber of your very being,” Stiles says. “You think that this shit is complicated. But it isn’t. You know how we became a pack? I asked the three werewolves ‘will you accept me as your alpha’ and they said yes. That was it. No incense, no fireworks, no shenanigans of any sort. Just ‘will you’ and yes, like, bam.”

“Sounds like a wedding,” Parker says, her mouth full of cookie. She and Hardison had been at the den when Eliot arrived, and he decided against asking how long they had been there.

“It kind of is like a wedding,” Stiles says. “I mean, creating a bond between people. Same idea.”

“Eliot, you didn’t even give me a ring,” Hardison says, and Eliot gives him a withering look. “My babies are all grown up,” Hardison adds, pretending to be choked up.

“You’re the youngest of the three of us,” Parker points out.


“We’re not having this discussion again,” Eliot says.

Stiles watches their bickering with amusement, then says to Eliot, “See, that’s how you can tell that they’re your pack. Because you fit together.”

“Okay, fine, they’re my pack, now will you –” Eliot says, and then stops because something just snapped into place. It’s like an entirely new sense has been added to the usual five. He can feel Hardison across the room, his warm heart and the way his mind races at a hundred miles per hour, and he can feel Parker standing next to him, all light like a bird and the joy she takes in simple things.

“Whoa,” Hardison says, nearly falling out of his chair.

“That – that felt kind of – sparkly,” Parker says, blinking.

Stiles holds his hands out in front of himself and says, “Ta da!”

Eliot scowls at him, or at least tries to scowl at him, but has trouble scowling because, well, he has a pack. And after all the years he’s fought against the thought even crossing his mind, all the years he’s pushed back the alpha instincts, it’s an incredible rush. He’d known he wasn’t alone, known that Parker and Hardison were there for him, but this – this is different. “Stop grinning like a smug little shit,” he says to Stiles.

“But I am a smug little shit,” Stiles says. Derek lifts his head from where he’s been observing from the corner, huffs out a sigh, and puts his head back down.
“Stay in touch,” Chris says, shaking Eliot’s hand.

“Don’t call me again,” Eliot replies.

Chris just laughs and turns to walk away.

“I mean it, you asshole!” Eliot turns to Hardison and Parker with a scowl. He’s ninety percent sure that they’re laughing at him. “Don’t start.”

Parker is definitely laughing at him. Hardison just looks affronted and says, with fake innocence, “We would never.”

Eliot just shakes his head. “Come on. Let’s go home before you two find more trouble to drag me into.”
By popular request: samples from the Lycanthropy for Dummies forum. =D

Derek's screenname is 'prickly-leatherjacket' (It's a fish!) and Stiles has two. One he uses for casual conversation where he just wants to be a regular guy, 'czerwony-piernik', and one that he uses as a moderator that everyone knows is him, 'the-boy-in-red'. Allison also posts occasionally, under 'the-hunters-daughter'. I probably could have gotten a lot more fancy/creative with the formatting, but I'm lazy.

Thank you to everyone for their suggestions and to all the people on tumblr who graciously allowed me to use their screennames so I didn't have to come up with a zillion. (Of note: these were assigned completely at random and have no bearing on or relationship to the actual owner. So if someone is implied to be gay, straight, alpha, human, et cetera, please note that this was done totally at random. I just slapped in the screennames in the order that people liked the post. Two exceptions: if someone made a post suggestion, I used their SN for that particular post, and daughterofscotland had a, ahem, special request. =D)

Enjoy!

can’t stand the subway

weebleroxanne: I have to take the subway to work and it’s driving me insane. It’s so packed in and noisy and the smells are just, oh my God, vomit city. I can’t afford a car. What should I do?

czerwony-piernik: Go down to the pharmacy and buy a cheap box of surgical masks. Then put a drop of peppermint extract in it and wear it on the subway. That’ll keep the smell from bothering you. And, as a bonus, everything will think you have a contagious disease and give you extra space!

weebleroxanne: …thanks?

prickly-leatherjacket: You could just borrow a scarf from a packmate and wind it around your face. In the winter, at least.

weebleroxanne: That might work better.

czerwony-piernik: I’m so unappreciated in my time.

flowerkats-things: Well, I tried your idea with the surgical mask and it worked great! Everyone stayed at least five feet from me. Best idea ever.
please tell me I’m not about to get e coli

mcmuffin-d: is it okay to eat raw meat when you’re fully shifted? I kind of, um, might have eaten a rabbit.

czerwony-piernik: for shame! No, I’m kidding. It’s fine.

prickly-leatherjacket: My family used to run down deer and eat them, so, don’t worry about it. It’s hunting instinct, and it’s actually very healthy to give it an outlet on occasion.

tsubame17: can you eat it when you’re in your human form?

czerwony-piernik: um, you can, but would you really want to?

tsubame17: fair point.

pregnant!!! SOS!!!

astraldeveloper: oh my God I’m pregnant am I going to have cubs

prickly-leatherjacket: oh my God no you aren’t going to have cubs

czerwony-piernik: Ignore him, he gets cranky. You’re going to have a baby. Probably just one. You have the same odds of having multiples as a human. And no, it won’t be a wolf. Now, it might be a werewolf, but you aren’t going to have a furry little cub come out of your vagina and scare the hell out of a bunch of doctors and wind up on Jerry Springer.

prickly-leatherjacket: and you’re telling people that I’m the problem?

theprettyflowerdragon: out of curiosity, what are the odds it would be a werewolf?

prickly-leatherjacket: It depends on the parents. Two born wolves have a one hundred percent change of a werewolf baby. One born wolf and one turned wolf have about a seventy-five percent chance, one born wolf and one human have a fifty percent chance, one turned wolf and one human have about a twenty-five percent chance.

had diabetes, now it’s gone
**twistwitch:** I’ve literally been on insulin for Type 1 diabetes since I was eight years old. Now I don’t need it anymore. I am definitely not complaining about this at all but my doctor’s office just reminded me that I’m due for an appointment. What the heck do I do now?

**the-boy-in-red:** Call them back, thank them for taking such good care of you, and then tell them that you moved to Alaska and you have a new doctor there.

**twistwitch:** Oh, that’s a good idea. Can’t believe I didn’t think of something so simple! Now I just have to hope that I don’t run into my doctor at the grocery store.

**prickly-leatherjacket:** just tell them you’re visiting friends.

~ ~ ~ ~

**nose-friendly cleaning solutions?**

**chibikachi:** my girlfriend was recently turned and now every time we try to clean the house, she feels sick. Even unscented products still have a lot of chemicals in them. What can we use?

**czerwony-piernik:** I hate to say ‘go organic’ because it tends to be expensive, but this is one of those times.

**prickly-leatherjacket:** Not necessarily. Dish soap is good to clean a lot of things, and you can use baby wipes instead of Clorox wipes; those are generally less offensive. Vinegar is also a really good cleaning solution. Except for the part where it smells like vinegar.

**czerwony-piernik:** http://greatist.com/health/27-chemical-free-products-diy-spring-cleaning <-- I found this article and it’s pretty helpful

~ ~ ~ ~

**my cat hates me ;_;**

**cluelessnu:** Ever since I got turned, my cat doesn’t like me anymore. It’s breaking my heart. What should I do?

**prickly-leatherjacket:** Pets can have a hard time adjusting. You have to treat it like you would introducing the cat to a new pet. Give her plenty of space, leave things that smell like you (the new you) around for her to get comfortable with. And, spoil the shit out of her. Lots of treats, lots of tuna.

**czerwony-piernik:** Feliway is good, too. Helps keep cats mellow.
cluelessnu: she seems to be getting used to me now. Thanks!

~ ~ ~ ~

help my boyfriend found my restraints

daughterofscotland: I had trouble with the first few full moons and so my alpha had these padded restraints lined with silver made for me. After I got under control, I just tossed them in my closet and forgot about them. Now my boyfriend found them and he thinks I’m super kinky! Help! What should I do?

the-hunters-daughter: What you should do, honey, is use those padded restraints to chain your boyfriend to your bed, and then fuck the hell out of him. That should make explanations moot. :)

daughterofscotland: Update: apparently I am super kinky. Thanks for the advice!

~ ~ ~ ~

trouble with the full shift

somecoughsyruptoeasethepain said: one of my betas just can’t get into the full wolf form. We’ve tried everything, meditation, incense, even hypnosis. What should we do?

czerwony-pierńk: Marijuana. No, really. It’ll mellow him out. Then just crank the AC until it’s freezing, and he’ll find his fur in a hurry.

somecoughsyruptoeasethepain: Is this legit?

the-boy-in-red: Yeah, it’s legit. I first heard it from Justin, and it actually does work.

somecoughsyruptoeasethepain: Okay, thanks.

~ ~ ~ ~

food question

bluewildfire: Is it okay for werewolves to eat chocolate? I know dogs are allergic.

prickly-leatherjacket: Chocolate’s okay, but don’t eat big quantities if you’re in your wolf shape.
You’ll get a stomach ache.

deerie: What about grapes?

prickly-leatherjacket: The general thing to remember is that even if a food is bad for you, your werewolf healing will take care of it. That being said, grapes (and raisins) are one food I really would avoid. Canine digestive tracks have trouble breaking down the skins and it can cause blockages. Your healing will deal with it, but it won’t be pleasant.

balentay: DOES THIS MEAN I CAN’T HAVE WINE OMG

prickly-leatherjacket: ARE THERE GRAPE SKINS IN YOUR WINE NO THERE AREN’T CALM DOWN

czerwony-piernik: WHY ARE WE SHOUTING

~ ~ ~ ~

STDs for werewolves?

whimsicaldragon: sooooo my boyfriend just admitted that he cheated on me and might have given me Chlamydia (he doesn’t know I’m a werewolf). Should I get checked?

prickly-leatherjacket: Werewolves can’t catch STDs any more than they can get strep throat so you should be okay. HOWEVER. You can carry them for short periods of time, so use protection or abstain from sex for at least a week if you don’t want to give it to anyone else.

~ ~ ~ ~

how to tell your partner you’re a werewolf

the-boy-in-red: Okay guys. We all know how tough this is. How about some advice for the newbies?

nicolemegann: Shift, then explain. Shift, then explain. SHIFT, THEN EXPLAIN.

czerwony-piernik: Didn’t go well, I take it?

nicolemegann: I kept trying to explain and he kept laughing and then left before I could actually manage to shift. I was so flustered that I had trouble doing it. We broke up not long after. I’m pretty sure he still thinks I’m crazy.

czerwony-piernik: For the record, a quick ‘so hey I’m a werewolf’ before you shift might prevent coronary events.
**stripedpawz**: when should you do it? Is this like a second date thing?

**prickly-leatherjacket**: No, this is more like a three-month anniversary thing. Don’t forget, there’s nothing wrong with being a werewolf. It’s not like you’re disclosing massive credit card debt or criminal history. (Though, sometimes there’s nothing wrong with those things either.) It’s just part of who you are. Anyone who can’t deal with that just isn’t for you.

**mythicalmagistra**: My parents got married before they had their three month anniversary.

**czerwony-piernik**: In that case, I hope neither of them were werewolves.

**prickly-leatherjacket**: There’s no reason to rush into anything. But this is advice, not binding arbitration. You can tell people on the first date for all I care. Just don’t wait until you’ve been married ten years because it never goes over well if you do that.

~ ~ ~ ~

**ztfruckj**

**cucurbitapuella**: i;mn stuck asz a wolkff jhowe doio i chasngfe bsack??>??/

**czerwony-piernik**: wait, how are you typing?

**prickly-leatherjacket**: Really, that’s what you’re going to focus on?

**czerwony-piernik**: Yeah, I’m mad curious.

**prickly-leatherjacket**: Focus on something human. Something you do routinely, like brush your teeth, make a sandwich, button up a shirt. Close your eyes and picture yourself doing it.

**cucurbitapuella**: it worked, thanks

**czerwony-piernik**: Okay, but, how were you typing? Like, were you just smacking your paw against the keyboard? Did you have a pen in your mouth that you were poking at the keys? Seriously, inquiring minds want to know.

~ ~ ~ ~

**lady wolf encounter**

**not-a-real-sn**: so I live out on a ranch in Montana and we get real wolves all the time. And last full moon, I ... uh ... ran into this lady wolf. What if she has pups?

**artgirltexas**: what if she does? It’s not like she can sue you for child support.
the-boy-in-red: So, who here has heard of wolfweres?

not-a-real-sn: what?

the-boy-in-red: Wolfweres. It’s what happens when a werewolf has ‘intimate relations’ with a lady wolf, and she has cubs. They can shift to a human form and are generally feral.


the-boy-in-red: Yeah. Don’t have sex with wolves, guys. Rule of thumb: if you wouldn’t have sex with something/someone when you’re not shifted, don’t have with it/them when you are.

not-a-real-sn: oh shit oh shit oh shit

artgirltexas: relax, she might not be pregnant

not-a-real-sn: I just got carried away! Full moon instincts! That’s a thing, right?

czerwony-pierwik: *crickets chirp*

~ ~ ~ ~

vegetarian SOS

la-flute-enchantee: help help help I’ve been a vegetarian since I was 12 and meat is super gross and every time I try to eat it I get sick but I know wolves are carnivores what do I do???

prickly-leatherjacket: First off, take a deep breath. Yes, wolves eat a lot of meat. But you’re not a wolf; you’re a werewolf. You can keep eating exactly what you were eating before and you’ll be fine. Trust me; we have a vegetarian in our pack and she still subsists mostly off tofu and eggs.

the-boy-in-red: technically wolves are omnivores

prickly-leatherjacket: I’m not giving a biology lecture here, Stiles.

the-boy-in-red: I’m just saying.

la-flute-enchantee: Wait, so you mean the guy who told me I had to start eating meat was wrong? Oh my God, I’m going to kick his ass and then make him eat nothing but celery for a week.

~ ~ ~ ~

parkour?

kenna-girl: My alpha keeps telling me I shouldn’t be posting my parkour videos on the internet
because I might draw attention. I think he’s just overreacting. Who’s right?

*prickly-leatherjacket:* Your alpha is. Stop.

*the-hunters-daughter:* You’re probably just thinking ‘people won’t think I’m a werewolf just because of some silly videos’ and on that count, you’re correct. But hunters can and do skim through those videos because they know that the sudden athleticism can go to young werewolves’ heads and lead to them showing off. Derek is right. You should stop.

*certainentropy:* Hunters actually do that?

*the-hunters-daughter:* Yeah, they totally do. Sorry to burst your bubble.

*kenna-girl:* Hunters ruin everything.

*czerwony-piernik:* Quite frequently, yep.

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**wolfsbane?**

*kinniska:* I read on the forum that wolfsbane is poisonous – how likely am I to run across it?

*czerwony-piernik:* Unless you live in a mountain meadow, pretty unlikely. It’s not really sold in nurseries or anything because it’s poisonous to humans as well as werewolves.

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**werewolf pregnancy in humans**

*the-wolf-or-the-memrys:* my husband is afraid to get me pregnant because he’s afraid having a werewolf baby will be too hard on me. Is that true?

*prickly-leatherjacket:* No. That’s a common misconception (thanks, Twilight). Actually, being pregnant with a werewolf baby is generally easier than a human baby. There’s a much lower chance of complications. Werewolf babies make more stem cells than human babies, and boost the mother’s healing factor.

*czerwony-piernik:* be warned, however, that you will eat everything in sight.

*the-wolf-or-the-memrys:* Update: totes pregnant! That was quick!

*astraldeveloper:* Congratulations!
kiyudono: Congrats! Out of curiosity, is it easier for werewolves to get pregnant?

prickly-leatherjacket: Yes and no. Strictly speaking, two werewolves and/or a werewolf-human couple have the same odds of an egg being fertilized. However, because being pregnant with a werewolf can be easier/healthier, you have a better chance of the baby hanging around. A lot of people lose pregnancies in the first month or so, before they even realize they’re pregnant, and that doesn’t happen as much with werewolves.

the-wolf-or-the-memrys: That’s really interesting, thanks!

~ ~ ~ ~

KNOTS?!!?

spicybumblebee: my girlfriend won’t have sex with me because she keeps reading werewolf erotica where the guys have knots on their dicks! Tell me that this doesn’t happen.

prickly-leatherjacket: No, it doesn’t. Only actual wolves have knots.

spicybumblebee: Update: she’s not sure she believes me.

czerwony-piernik: rub one out in front of her for proof.

daughterofscotland: what if you had sex with someone while fully shifted?

prickly-leatherjacket: …in that case, yes, you could knot someone (or get knotted).

daughterofscotland: Don’t judge me.

czerwony-piernik: He judges everyone. It’s not personal.

~ ~ ~ ~

outed!

dontgobrienmyheart: I lifted up my car trying to get to something that had rolled underneath it. My neighbor’s five-year-old saw me and now he keeps following me around. What should I do?

czerwony-piernik: Go audition for The Incredibles 2.

prickly-leatherjacket: Explain to your neighbor’s kid that your secret identity is super important and he can’t ever let anybody know about it, and if he can keep his mouth shut, someday you’ll take him along with you on one of your secret missions.
*dontgobrienmyheart*: that seems a little rude when I can’t actually do that.

*prickly-leatherjacket*: he’ll get over it.

~ ~ ~ ~

**picture day did not go well**

*lottiepostsalot*: my school pictures were ruined by glowing eyes and now everyone is giving me weird looks

*prickly-leatherjacket*: there are special contact lenses you can get to fix that; go visit the ‘helpful products’ section on the website.

~ ~ ~ ~

**scenting**

*howshouldibegin*: My boyfriend is a werewolf and he said to come to this forum if I have questions. He keeps sniffing me, especially when I’m right out of the shower. Is that normal???

*prickly-leatherjacket*: Very normal. Sense of smell is the most important sense to werewolves. Do you wear a lot of perfume during the day?

*howshouldibegin*: I wouldn’t say a lot, but I do wear it.

*prickly-leatherjacket*: That covers up your real scent, so, when you’re not wearing it he just wants to smell you. That’s all.

*howshouldibegin*: Should I not wear it?

*prickly-leatherjacket*: You should probably ask him what he would prefer. Some werewolves don’t mind. And he could genuinely like the smell of your perfume, too, but doesn’t need to get so close, because it’s probably a lot stronger.

*howshouldibegin*: Okay, I’ll ask him. Thanks!

~ ~ ~ ~

**two lupas?**
mojaunicorn: I have a twin sister and she’s always been my lupa, but lately I’ve met a guy and he just, everything about him is just, amazing. We got together (romantic stylez) about six months ago and I feel like he’s my lupa, but I don’t know if it’s possible to have two lupas. Thoughts?

the-boy-in-red: I don’t see why not. I mean, one thing to remember is that we discover new things are possible every day (I would be a grand example of this).

a-pen-for-a-sword: Does it matter? I mean, I have a lupa (baby brother) and a husband who isn’t my lupa. That doesn’t mean I love him any less.

mojaunicorn: I feel like it matters. I mean, my sister is getting kind of jealous? She said yesterday ‘if he was your lupa, it would be different’.

a-pen-for-a-sword: Ugh. That sucks. My brother never had a problem with it.

the-boy-in-red: Well, everyone’s relationship is different. I bet twins are more prone to jealousy – I mean, they’ve literally been lupas since the day they were born.

inklingobscura: That’s why my twin brother and I share our boyfriend/lupa. :)

the-boy-in-red: Forward thinking. I like it.

mojaunicorn: So, I can have two lupas? That’s a thing that happens?

dammithardison: You can. Trust me.

the-boy-in-red: Hey! How are things in Portland? Going well, I take it? ;)

dammithardison: Shut up.

~ ~ ~ ~

in the closet

minishadowsoul: since I got super athletic and more good looking, girls keep asking me out - but I'm gay! how do I turn them down without people starting to talk? it was never a problem before!

prickly-leatherjacket: I take it that ‘come out of the closet’ isn’t a viable solution?

minishadowsoul: not if I want to keep living at home

thaddeusscreams: You could always date one or two, to get people to stop talking.

minishadowsoul: But I don’t want to hurt their feelings, since I can’t be serious about it.

czerwony-piernik: Just stop wearing deodorant. That will fix it, I promise you.
my boyfriend hung mistletoe

epiphanyx7: My boyfriend hung mistletoe for the hols and now I can’t go into his house. I can’t figure out how to ask him to take it down.

prickly-leatherjacket: Just tell him you’re allergic to it.

epiphanynx7: Update: he said ‘nobody’s allergic to mistletoe’ and it’s still up.

czerwony-piernik: Then dump him. He sounds like a prick.

SOS alpha pack just showed up

bompeii: First trial is tomorrow and I’m having a major freak-out!

the-boy-in-red: Do you do your best to take care of your pack?

bompeii: Of course.

the-boy-in-red: Then you’ll be fine. Just do your best.

my daughter hates the new alpha

pretzel-log1c: Our alpha was killed about a year ago by hunters, and I’ve been omega for a while. We joined up with another pack, and my daughter (she’s nine) seems to get along with everyone except the new alpha. She’s not a werewolf, so she doesn’t understand why we have to put up with this guy. He’s been really patient with her, but it’s starting to get on his nerves.

czerwony-piernik: It sounds a lot like introducing a child to a prospective step-parent, to be honest. Was the previous alpha her dad?

pretzel-log1c: Her biological dad has been out of the picture since before she was born. The previous alpha didn’t really raise her, but he was probably more of a father figure to her than anyone else.

czerwony-piernik: It makes sense that she’d be having trouble adjusting. It sounds like a lot of big
changes have happened recently. I think it’s important that she knows that she’s your priority. That her feelings are valid and you aren’t angry at her. It’s natural for her to resent the new alpha, and without being a werewolf, she doesn’t really have the pack bonds drawing her in the same way.

prickly-leatherjacket: Are there other kids in the pack?

pretzel-log1c: Yeah, a couple other pack members have kids.

prickly-leatherjacket: I would arrange for her to spend some time with them. Just distance her from the alpha for a little bit, until she gets used to the idea. And remind His Holy Alphaness that he might be your alpha, but that doesn’t mean he’s her anything.

pretzel-log1c: I don’t know how well that will go over.

prickly-leatherjacket: Then he might not be the alpha for you.

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coming out stories

the-boy-in-red: Okay, guys, we’ve had all the serious discussions about the best way to break it to your significant other or your parents that you’re a werewolf. Now for some fun. Who wants to tell stories about the super embarrassing ways people found out?

lilac-clint: I got really excited during my second full moon, when the moon came out. And I howled at it, right in front of my boyfriend.

elvencantation: Super bad itch, right between my shoulder blades. Could almost reach it. Out came the claws. I still don’t think my daughter’s stopped laughing at me.

cluelessnu: My cat finally decided she was okay with me being a werewolf, and then decided her favorite napping spot was on top of me while I was fully shifted. I couldn’t just make her move! Aaaaaand that’s when the bae walked in.

astraldeveloper: I knew my boyfriend was thinking about proposing, and I was trying to work up the nerve to tell him. Then he did. And the ring was silver. I couldn’t bring myself to tell him, so I just slid it on. Then my finger turned bright red and the rash spread all the way up to my elbow. I was mortified.

maelace: My dad decided to prank me with that joke where you put the airhorn on the back of someone’s door, then lay in wait to surprise me. Surprise was on him when I freaked out and shifted…


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Chapter 23

Chapter Notes

Here we are. The last chapter.

Just a quick note or two... technically, I consider the last chapter of Ten Little Hunters to be the end of TSOIP. The reason is mainly literary - it fits with the series. It ends with things still kind of messy, still with trauma and struggle, but hopeful. And as an author, that's how I want TSOIP to end. That's what fits and makes sense.

But, I'm not just an author. I'm also a fangirl. And as a fangirl, I really just wanted to write 12K of future!TSOIP fluff. So that's what I did. =D (Also, my girlfriend threatened dire things if I didn't write the Sterek wedding.)

Scenes are not in any particular order. This isn't meant to tell a story. It's just little windows into what the future will bring.

Thank you again for reading. <3

Although some wedding plans become points of contention, most of the arrangements are pretty simple. What kind of venue to have. What kind of cake. That sort of thing. They agree right away that they’ll write their own vows. Traditional vows aren’t the sort of things that would really apply to them.

Stiles dashes off to do this right away, leaving Derek feeling awkward and flustered. He wants to ask for advice, but at the same time he feels like he should just automatically know what to say, the way that Stiles seems to. So instead he goes for a walk in the woods, just to think about things. Then he sits down in his studio and writes.

Writing them without advice is one thing, but saying them to anyone, let alone the man he’s marrying, in front of a hundred people, is something else. He has to get a second opinion, and maybe a third, before he’ll be comfortable with that. (In fact, that was one of the few bones of contention – Derek still feels awkward and uncomfortable with the idea of a wedding at all. He wants to marry Stiles, that’s no lie, but public speaking has never been his forte.)

So he shows up at Tom Stilinski’s office with the papers clutched in one hand, and says, “Can I talk to you about the wedding?”

“Yeah, great timing, actually!” Tom says, and pulls open one of his drawers. “Wanted to give this to you.”

Derek takes it and frowns. “A watch?”

“To wear at the wedding. You know, something old, something new.” Tom waves this away. “I’m not really superstitious, but I want you to have it. I wore it at my wedding to Claudia, and my dad wore it at his wedding, too.”
Derek frowns. “Shouldn’t – shouldn’t you give it to Stiles, then?”

“And have to sit through an hour of Pulp Fiction jokes, are you kidding me?” Tom rolls his eyes as Derek laughs reluctantly. “No. I want you to have it. Stiles has some heirlooms from both sides of his family, but I don’t know if you have anything. And you’re my son, Derek. I know that I can’t replace the father you lost, but you’re an amazing young man and I’m really proud of you. I couldn’t ask for a finer man to marry Stiles. I thank God every day that the two of you met.”

Derek flushes bright pink. “Um, yeah, well,” he mutters, and shoves the watch into his pocket. “Thanks.” He clears his throat and adds hastily, “So uh, I wrote my own vows, thought maybe you could tell me what you think?”

“Sure, let’s hear it.”

“I thought you could just – ” Derek shoves the papers at him.

Amused, Tom says, “You’re going to have to say it out loud eventually. Might as well start here.”

Now an even darker pink, Derek mutters, “Fine,” clears his throat again, and starts to read. His gaze flicks up to Tom’s face occasionally, and the man nods reassuringly, smiles a little, looks like everything’s okay. Then Derek gets to the end, and Tom suddenly pinches the bridge of his nose. “Is that not – ”

“No, I just – ” Tom says, and Derek realizes in horror that he’s crying. “I’m just – you really are so perfect for my son.” He wipes his eyes. “I’m just really happy, Derek.”

“Okay . . .” Derek wonders when he can get away with leaving. “They’re okay, then?”

“They’re great.” Tom squeezes his shoulder. “Yes, you can run away now.”

“Oh thank God,” Derek says, and flees.

~ ~ ~ ~

Before Scott has been working for Dr. Deaton for a year, the once-small veterinary clinic has expanded into something three times its original size. In addition to the groomer that Scott hired and the obedience classes he’s teaching, they’ve opened an entire new wing for boarding. It’s full within a month of down-on-their-luck animals that he’s rescued from the shelters in the area, so they expand again. By the time the year is out, it’s a full service no kill shelter.

Scott tries not to accept too much charity from Derek, wanting to be able to run the shelter with volunteers and donations, but there’s always that one E-list dog who needs surgery, always that one cat that was hit by a car that nobody claims. They constantly flirt with bankruptcy, but Scott doesn’t care. He’s doing what he loves, and he couldn’t be happier.

The bell rings as the front door opens one night when he’s alone in the clinic, and Jackson walks in leading a parade of battered, whimpering dogs. He scowls at Scott and says, “Uh, room for six more?”

“Don’t start with me, asshole. They just broke up a dogfighting ring outside L.A, most of the animals were healthy enough to go to local shelters but these six need help.”

“So you brought me the sick and injured ones, super.” Scott kneels down by the first dog, a pit bull with cropped ears who gives him a slow, sad tail wag. “You’re gonna owe me for this.”

Jackson scoffs. “Like you don’t do all of this out of the goodness of your heart.”

“Of course I do, but you know that dog food isn’t free, right?”

Jackson slaps a check book down on the counter and ostentatiously signs one of the slips inside. “Just fill out the amount, dick. From now on I’m your silent partner. Emphasis on ‘silent’. Tell anyone about this, and I’ll feed you your spleen.”

Scott grins despite himself. “You’ve got a deal.”

~ ~ ~ ~

When Lydia is working on her doctoral thesis, she has to stay in San Francisco. The others are getting jobs in Beacon Hills by then, but they don’t have the facilities that she’s going to need. They take turns staying with her in twos and threes – Derek has the gallery, of course, and there’s always work for Erica to do in the city – and she comes home at least one weekend every month.

She skypes with them a lot and tells them about her work in mathematics and engineering and the people she’s meeting and working with. She’s learning about medical technology, finding ways to make things affordable. She’s telling them about how crocodile blood might hold a cure to MRSA and how shark skin has helped make surfaces in hospitals that bacteria can’t stick to. She’s working with a marine biologist named Newt, an unself-conscious genius covered in tattoos who both studies and befriends octopi.

Stiles is a little worried about what’s going to happen when Lydia decides to tell Newt about werewolves and the pack. It’s always the logical, scientific ones who have the most trouble dealing with that sort of thing –

“It must be a genetic mutation of some sort,” Newt says, pulling out a pen flashlight. “Lycanthropy is like a virus that mutates the DNA – ”

“Ow, what the hell,” Derek says, as Newt shines the flashlight into his eyes.

“Does the shift hurt? You can do it whenever you want, right? Not just during the full moon. I wonder where those legends start. Maybe there’s more than one kind of werewolf? Or maybe it’s evolved over time, as people learned to control it – can I look in your ears?”

“If you really want,” Derek says, trying not to be too obvious about giving Newt the side-eye.

“You’re handling this better than I would have expected,” Lydia muses. “I mean, it kind of goes against every law of science we know of – ”

Newt waves a hand at her. “That just means we have some of the laws wrong, doesn’t it? Everything is explainable by science, you just have to look. Can I take a sample? Like a cheek swab, so I can map your DNA?”
“Uh – ” Derek says, discomfited.

“No,” Stiles says. “Sorry, dude. Sorcerers can use stuff like hair and blood against you, so my assumption is that they can use cheek swabs, too.”

“Whoa, really?” Newt pushes his glasses up his nose. “That’s amazing! How does that work? It must have something to do with quantum mechanics – you know, particles that are in more than one place at one time – ”

Stiles looks at Lydia and mouths, ‘marry him.’

~ ~ ~ ~

It takes Isaac about five years of effort, but he manages to get his father’s business out of the red ink and into the black. Once that’s done, once he feels he’s done right by his father’s memory, he sells it to another burial business that’s looking to expand. He uses the money to open his own landscaping business, which quickly becomes popular. It helps that his werewolf talents enable him to do things humans can’t, and do them more quickly.

By the time a year has gone by, he’s hired more help and expanded his services, and things are going well. But something isn’t right, and he’s not sure what. He finds himself sitting down with Sheriff Stilinski, the only adult he’s ever felt comfortable around.

“Owning your own business and being successful is great,” Tom says, pouring Isaac a cup of coffee, “but I think I can see why you feel like it’s not enough. I mean, Scott and Allison are having their third kid, Stiles and Derek are talking about it, Boyd and Denise have one on the way, Lydia’s engaged to that scientist friend of hers.”

“See, I thought about that,” Isaac says, “and I don’t think it’s that. I mean, I don’t really feel compelled to have kids. And as much as I wouldn’t say no to romance, I just kind of figure it’ll happen when it happens, you know?”

“That’s not exactly what I meant.” Tom sits down across from him. “I’m talking about legacy. About what we leave to the world, and the way the world remembers us. Kids, family, that’s a great way to have a legacy, but it’s not the only way. I think maybe you feel like as much as you enjoy landscaping, it’s not the reason you were put on earth. So what do you think that reason is?”

Isaac thinks about that for a long time. Then he asks Derek for a loan. A business loan, he says, and insists on drawing up all the paperwork so he can make sure Derek is paid back properly. This isn’t pack business. This is for himself.

He uses the money to open an activity center and shelter for underprivileged kids. Boyd and Lydia both volunteer there to tutor. Jackson begrudgingly coaches the youth lacrosse team. Melissa provides free check-ups. Stiles does the cooking when he has time. Isaac contacts Big Brothers Big Sisters and gets their center signed up to help with the program. They build a garden and grow vegetables to donate to the soup kitchen.

Most of all, he listens. He talks to the kids and offers advice, and before long, every kid in Beacon Hills knows that if you want a hot meal or a place to sleep or just to talk to someone who genuinely cares, that’s where to go.
“Okay, there’s something I need to tell you,” Boyd says, taking both of Denise’s hands in his. “The place I live is kind of . . . different.”

“Different how?” she asks, arching her eyebrows at him.

“A bunch of friends and I live together, you know, it’s sort of like – a commune? Only that sounds like a cult and I swear to you that I’m not in a cult.” He sees that she’s getting more confused, and possibly a trifle suspicious. “It’s just a bunch of people, we’re all friends, we all live in the same place because – okay, let me back up. Do you, uh, okay, this might be something of a shock, but there are werewolves in the world.”

At this, Denise looks more unimpressed than anything else. “Vernon. Honey. I live in Beacon Hills.”

Boyd lets out a huge sigh of relief. “Okay, great. That saves some time. Anyway, I’m a werewolf, I live with my pack.”

“You probably should have started there,” Denise says, but she’s smiling. “Wait, does that mean . . .” When she trails off, seeming somewhat uncertain, Boyd squeezes her hand. “What?”

“Does that mean there’s always someone available to babysit?”

Boyd huffs out a laugh. “Pretty much, yeah.”

“Because the girls have had some pretty bad separation anxiety since their father died, you know? And I know it was a few years ago, but I still hate having to leave them with a sitter. It’s part of why I didn’t really date until I met you – because you got that. You knew that they had to be my first priority.”

“Don’t worry,” Boyd says. “By the time Stiles is done making them cookies and Scott’s done introducing them to all the puppies, the girls will have forgotten we exist.”

~ ~ ~ ~

Derek has barely entered the police station when he can hear Erica’s raised voice. She doesn’t sound nearly as distraught as he would have expected, given that she had called him for bail money at two o’clock in the morning. In fact, she’s loudly exclaiming, “I know, right?” and then Derek hears another woman laughing.

It turns out to be the deputy, who’s sitting outside Erica’s cell chatting with her. “Having a good time?” Derek asks dryly.

“Oh, hey!” Erica springs to her feet. “Sorry to wake you. I know, I should have called Stiles, blah-blah-alpha-blah, but you’re the one with the bank account.”

“It’s fine. I wouldn’t have wanted to wake him anyway.” Derek shakes his head and looks at the
deputy. “I probably have something to fill out?”

She nods and leads him to the front desk. A few minutes later, Erica’s been released and there’s a sizable dent in Derek’s bank account. “What exactly did you get arrested for?”

“Assault!” Erica sounds very happy about this. “Probably also battery. I don’t actually know what the difference is between regular assault, and assault and battery. I should ask Stiles. He’ll know.”

“Exactly who did you assault at two o’clock in the morning?” Derek asks, as he walks back towards the Camaro.

“This asshole fuckboy. See, my friend Larissa, I know her from modeling, and she also works as a stripper. She’s been having trouble with this guy who always tries to accost her in the parking lot after work. They’re not allowed to be handsy, you know? But the girls aren’t supposed to discourage their attention because then they’ll lose money, and this guy was actually following her home, super creepy, and her boss was being a real dick about it, so I offered to come hang out at the club and make sure he never laid a finger on her again.”

“What you did by beating the shit out of him?”

“I nailed him in the ‘nads so hard that he’s wearing his balls for earrings!”

Derek flinches instinctively.

“And don’t be mad, I waited for him to try to grab me, I warned him not to touch me, he tried to grab me again, so I was just defending myself and it’s all on camera.”

“Why’d you get arrested, then?”

Erica huffs out a breath. “Because the cop who showed up was the dude’s brother.”

“Whoops.”

“Yeah. The deputy I was talking to assured me that he’s also a fuckboy, nobody likes him, and she’s sure they’ll drop the charges once they review the tapes, but I still had to post bail if I didn’t want to be there all night.”

Derek’s quiet for a minute. “You didn’t really solve the problem, though. Nailing one guy in the ‘nads won’t help the fact that people take advantage of these girls and their boss won’t protect them.”

“That’s true.” Erica’s quiet for a minute. “Hey, if I tell you something, do you promise not to laugh?”

“Yeah, I promise.”

“I’ve been thinking about going to school. You know, I know all you guys already went, I know that I’m twenty-four, but I was thinking, if I got my degree, I could be a lawyer or a politician and I could help these people. I mean, modeling is bad enough, but some of the girls I’ve worked with have been hookers or strippers, or been in pornography, and there’s just so much abuse, and the laws barely protect them, and that’s not even going into the under-reporting of sexual assault and how victim-blaming and accusations of false reporting create barriers for – you promised you wouldn’t laugh!”

“I’m not laughing,” Derek says. “I’m smiling, because I like hearing you fired up about things. I don’t think wanting to go to school is a bad idea at all.”

“The last person I told that I wanted to be a lawyer laughed,” Erica says, and frowns. “Then he tried
to grope me and I punched him in the throat, so his opinion probably doesn’t matter.”

Derek reaches out and squeezes her hand. “If that’s what you want, we’ll make it happen. You’ll be amazing at it.”

~ ~ ~ ~

The alpha pack has gained a member since the last time they’ve been to Beacon Hills. Justin had mentioned it over text a few times, but it wasn’t the sort of thing that they had talked about in detail. She’s a beautiful woman with dark skin who introduces herself as Rokiatou, from Senegal. Stiles doesn’t ask what happened to her pack, because that’s just rude. She speaks heavily accented English and offers to help him cook dinner.

He’s curious about the visit, because Justin had said that he’s got some important news. But he waits until they’ve all eaten to ask, “So what’s up?”

Justin opens his mouth, but Yasmin bursts out with it first. “I’m pregnant!”

There’s a round of ‘oh my God!’ and ‘congratulations!’ and a lot of hugs. Justin has his hand curled around Yasmin’s elbow, and he’s grinning like the proverbial canary-eating cat. Erica is the only one tactless enough to ask, “How’d that happen? Thought you guys always doubled up on birth control.”

“We stopped a little while ago,” Justin says. “We’re going to retire. Decided to work until Yasmin was pregnant and then pass on the reins.”

“Retire?” Stiles is surprised. He doesn’t think it’s ever been done before. But then again, Justin’s been all about making new rules for the alpha pack. “Got a destination in mind?”

“Michigan,” Justin says. “That’s where my sister lives. Though we might go down to Argentina in the winter, because yikes. You haven’t seen winter until you’ve seen lake-effect snow.”

“So who’s going to be the alpha of alphas now?” Scott asks.

Justin snorts. “Cora, obviously.” He points at where Cora is scowling at all of them. “She’s like the queen of judging people,” he adds, and everyone laughs.

Derek hooks an arm around his sister’s shoulders and gives her an affectionate squeeze. “I’m so proud of you.”

Cora scowls at him and flushes pink. “Whatever.”

“What about you two?” Allison asks Ravinder and Mei. “Do you ever think about retiring, having kids?”

Mei shrugs. Ravinder smiles at her and says, “We’ve had a discussion or two about it, but in the long run, we are happy just as we are.”

“I’ll drink to that,” Stiles says, and raises his glass.

~ ~ ~ ~
Tom knows his son’s penchant for drama runs deep, and he insists that his wedding to Melissa is going to be a small, private affair. “We don’t want to make a big deal out of it,” he says approximately a hundred times. “Yes, we’ll have a party afterwards, that’s fine, but the ceremony itself is going to be small. We’re not even taking a honeymoon, for crying out loud.”

Stiles grumps but says fine, and so the ceremony is immediate family only – Tom’s parents and Melissa’s mother, Stiles and Derek, Scott and Allison – and then the party has about a hundred people there, mostly owing to the fact that all the pack’s families are in attendance. Tom and Melissa are popular amongst the pack parents, since they were always the ones with a listening ear, advice, or a drink when it became necessary.

After the party, Stiles says, “Okay, here’s your present from the pack!” and hands over a bulky envelope.

Tom sighs and pulls out the papers inside. A faint frown crosses his face. “Plane tickets?”

“To . . . Seattle?” Melissa is peering over his shoulder.

Stiles nods happily as Tom finds the next set of tickets, for the cruise ship. “It’s an Alaskan cruise! The alpha pack was up there last summer and they told me it was super gorgeous, and you couldn’t just not have a honeymoon, geez, Dad – ”

Tom groans. “Stiles, I told you – ”

“I know, Dad.” Stiles’ expression softens. “I know that you and Mom didn’t have one because you were broke and you had just finally gotten a job. And I know that you feel like you shouldn’t give Melissa something that you couldn’t give Mom. That’s why we’re giving it to both of you. Because you two deserve a vacation. For real.”

“Can’t argue that,” Melissa says, chuckling.

“And I’ve talked to the station and the hospital and you both have a week of vacation, so go! Have fun! Because remember, we have confirmation of the afterlife, and you know Mom is up there and that she’s been rooting for you and she would really want you to do this.”

Tom looks at Melissa, then at his son. “Yeah, yeah, okay,” he says, and hugs Stiles so hard that his feet leave the floor for a minute.

“An Alaskan cruise, it sounds so exciting,” Milena says, leafing through the brochure. “Przemyslaw told me all about it, of course, and Tomasz and I read about it and it looks so beautiful, we decided that we would go, too!”

Tom stares at his mother in an expression of undisguised horror.

Milena blinks at him, then laughs merrily and pats his cheek. “Next month, Tommy, next month. We’re not going with you on your honeymoon, for goodness sake.”

“Oh thank God,” Tom says, and Stiles laughs so hard his stomach hurts.
After some discussion, Jake decides to move with Chris and Victoria. Phil is going with them, and he doesn’t want to leave his brother. He had been accepted into college in San Francisco, but decided to take a year off and help with the move and coordinating between all the new hunter territories. There’s a lot of work to do, and if Allison needs his help, she can always give him a call.

As much as Phil might be happy to return to his old school, Chris doesn’t want to live where Henry and Rose had settled. There are too many unanswered questions there, too many ghosts. So while they had lived in a Chicago suburb, he settles further north, along the shores of Lake Michigan in Wisconsin.

It takes time, but they get settled in. Henry’s old lieutenants are mostly gone now – between those who had changed loyalties to Martin Drake and gotten subsequently fired, and those who had gone with Sam to New England, there are only a few left. Chris builds up new networks, makes new friends, teaches new people. He makes things work.

Chris likes living on the lake. There are monsters out in the water, so they buy a boat and he learns about monster fishing. Jake studies, and learns the ins and the outs of the Archive. He goes to college in Milwaukee and commutes home on the weekend, and skypes with the pack once or twice a week.

It’s been about a year since the move was finalized, and Victoria comes out onto their back porch to find Chris looking out over the water. “You all right?”

“Yeah,” Chris says. “I was just thinking . . . about how Henry is out there, somewhere. Wondering if his body will ever be found. I’m sure that Sally weighted it down, maybe even used magic on it, but . . . I wish there was something we could do.”

Victoria leans against the railing, letting her arm rest against Chris’. “I’m sorry for your loss, but your cousin made his own choices.”

“I know. He was a spiteful, impatient, arrogant son of a bitch. He fucked up and it got him killed. But I think about him, about my father, about Kate . . . about what happened to me.”

Victoria doesn’t have to ask what he’s referring to. “What happened to you was different, Chris. Your sister, your father, they made their own choices. They weren’t affected by magic. They knew exactly what they were doing.” She twines her fingers through his. “I know you worry sometimes that madness seems to run in your family. I know that I can’t understand that sort of fear. All I can tell you is that in a world that seems to be full of mostly crazy people, you’re the sanest man I’ve ever met.”

“Thanks.” Chris squeezes her hand. “But if anything ever happened . . . if I ever crossed the line . . .”

“I’ll be there,” Victoria promises.

Chris nods. “Thank you.”

~ ~ ~ ~

Allison and Scott’s wedding is the more traditional kind, a summer wedding a month after they graduate from college. Allison is in training for the qualifying rounds of the Olympics, and Lydia
handles most of the wedding details for her. She has a beautiful white dress and the wedding is outdoors on the preserve, surrounded by beautiful trees. People have come from all over the country, and it seems like half the population of Beacon Hills is there.

When Scott sees Allison coming down the aisle, he puts both hands over his mouth like he just can’t believe the woman he sees is marrying him. When he lowers them, his grin is so wide and bright that it could light up the world.

Chris cries all the way through the vows, while Victoria sits next to him and offers him tissues.

~ ~ ~ ~

After the success of the hunter tracking app and the online forums where people can ask whatever they want about werewolves, Mac and Danny decide to keep developing apps for the supernatural. A lot of the older creatures are out of touch or actively tech-phobic, but the younger generations of werewolves, vampires, and Druids love the internet just like everyone else.

Their most popular app is the supernatural dating app. It’s based on the same principles as Tinder and OKCupid, but is shared only among supernatural creatures. Five star reviews include a lot of people thrilled with how much it cuts down on the awkward dating period, trying to figure out what, if anything, their new significant other knows about the supernatural, and when the best time to come out of the metaphorical closet would be.

Then there’s supernatural yelp, where people compare magical products and the places to get them, without fear of a thousand internet dwellers mocking them. There’s even supernatural video sharing, used for magic spell tutorials between Druids, parkour videos for werewolves, and everything else under the sun.

After these successes, Danny and Mac work with Gwen to create a directory of supernatural counselors, social workers, and medical professionals. This is distributed to every alpha werewolf, every hunter, and every Druid in the country. They’re the most likely to be involved when shit goes sideways, and can try to make sure everyone makes it to an appropriate professional if needed.

“It’s a whole new world,” Stiles says, as the app flies off the metaphorical shelves. They’re all free. Danny and Mac have a main business which is website developing and internet security. It pays the bills well enough that they distribute their supernaturally-oriented apps for free.

Predictably, Danny and Mac burst into song.

~ ~ ~ ~

Derek loves to paint, and for a long time, that’s pretty much what he does. He slowly gets into charcoal and different mediums, trying his hand at watercolor and oils. Sculpture has always interested him, and he likes to make them out of wire instead of the more traditional stone or clay.

Over time, he gets more adventurous. He’s having trouble thinking of a new subject for a painting, and then the pack drags him to the Renaissance festival that comes through once a year. He spends a
lot of time talking with the glassblowers and the metal workers, finding new forms of art to try his hand at.

He doesn’t want to buy entire rooms full of equipment that he might only use once or twice, so he takes some classes in glass blowing, making bowls and vases and flowers. It’s fun, he says, but it’s not really for him. He doesn’t like being so close to the heat, and he doesn’t think he would ever feel comfortable installing a bunch of furnaces in his studio. He never gets into pottery for the same reason, although he enjoys the classes he takes.

He turns out to love woodworking, though, and spends hours in the forest looking for fallen trees that he can bring back to the preserve to make sculptures out of. He finds smoothing and polishing the wood to be soothing, but will only use wood that had already fallen to the ground.

After a while he tries some smaller things like beading and needlework, both of which he gives up on before the day is out.

“If you don’t like smaller things, make bigger things,” Stiles tells him, so he starts painting murals. They’re popular amongst the people of Beacon Hills, and soon businesses are hiring them to paint the walls of their buildings. It gives areas of the city a quirky, welcoming look that everyone enjoys.

He learns about candle making and dyeing silk, about leather masks and calligraphy. He even illustrates a few children’s books, after someone on the forum sees some of the sketches he’s done of the pack. But it’s always the painting and the woodworking that he comes back to. He loves the idea of functional art, and designs wooden bookshelves in strange shapes, chairs with carved legs, tables made out of geodes. He works with Isaac’s landscaping firm to design gardens and parks.

He’s sanding down a piece of wood for a new bench, smoothing it down by slow increments, when Stiles comes in behind him and smacks a kiss on top of his head. “Whatcha doing?”

“I’m thinking about wood carving as a metaphor for life,” Derek says.

“Uh oh.”

Derek laughs. “I mean, you taken a fallen tree. It’s broken. Dying or dead. And then you just . . . smooth it out. Over and over again. It takes time and patience. But it becomes something beautiful. That reminds me a lot of what happened to me.”

“You were always beautiful,” Stiles says.

“Thanks.” Derek glances over his shoulder and smiles a little. “But I was still broken.”

Stiles looks thoughtful. “Somehow I became the artist of this scenario, which seems a little problematic, since I can’t even draw a stick figure in the correct proportions.”

“Maybe the universe is the artist and you were just the brush.”

Stiles blinks. “Damn, that’s profound. You should put that in your next mural.”

Derek smiles again. “Maybe I will.”

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I’m surprised you volunteered to host the Conclave,” Stiles says, looking around at the meadow that they’ve gathered in to have the opening ceremonies. “I mean, just because you don’t have a lot of space at your place.”

Wednesday gives him a huff and a roll of her eyes. “I have three children under the age of five. It’s not easy to just take off for a week. Izzy offered to watch them, but she wants to be at the Conclave, too, so it was easiest to just offer to host.”

“ Heard she’s getting quite a reputation for herself,” Stiles says.

Wednesday’s smile is nothing but pride. “She’s one of the best.”

“How’s it going with her and, uh, what’s Sam’s younger brother’s name? Lewis?”

“Leo. And it’s okay. I mean, you know, they’re still pretty young. Not that I can talk.” Wednesday gives a practical shrug. “They’ll get married and we’ll form an super family of hunters and take over the entire east coast –”

“Look what we made!” Sketch thrusts a baby, legs dangling, into Stiles’ face. “Look at him!”

“Tell me his name isn’t Pugsley,” Stiles says, biting down on his lower lip to keep from laughing. He knows they named their first son Curtis, after Wednesday’s father, so he’s been eagerly awaiting the naming of their second son.

Wednesday huffs again. “No. His name is Edward.” After a beat, she adds, “After Edward Scissorhands. Not Cullen.”

Stiles tries not to laugh too hard. “Well, he’s adorable.”

“And so are you,” Sketch says to his wife, who pinches him so hard that he yelps.

~ ~ ~ ~

“You know, I’ve been thinking,” Stiles says.

“ God forbid,” Derek replies automatically, not looking up from the paint he’s mixing.

Stiles flips him off but grins. “Do you want kids?” he asks, and Derek’s hands stop moving for a brief instant. “Because, you know, I think maybe this is one of those times when you’re not saying anything because you’re not sure how I feel so you don’t want to bring it up. But have I mentioned lately how adorable you are around kids and how great a father you would be?”

Derek flushes pink. “Don’t make me throw paint at you.”

“I can take it.” Stiles flops onto the sofa and tucks his hands behind his head. Derek is adorable around kids. There are always kids around now. Scott and Allison just had their third a few months ago. Boyd’s wife, Denise, has two girls from a previous marriage, and their son is just over a year old.

Scott and Boyd both work full time, and Allison teaches classes at her archery studio, but there are always pack members around to help look after the kids. And more often than not, it’s Derek who’s warming up the baby bottle or helping Deanna do her hair or distracting Ellie from her broken toy.
And it’s Derek who knows how to deal with wolf cubs, too, who knows what kind of teething toys help when their canines are coming in and how to keep their claws trimmed and fur straightened out.

Derek just seems to genuinely enjoy taking care of kids, and now that Stiles is a little older he’s starting to think that it would be a good thing to have a couple of their own to look after.

After a long silence, Derek says, “It would be nice to have a family again. But it’s not exactly simple, you know? The two of us being guys and all.”

“Yeah, I’ve been thinking about that,” Stiles says. “I bet Erica would do us the favor. I mean, since she and I already do the do, it probably wouldn’t be too hard to get her pregnant.”

At this, Derek looks up, a little line creasing his forehead. “But then they’d be – your kids. Yours and Erica’s.”

Stiles shakes his head. “I can see why you’d be worried about that, but you know, this is Erica. She’s one of my best friends, and I think kids that have her genes would turn out great, but she has absolutely zero inclination towards motherhood. I mean, did you see her when Scott kept trying to get her to hold the new baby? She was like ‘come get your crying meatsack before I throw it out a window’.”

Derek snorts. “I guess you’re right about that. Any time the subject of baby-sitting for more than five minutes while Allison puts in a load of laundry comes up, Erica suddenly remembers an urgent prior engagement.”

“So I think it could work. If you wanted, and if she’s willing.”

Erica’s willing, although she has a stipulation or two about Stiles’ responsibility for any pregnancy cravings she gets, and a year later she gives birth to a beautiful, healthy baby girl. Stiles and Derek name her Claudia Milena Stilinski-Hale. Stiles insists on using the hyphenated name even though she’s not biologically related to Derek, to drive home that he’s her father, too. It’s not really an issue. Derek is the most loving, doting father in the history of the universe.

Stiles thinks that it would be nice to have more Hales in the world, and Erica’s as down for IVF as she was for natural pregnancy, so after some discussion, they agree to go ahead with a second baby when Claudia is about a year and a half old.

Erica demands lemon bars constantly throughout the entire last month of her pregnancy and everyone is relieved when she gives birth to a baby boy and the house finally stops smelling like lemons. They name him Benjamin Oliver Stilinski-Hale, after Peter’s wife and son, and he’s a fuzzy little cub who chews on absolutely everything.

Two years later, Claudia is showing Benjamin how to get to the cookie jar, and Derek presses a kiss into the back of Stiles’ neck. “One more for luck?”

Stiles laughs. “Okay, but who gets to be the father?”

“Why don’t we leave it up to fate?” Derek asks. “Do IVF at the same time, see who wins.”

“Oh, you’re on,” Stiles says.

When the doctor tells Erica that she’s pregnant with quintuplets, she punches Derek in the nose and Stiles in the stomach. They hadn’t really thought much about the prevalence of multiples when IVF is involved. The doctor tries to delicately bring up the subject of selective abortion, and Derek has to grab Erica before she can punch him, too.
There are three girls and two boys, all tiny and perfect, named Luke (for Star Wars), Amelia (for Doctor Who), Xander (for Buffy), Natasha (for Marvel), and Diana (for DC).

“So who do you think is whose kid?” Erica asks, as they stand in the nursery and coo over their five babies.

“Does it matter?” Stiles asks, and puts his arm around Derek’s waist. “They’re ours.”

~ ~ ~ ~

“You know, the Conclave really runs a lot more smoothly now that we aren’t all constantly arguing and nobody’s bringing monsters to attack our children,” Julien notes as he sips his beer and watches the sunset.

“It ran smoothly for years before you pups got involved,” Vanessa says with a snort. “Can’t say that I mind, though.”

Mikael nods. “My wife was saying that it’s just an excuse for a week-long vacation.”

“What’s wrong with that?” Chris asks, laughing. “I think we should do this every year.”

There’s a distant crash.

Chris refills Victoria’s glass of wine.

A minute later, Stiles trots up. “Now, there’s absolutely no cause for alarm,” he says, and Tom facepalms so hard that everybody can hear the smack. “But I just wanted to let you know, if you smell smoke, everything’s taken care of, it’s all good, don’t worry about it.” With that, he turns in the other direction and jogs away.

“Then again,” Mikael says, “going back to every ten years might not be a terrible idea either.”

“Mm,” Chris says.

Victoria sips her wine.

~ ~ ~ ~

Stiles makes it to the polls with about five minutes to spare, panting out an apology to the woman who checks his name off the list. It was a long day at work, and he almost hadn’t bothered to come vote at all. He knows his father would kill him – and worse, give him a long speech on civic duty – but it’s an off year. There are hardly any elections going on that he cares about.

But there is one very important election, so he takes his ballot over to one of the little cubbies. Gertie, his service dog, plants herself behind him, her weight pressing against his legs. Stiles had never been sure about the idea of a service dog until one of Scott’s endless down-on-their-luck rescues had broken him out of a panic attack. He had been huddled in a corner, trying to calm himself before he had to call for Derek, when she had come right over and started licking his face and cuddling up to
him. From that moment on, she and Stiles had been inseparable. He got her trained and registered as a service dog, and when his father talked him into joining the Beacon Hills police force – “you’ll do fine, bucko” – Gertie had come along and been trained as a police dog as well.

It’s a good thing, too, because voting would be hard without her. He still hates having his back to a room, whether there are other people in it or not. Even with Gertie on guard, he ticks down the list of candidates and propositions as quickly as he can. He smiles as he fills in the bubble, as usual, for Stilinski as sheriff, then hastily fills out the rest and turns it in.

His father and Melissa are over for dinner, because Stiles insists that they eat at the den at least a couple times a week so he can make sure that his father is getting enough vegetables. The pack usually eats in two shifts, and sometimes the families eat separately if a lot is going on. Lydia is working late at the lab. Isaac is at the shelter.

After dinner and an hour of television, it’s the usual chaotic mess of bath time and bedtime, which is the fun of having seven children under the age of ten. At least, it’s usually fun. Story time is one of Stiles’ favorite times of the day.

When Stiles finally gets back downstairs, a little after nine, the entire pack is gathered in the den’s living room, and he nearly turns around and runs right back upstairs. “What happened? Who died?”

“Nobody died,” Derek reassures him quickly, as Gertie noses at his hand. “Your dad brought a surprise for you.”

Stiles looks through the crowd to find his father and Scott holding a cake that reads, ‘Congratulations Sheriff Stilinski’. “You bought yourself a cake? You were running unopposed!”

Tom is obviously trying not to laugh. “I told you he wouldn’t notice,” he says to Derek, who grumbles and takes out his wallet, forking over a ten dollar bill. “Son, how closely did you look at the ballot you filled out today?”

“What? I don’t know.” Stiles gives his father a suspicious look. “There were no options besides Stilinski.”

“Right. But not Thomas Stilinski. Przemyslaw Stilinski.”

Stiles blinks. “Honey-say-what-now?”

“You were elected sheriff, Stiles. By an overwhelming majority! Although you were, as you said, running unopposed.”

“B-But!” Stiles sputters. “I wasn’t running! I never ran! Don’t you have to sign something in order to run for office?”

“Mm hm. I just waited until you were busy with work, super focused, and just slid them under your hand and said, ‘Here, Stiles, sign this’.” Tom is smiling, clearly unremorseful. “It was all done by word of mouth. You can still do campaigns like that in supernatural towns. Everyone knew who they were voting for. Except you, apparently.”

“But, but! What about you?”

“Stiles,” Tom says patiently, “I’m over sixty years old. I’m going to retire.” He sees the look on Stiles’ face, and becomes momentarily serious. “I know that you’ve always wanted this. But I also knew that you’ve spent years convincing yourself that you couldn’t have it. That you’d be too busy with alpha business, or too jumpy because of your PTSD, or too something else. But you’re my best
deputy, Stiles. You have been for over a decade now. You deserve this, and you’re going to be great at it.”

“You all knew about this?” Stiles asks, gaping at the pack.

“We even had a pool on when you’d figure it out,” Allison says, laughing. “But your dad won. He was the only one who actually bet we would get all the way to your official election without you catching on.”

“Well, thank God the rest of you let me have some dignity,” Stiles says.

Tom is laughing again. “I know you too well, bucko. And don’t let them fool you. Most of them figured you wouldn’t notice until you saw your own name on the ballot.”

Stiles makes a face at his father. “I don’t know if I can do this.”

“You absolutely can do this. And I’m not going anywhere yet. I’ll stay on as a deputy for a few years, so I’ll be right there if you need me. I might even take an order or two, if it’s coming from the Sheriff and not my kid.”

“I’ll believe that when I see it.” Stiles wraps his arms around his father and hugs him tightly.

“Thanks for having faith in me. If ‘voting for a guy who isn’t even observant enough to notice that he’s running for office’ is faith.”

Tom gives another snort of laughter. “I guess we can call it that.”

~ ~ ~ ~

“I’ve been looking over this seating chart you’ve put together for your reception,” Tom says, looking at his son over the rims of his reading glasses. “I have . . . concerns.”

“Aw, come on, Dad, there’s not even going to be a hundred people at this wedding, the seating chart wasn’t even hard.” Stiles rolls his eyes. “It’s not like the Conclave, where half the people invited hated each other and couldn’t be trusted not to shed blood. What’s to worry about?”

Tom pinches the bridge of his nose. “Did you seriously put my mother at the same table as Veronica Mars?”

A wide grin crosses Stiles’ face. “Best idea ever, right? I’m calling that the Badass Ladies table. I’ve got Grandma and Grandpa, Veronica and Logan, then Victoria and Chris, and Wednesday and Sketch. I mentioned that to Erica and she was like ‘well mark me down as scared and horny!’”

“Son,” Tom says slowly, “you put my mother at the same table as Veronica Mars. They’re going to take over the world.”

“I for one would be perfectly happy living in a world run by Grandma Millie and Veronica,” Stiles says, and pats his father on the shoulder. “Don’t worry, Dad. It’s going to be awesome.”

~ ~ ~ ~
Jake moved back to Beacon Hills a few years after he graduated college. Chris had things all put together in the Midwest, and Phil was off to New York to go to school there. Jake missed California, he missed the pack, so while he would miss Chris and Victoria, they encouraged him to go.

“I’ve made a terrible mistake,” he announces to the ceiling of his hospital room two months later. “Nobody ever shot me in Wisconsin.”

“Sounds like a boring place,” Allison says, keeping her voice bright to hide her concern. It had been bad luck, a case of too many hunters, mind-bewitching faerie fog, a moonless night, and friendly fire. Allison reaches out and squeezes Jake’s hand.

The doctor is talking about nerve damage and his broken collarbone and rehab and a bunch of other things that sound extremely unpleasant to Jake. It’s not until after he’s gone that Stiles gives Jake’s knee a friendly slap and says, “Come on, getting shot in the shoulder isn’t serious, haven’t you ever seen an action movie?”

Allison gives a little snort of laughter while Derek rolls his eyes.

“I never should have moved back to this crazy place,” Jake groans. “This is the worst. Did you hear the rehab he was describing? And the whole part about how I might never regain full mobility in my arm? And the part where – ”

“Jake,” Stiles interrupts, “you want the Bite?”

“Yes, please,” Jake says meekly.

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Deaton listens to what Stiles has to say, and then asks, “Are you sure?”

Stiles nods. “Yeah. We’ve talked about it. It’s time.”

“I’ll make some arrangements, then. It’ll take a few days, but I know several people who would be more than qualified.”

“Thanks, Doc.” Stiles waves over his shoulder and heads outside, where Derek is waiting. “He’s going to set it up.”

“Okay, good.” Some of the tension leaves Derek’s shoulders, but he looks at Stiles and says, “Is it going to be weird for you? Peter being gone?”

“For a while, probably. I’m so used to him being there. But nobody’s tried to kill me for over five years now. Everything has settled down and we can handle our shit now, you know? I feel bad, keeping him from his family, from his lupa. He deserves to see them again.”

Derek nods. “Okay. If you’re sure.”

Two days later, they’re sitting in the birch grove that’s been planted where the Hale house once stood. Deaton has contacted people through the Druidic Council, and the man who meets them there is an actual priest in addition to being a sorcerer. “Okay, let’s do this,” Stiles says. He turns to Derek,
and his eyes gleam that familiar blue. “I’ll be seeing you, nephew.”

Derek pulls Peter into his arms and hugs him hard. “Goodbye, Uncle Peter.”

By the time Derek lets go, Stiles’ eyes are brown again. He walks over to the priest and sits where he’s told, closes his eyes. “Thank you,” he says quietly. “For everything.”

When they leave, Derek is worried that Stiles will be upset, but Stiles is actually chuckling a little as they walk back towards the den. “What’s so funny?”

“Do you know what that son of a bitch said to me?” Stiles asks. “He said, ‘I’ll enjoy a nice visit with my wife and son before you inevitably need to call on me for help.’” He’s laughing, but crying. “What a jerk. I’m going to miss the hell out of him.”

Derek puts an arm around Stiles and pulls him into an embrace. “Me too.”

~ ~ ~ ~

Scott and Allison’s daughter is five months old when she first shifts into her wolf form. Derek says that’s no surprise. Born wolves learn it early, especially if they can watch their pack doing it. She’s crawling around her playpen one day, trying to pull apart a set of toy plastic rings, when she suddenly transforms into a furry little cub and starts tugging on them with her teeth.

“Oh my God,” Stiles says, as he goes into see what everyone is squealing about. Ellie is sitting on the floor, a cub with fluffy gray fur and needle sharp teeth. “Oh my God, that is so cute, what even.”

“Isn’t she precious?” a completely unexpected voice coos, and Stiles looks over to see Chris Argent, badass extraordinaire, werewolf hunter spectacular, down on his hands and knees in the playpen. He’s crouched in a position that looks strangely familiar to –

“Are you doing a play bow?” Stiles asks, unable to help it.

“I read about this,” Chris says, not looking away from his granddaughter. “About how to engage with cubs, you know, challenge them without making them afraid of you – ”

Stiles presses both hands over his mouth in an effort not to laugh. Derek is looking at Chris like he’s from a different planet. “What book was that and where exactly did you get it? Is ‘how to train your werewolf’ a book they sell at Barnes and Noble?”

“You can get anything on Amazon these days,” Chris says, not looking up as Ellie romps around the playpen. Stiles can’t even tell whether or not he’s serious. Ellie jumps on his shoulder and they go tumbling into a heap.

“Well, this is the cutest thing I’ve ever seen,” Stiles says, looking over at Allison to make sure that she’s filming. “Has the great werewolf hunter finally met his match?”

“Graaarr!” Chris dramatically collapses backwards onto the floor while Ellie proudly chews on his shirt collar.

“I am so framing this,” Allison says.
“This way,” Gwen says, holding the door open to let Stiles and Mac inside. Mac’s hands are trembling slightly, and Gwen gives her a reassuring smile. “Remember, you don’t have to do this.”

“No, I want to, I’m just, you know, nervous.” Mac takes a breath and then lets it out. “I know you wouldn’t have brought me here if you didn’t think he was ready. It’s just, it’s been such a long time, and I – am going to stop talking now. Yep. This is me, shutting up.”

Stiles squeezes her hand and says, “I’ll be right out here if you need me.”

She nods and follows Gwen down a corridor and into a small study. It’s cozy, and there’s a fire in the fireplace and books everywhere. Cassidy is sitting at the table, and he looks as nervous as Mac feels. He jolts to his feet when she comes in, hands worrying at the hem of his shirt in a painfully familiar gesture that a decade hasn’t changed.


“Thanks.” Mac smiles at him. “You look, well, a lot better than the last time I saw you,” she says, because he does. He’s actually grown several inches, and although he’s still lanky, he’s not the twig he had been before. His hair is a bit shorter, but other than that, he looks very much the same. Mac sits down at the table across from him, and he sinks back into his seat.

“I guess you probably know why I asked Gwen if I could see you,” he says. “I mean, I’ve actually been asking her for a long time, but she finally said it was okay.”

“I wanted to see you, too,” Mac says.

Cassidy flushes nervously. “I just wanted to say I’m sorry. For everything. What I did was – it was so awful, and horrible. I killed people who hadn’t done anything wrong, hadn’t done anything to deserve it. People who were my friends. I was scared, and, and sick, but it’s not an excuse for what I did. And I used you to do it, and that’s awful. It wouldn’t have been better if it was someone I didn’t know, but . . . it’s worse that it was you. Which doesn’t make any sense now that I say it out loud.”

“I understand,” Mac says. “Thank you. For the apology.”

Cassidy nods a little. “I guess, uh, they’re saying I might be able to go soon. No longer a danger to society, and all that. I don’t think I’m ready, but maybe someday I will be. I just don’t know what I would do. I can’t take back what I did, so I have to, to pay it forward somehow, you know?”

“Well,” Mac says, “my friend Erica is working on programs to help sexual abuse victims. Which seems kind of in line with the sort of thing you might want to do.”

“I can’t . . . look other victims in the eye. Not after what I did.”

“Okay, but that’s not what I meant. Programs like this need a lot of money, you know? And from what I recall, you’re pretty good with that sort of thing.”

“Well . . . yeah, I guess.” Cassidy gives a rueful laugh. “I don’t know if I’d still be as good at it now as I used to be.”

“You built a real estate empire when you were eighteen. I’m pretty sure that even if you’re out of
practice, you can still make a lot of money and do a lot of good.”

“Yeah, I guess that’s true. And I could do that from here. I mean. It’s not like you would want me living anywhere near you.”

“I wouldn’t mind,” Mac says, and Cassidy blinks in surprise. “Cassidy, this is Oblivion. If they say you’re not a danger to anyone anymore, I believe them. They’re kind of the authorities on that sort of subject. You don’t have to, if you’re not comfortable with it. But you can, if you want to. Just think about it, okay?”

Cassidy nods. “Okay.”

~ ~ ~ ~

“I don’t like surprises,” is what Lydia says when Derek tells her that he has a surprise for her. “They never end well for me. For anyone in this pack. Probably for anyone in Beacon Hills.”

“Fair,” Derek says. “Okay. I know that staying in the city is rough for you, so we built a lab for you to work in here.”

“Oh, that was nice of you,” Lydia says. She looks somewhat skeptical. Given the type of facilities she needs to conduct her research, she doubts that any lab in Beacon Hills is going to have even a quarter of what she needs. Still, maybe she can get some of it. It would certainly beat having to commute back and forth on the weekends.

They take the Camaro, and Derek drives her out to the edge of town. There’s a shiny, brand new building there, with a shiny, brand new sign that proclaims it ‘Martin Technologies’. Lydia’s jaw is ajar as he unlocks the front door, punches in a security code, and shows her inside.

“How,” she says, gaping. “How did you put this together? Without me even knowing?”

“Money talks,” Derek says, smiling slightly.

“This must have cost millions,” she protests. “I mean, I would have been happy with an old chem lab and a spectrometer. This is – this is top level equipment!”

“It cost less than you’d think,” Derek shrugs. “Investors. Grants. All the boring stuff that the scientists don’t like to deal with on their own. I might have talked you up a little to some very important scientific people. Something about you winning a Nobel prize within five years. I may have exaggerated . . . but probably not.”

“This . . . this is amazing,” Lydia says. “I don’t know what to say. Besides thank you.”

Derek pulls her into an embrace. “We just want you to be here with us.”

Lydia hugs him back and looks around at the new lab. “I may never leave again.”

~ ~ ~ ~
“Hey, what’s up?” Jackson pulls the door open and steps back to let Danny in. He sees the look on Danny’s face and immediately scowls. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing, it’s just . . .”

Jackson rolls his eyes. “Boy trouble?”

“Yeah.” Danny slumps into a chair. “You know, I knew Greg wasn’t right for me. But I’m getting really sick of kissing frogs in my efforts to find a prince.”

“Greg was a jackass, and as I told you numerous times, you deserve better.” Jackson flops onto his apartment’s sofa. “Do I need to beat the shit out of him? Hex him a little?”

“What? No. Jesus, Jackson, I came to complain to you because whenever I complain to the pack, they get all snarly. Don’t start threatening to hex people. Then I won’t have anybody to complain to at all.”

“If you seriously think that I’m going to be any less protective of you than that touchy-feely wolf pack, you’re a complete moron. But I won’t hex anybody unless you say that they deserve it.”

“Good enough.” Danny springs up off the sofa, goes over to the refrigerator, and pulls out a beer for each of them. He tosses it to Jackson, who catches it out of midair. “How are things with Annika?”

“I don’t know, man. I like her a lot, but I feel like it can’t really go anywhere. I don’t want to leave Beacon Hills, and she doesn’t want to leave her family’s territory, so we’re always going to live a thousand miles apart.”

Danny frowns as he pops off the top of his beer. “I seem to recall magic having a solution to that.”

“Dude, I can’t commute via gate. Those things are kind of tiring to make.”

“I’m just saying, you’re looking for excuses because it’s getting serious. I know you, and I know the way you think, and that’s what you’re doing.”

“Yeah, I guess so.” Jackson takes a swig of his beer. “I told her about Stone. Like, everything that happened back then. I told her about the things I did, and what happened with Lydia. I felt like she deserved to know what I was capable of, you know?”

Danny nods. “What’d she say?”

“That it was okay. That she’d done things she wasn’t proud of, too, and I clearly regretted it and had done everything I could do make amends. And that if I ever did anything like that again, she’d kill me in my sleep, cut off my head, and put it on a stick as a warning to the next fuckboy.”

Danny can’t help but grin. “So, she’s perfect for you, is what you’re saying.”

Jackson grunts. “Yeah.” He reaches out and punches Danny in the arm. “My point is, the perfect guy is out there for you somewhere. You’ve just gotta be patient. If fucking Stilinski can find the right guy for him, you’ve got this on lock.”

Now Danny does laugh. “I’ll keep that in mind.”

~ ~ ~
“Whoa, what happened in here?” Erica asks, as she jogs into Boyd’s classroom.

Boyd looks up with a puzzled expression on his face. He had known Erica was going to be coming by to pick him up – old habits die hard, and the clunker Boyd still drives is in the shop – but is confused by her entrance. “Student teacher conferences?”


Boyd rolls his eyes. “Yeah, yeah, the kids like me, I get it.”

“No, it’s not the kids, it’s the moms.” Erica sniffs delicately and grins widely. “And a few of the dads, too, I think.”

“Now you’re just being ridiculous.”

“Nope. This room smells like infatuation has been stewing in it all day. Hey, it makes sense!” Erica says, as Boyd’s expression becomes even more politely skeptical. “I mean, you’re a handsome guy who’s great with kids. I know for a fact all the kids love you and they probably tell their parents about you all the time. It’s pretty mild for the most part, but there are a few moms who definitely are thinking about asking you out.”

“I don’t date the mothers of my students,” Boyd says firmly.

“Solid plan. Get some phone numbers, wait until the kids are in fourth grade.”

“I am not going to ask for phone numbers.”

Erica is still laughing. “Don’t worry, Boyd. I’m pretty sure you’re not going to have to ask.”

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Nobody really bats an eyelash when Derek receives a package in the mail from Cora which contains a scarf. They’ve been sending packages back and forth for years, and they often exchange clothes like jackets or sweatshirts that they’ve been wearing for a while. It’s nice to have their sibling’s scent to carry around with them. Plus it’s November, and Beacon Hills doesn’t get as cold as some places, but it does get cold.

So Derek happily wears his sister’s scarf around all winter and into the spring, when he receives an even larger package which is a cable knit sweater. It’s huge and bulky and an ugly oatmeal color, but he wears it anyway, even turning the AC up too high so he doesn’t get hot (much to the rest of the pack’s annoyance).

Stiles is wondering if he should say something about this, but before he can ask, Derek receives another package.

“Mittens,” Mac says, looking at them. “She sent you mittens. In July.”

“I guess so,” Derek says.

The next package is a hat that’s very reminiscent of Jayne’s from Firefly, and that’s when Stiles
finally breaks down and texts Ravinder to ask what the heck is going on.

‘Cora seems to like knitting,’ is his response.

‘Yeah, I figured that out on my own, but can’t she knit stuff for you guys?’

A minute later, his phone rings. Ravinder has never been fond of texting, and it becomes clear that he has a lot to say. There’s laughter in his voice as he says, “She does knit things for us. And she knits things for the alphas on trial. Rokiatou taught her, and she finds it soothing. Once an alpha chose to mock her for this, and she stabbed him in the throat with a knitting needle.”

“That is awesome,” Stiles chortles. “So she literally knits so much that she has to give away stuff to everyone or else you’ll be buried in it?”

“Indeed.” Ravinder is still audibly trying not to laugh. “It’s become something of a ritual, actually. When an alpha passes their trial, Cora gifts them with whatever she’s been knitting for the duration.”

“You’re lying.”

“Hold on for one moment – ”

There’s a long silence, and then Stiles’ phone makes the ‘incoming text’ noise. He pulls it up to see a photograph Ravinder has taken. Cora, with her usual scowl, wrapping a scarf around the neck of a red-headed woman who looks stunned and frankly overwhelmed.

“Did you get the picture?” Ravinder asks.

“Yes,” Stiles says. “Yes, I did, and if you’ll excuse me, I need to forward it to everyone I know, have it framed, and hang it on my wall.”

The next package they receive from Cora is gloves for Stiles, folded so the middle finger is sticking up.

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Allison takes a deep breath as she looks around the room. Her hands are shaking and her stomach is tying itself into knots. She reminds herself that she can do this, that she’s done this dozens of times, that she knows what she’s doing. She’s been in charge of missions before, but never without her father or some other adult silently standing behind her, backing her up. She catches Scott’s eye, and he gives her a reassuring smile. It eases her nerves down enough that she manages to shout, “Okay, listen up!” in her best approximation of her father’s drill sergeant voice.

Much to her surprise, the group of men and women stop arranging their combat gear and turn to look at her. She clears her throat and says, “So what we’ve got here is a rogue wendigo. They’re fast and strong, but our intelligence shows that he’s alone, so we should have no trouble taking him down with a coordinated effort. He was last seen in the northern woods on the Preserve and we believe he’s abducted a number of children who may be dead or alive. Getting to those kids is our top priority.

“Parrish, Yukimura, you’re on point with me. Dunbar, Hewitt, Romero, you’re going to flank and sweep. Graeme, Clark, cover and rear guard. When we get to the kids, Romero and Clark will get
them to safety while the rest of us pursue the wendigo. Any questions?"

There’s a round of shaking heads.

“Okay!” Allison tucks her crossbow into its holster. “Let’s do this!”

The others head out to the assembled trucks, and Allison turns to Scott, who’s going to be following at a safe distance in case any of the kids need immediate medical attention. “That was amazing,” he says, grinning at her. “Too hot, hot damn.”

Allison smirks and gives him a kiss. “Don’t wait up.”

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Stiles and Derek’s wedding goes surprisingly smoothly. Given Stiles’ penchant for drama, it could have been all over the place, but he knows that Derek wants to keep things low-key, and he does his best. Tanya is their flower girl. Scott is Stiles’ best man, and Cora is Derek’s. They get Justin to officiate, as he’s the closest thing to a ship’s captain as they have. He is, after all, the reason they had really gotten together without it being a disaster.

They keep it fairly short. Both of them walk up to the front at the same time, coming down separate aisles in a V-shape. Tom is sitting in the front row, trying not to cry too obviously, while Milena clutches at his arm and does the exact opposite. The rest of the pack fill in the front rows. There are nearly a hundred people there, family and friends from all over the world. Justin says a few words that he obviously made up five minutes before the ceremony about how marriage is about bringing people together, and then says he’ll let Stiles and Derek speak for themselves.

“Okay, so.” Stiles lets out a breath and tries to calm his jittery nerves. “I know that wedding vows are usually all about love and faithfulness, et cetera. And I thought about that, but when there are supernatural forces afoot, that sort of thing is already a given. I mean, you already know that I’m going to love you forever and never leave you, so I don’t have to make promises along those lines. I said to myself, there have to be different promises to make. So, I hereby make the following promises to you:

“I promise that I’ll never sit on the remote control and then tell you I haven’t seen it,” he continues, and Derek’s face breaks into that beautiful smile. “I promise that I’ll never finish the jelly, since I know that you don’t like plain peanut butter sandwiches. I promise that when it’s my turn for the laundry, I’ll always match and fold your socks the way you like even though that is, frankly, an enormous waste of time.”

A ripple of laughter goes through the audience. Stiles is smiling now, too. “I promise that I won’t get annoyed when you take an hour in a single room at an art museum. I promise that I’ll never eat the last snickerdoodle without asking you first. I promise that even though I’ll probably never learn the difference between cyan and cerulean, I’ll nod intelligently when you talk about art stuff. I promise that I’ll still watch movies with you even after that one time that you made me watch a movie about fonts.

“And most importantly, I promise I will always love you and protect you, but you already knew that, so to be honest you’re probably more excited about the snickerdoodle thing. Your turn.”

There are a few more giggles, and Stiles can see the genuine amusement in Derek’s eyes and the
smile that still tugs at the corner of his lips. Then the clearing quiets down as Derek takes a deep breath.

“The day I realized I was in love with you was one of the worst days of my life,” Derek says, and Stiles blinks at him, a little taken aback. “I remember sitting in my apartment, hating myself and the disaster I was living, because I knew you would never love me back. I knew that I didn’t deserve it,” he continues, and Stiles’ expression softens into understanding. “Most of the first year I knew you was like that. I was just waiting for you to realize that you could do so much better, for you to find the person you were truly meant to be with.

“And then you told me that you weren’t going anywhere. That it was always going to be you and me. And I believed you, because you didn’t lie to me, but I didn’t understand it. I felt bad that you had gotten stuck with me. But every time I turned around, there you were. You never made me feel like you didn’t want me. You never treated me like I was a burden.

“It’s been a long time, so I can look back on it now and see how messed up I was. You got me through that, and you loved me anyway, and you made me see how amazing things are going to be. You gave me my life back. I’m so grateful for everything you’ve done for me, and I love you more than words can say.” He takes a deep breath, trying to ignore some of the audible sniffling in the audience. “I promise that I will always be there for you. It’s always going to be you and me. And I promise that no matter what happens, I will never close any of the five dozen Chrome tabs that you have open.”

Everyone at the wedding bursts into laughter, including Stiles. That’s a relief to Derek, since Sheriff Stilinski had started crying at that point. Stiles wraps his arms around Derek’s shoulder and hugs him as tightly as he can.

“Okay, okay, break it up,” Justin says, grinning. “Got the rings? Let’s do this.”

Scott trots over with the rings, with a mile-wide grin on his face. They put the rings on each others’ fingers, and there’s a little more sniffing from the audience.

“I now pronounce you married!” Justin says, and there’s a round of applause and cheers, and Stiles throws his arms around Derek again. Derek lifts him up off his feet, and they hold onto each other for a long moment before letting go.

They march out hand in hand to the celebratory music of Star Wars, although they don’t go far. The tables for the reception are set up in the preserve. There’s music and dancing and, of course, a ton of food. Stiles sits in Derek’s lap and keeps an arm looped around his neck.

“Okay, I admit it,” Derek says. “This was a good idea.”

Stiles smirks at him. “When are you going to learn that all my ideas are good?”

Derek thinks that over. “About the same time I develop complete amnesia.”

“Hey, don’t invite trouble!” Stiles reaches up and flicks his nose. “How does the unjinxing thing go again?”

“Oh, God, I don’t remember. It had something to do with ammonia and sage and white candles.” Derek shakes his head. “It doesn’t matter. We’re married now, remember? So that means we can never forget each other or be separated.”

“Is that what it means? I think Justin left a few things out, in that case.”
“It’s from the original marriage vows. ‘What God has joined, let no man sunder.’”

“You’re such a nerd,” Stiles says fondly. “And we’ve been like that for a long time, anyway.”

“True.”

They sit in contented silence for a long minute, watching their friends. A lot of couples are dancing in the clearing, surrounded by the tiki lights: Scott and Allison with Ellie holding onto their hands, Tom and Melissa, Justin and Yasmin, Wednesday and Sketch. Lydia and Danny are attempting to drag Jackson onto the dance floor, and he’s putting up a huge show of protesting while Annika rolls her eyes at all of them. Cora, surprisingly, has been asked to dance by Sam Argent, and she actually looks like she’s enjoying herself. Boyd is making sure all the kids have gotten something to eat while Jake captivates them with a story about a grindylow. Erica is nudging Isaac towards a pretty young woman who’s been glancing at him and blushing. Milena is terrifying everybody there by making best friends with Ian (who attended the wedding as Anthony Hopkins). Mac is sitting with Veronica and Logan, undoubtedly plotting world domination. Chris is pouring Victoria a glass of wine.

Stiles leans his head against Derek’s shoulder and revels in the feeling of Derek’s hand on his back. “This has been a really amazing day.”

“It has.” Derek’s quiet for a minute. “You know what I think? I think tomorrow is going to be just as amazing.”

“Yeah?” Stiles feels a smile start to touch the corners of his mouth. “I think so, too.”

~fin~

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