### Past, Present, and Future

**Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at** [http://archiveofourown.org/works/6960580](http://archiveofourown.org/works/6960580).

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<td>Additional Tags:</td>
<td>Kid Fic, Single Parent Derek, Single Parent Stiles, Deputy Derek Hale, Fluff and Angst, Mostly Fluff and Tooth Rotting Sweetness, Happy Ending, alpha dynamics, Alternate Universe - Werewolves Are Known</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stats:</td>
<td>Published: 2016-05-25 Updated: 2016-12-05 Chapters: 24/60 Words: 182513</td>
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**Past, Present, and Future**

by **Code_Zackary**

**Summary**

Deputy Derek Hale has just become a single parent, after adopting abandoned five-year-old Isaac Lahey, and drowning in his new responsibilities as a father, and Alpha. Add the babysitting of his new rookie partner, Jackson Whittemore, and the weight of his past bubbling to the surface, Derek isn't sure how he's going to keep his head straight.

Meanwhile, Stiles Stilinski returns home to Beacon Hills to give his son, Scott Stilinski, a better quality of life. However, raising a werewolf pup, as a human, is something he struggles handling on a daily basis. Stiles wishes nothing more than to find a werewolf willing to show his son "the ropes", so Scott can fit in with all the other pups come the first day of Kindergarten. But where would he ever find a werewolf willing to help a human?

When the two meet, their struggles in life will come to the forefront, as the loners become an invaluable support system for each other, and build a unique Pack all their own.
Chapter 1

The small, rural town of Beacon Hills was, for the most part, just that. A small, quiet, rural town, hidden in the thick foliage of Northern California. Aside from the occasional drunken brawl in one of the town's many bars, or a prank pulled by an easily-bored teenager, the town could be considered by many as a peaceful paradise from the rest of the world.

Which left Deputy Derek Hale, a member of the county Sheriff’s department, where he always sat at the end of a slow day. Sagged against his desk chair, typing a traffic report on an outdated computer, and ignoring the explosion of gossip in the back area of the building.

As always, the latter was near impossible, which left an annoyed wrinkle on the thirty-year-old’s stoic expression.

"Seriously, someone needs to check on him! Old Man Stilinski never shuts his door!"

"Last time he did, it's right before he fired Old Jeb for drinking on the job. Or the week after he hired Jack"

"It's been three hours, and he skipped an entire meeting with Mayor Whittemore! This has got to be bad, nobody fucks with Whittemore!"

Ears twitching, Derek sighed as he heard the soft, rhythmic footsteps of overpriced, tacky leather boots. It was accompanied by a disgusting amount of cologne he’d expect from a high schooler hoping to get lucky.

Without turning around from his work, Derek shook his head. "What do you want, Jack? My shift’s about over, take it to the Boss." He scoffed, in a dark, menacing tone.

A warning that a young, lean male with punked up blonde hair, and a sneering grin, ignored completely.

"It's Jackson, Hale. Not Jack." The deputy, clearly offput, brushed off his pristine, unwrinkled beige uniform. With little ceremony, Jackson propped himself up on Derek's desk, folding both arms. "The Old Man is stuck in his office, and hasn't come out all day."

Derek leaned back in his seat, mentally groaning. He ran his thick, broad hands across the length of his sharp black hair. "And?"

"You're basically second in command here, Derek. The Old Man trusts and respects you more than any other officer here." Jackson cocked an eyebrow, as if it explained everything.

Derek rolled his eyes. "...and you're the mayor's bratty son that was promoted too quickly. There, now we've both stated the obvious. What's your point?"

Groaning, Jackson pushed off Derek's desk, and pointed directly to the Sheriff's private office. "Go ask him what's wrong! That's your duty!"

"Invading my boss' personal issues is a job requirement?" Derek smirked, nodding at the office.
"You go do it."

"He hates my guts, Derek. You and the entire office know it." Jackson sighed, stomping away. "Either you do it, or the Gossip Dorks will be going all day tomorrow at it too! I don't know about you, but work around here sucks enough without Kira, Ethan, Aiden, and Parrish jabbering all day about shit they know nothing about."

Chest thumping in terror at the thought of the Gossip Dorks making shit up and riling up the entire city, Derek locked his computer, shooting up to his feet. He strode past Jackson, height towering over his fellow deputy, with Derek's broad shoulders accidentally swiping him in the process.

Ignoring a few gasps as he opened the Sheriff's door without knocking, Derek entered the mess of an office, shutting the door behind.

Before Derek was "Old Man Stilinski", as the town affectionately (and ironically) called the man of his later forties. Sure, the county Sheriff had plenty of wrinkles, a head of softly greying hair, and a no-nonsense (grumpy) attitude of someone in their 70's, but Derek never personally bought into the nickname. Anyone who could wrangle the hodgepodge of the County Sheriff's Department deserved a proper amount of respect.

"Boss? You okay?" Derek sat down, across from the Sheriff's desk.

Leaning his head up, Sheriff Stilinski's face seem split. Red, teary eyes from crying, a solemn frown, and four empty cans of (forbidden) diet cola scattered over the desk spoke to the mess of emotions that overwhelmed the man.

Sheriff Stilinski wiped the tears from his eyes, laughing quietly. "Yeah, yeah... I'm fine, Derek. I'm an old man, and I'm entitled to a little sentimentality." He shook off his stupor, smiling from ear to ear.

"Good news, I take it?" Derek asked, easing back into the chair. "No layoffs, and nobody's getting fired, I hope. Maybe he's finally got a reason to can that hack Whittemore and get him off payroll."

Nodding, the Old Man grinned, shedding his aged facade. "My son and grandson are moving back to Beacon Hills. They'll be here next week, and my son's going to be the new counselor for the high school next year. I've been waiting five years for this news, Derek, and I... I can't possibly be any happier." He slammed a hand on his desk, laughing excitedly with both hands up in the air.

Derek beamed, on behalf of the old man, feeling his own share of the man's joy.

Sheriff Stilinski smiled for only three things in the world. Melissa Delgado (his girlfriend of three years), the delivery boy who brought (forbidden) pizza to the Sheriff's office every Thursday, and the man's family. Especially, his son and grandson, the Sheriff's only living family, who he'd lasso the moon for.

"Congratulations, Boss! I guess that means no more flying to New York three times a year?" Derek extended his hand, which Sheriff Stilinski shook eagerly.

"Hell no. My ingrate of a son HAD to move to New York for college, and stick there for this long!? Every goddamn Christmas, Thanksgiving, and birthday I fork out a small fortune to sit next by assholes to and from New York! Then, I'm stuck in that goddamn endless traffic jam to sleep on a couch for a week that I wouldn't put our criminals on!" Sheriff Stilinski scoffed, letting loose a laugh that betrayed his barrage of complaints. He wiped another set of tears from his eyes. "My son, Dr. Stilinski. Child psychologist. Never would have guessed anyone in my family would get that
smart. Well, not that he got any of that from me. That's 100% Claudia. Hands down..." He sniffed, wiping some snot from his nose. "Damn. She'd have been proud of that boy."

A brief pause dotted the conversation, as the Old Man grimaced.

Derek, too, felt the shift in the atmosphere. The grief of the Sheriff losing his wife to cancer, even 20 years down the line, was still fresh and just as overwhelming as it was on the day of her death.

"You need a moment, boss?" Derek asked, knowing good and well how the waves of grief could crash over and overwhelm you at any given time.

The Sheriff shook his head. "Nah, I'm fine, Derek. No need in getting upset over things like that, just a waste of time and energy. I've got to go get my son's room ready for him. They're staying with me until they can find an apartment in town. That shouldn't take too long, I'm guessing."

Derek snorted, shaking his head. "God bless his search, Boss. It took me two years after Academy to get one of the only 5 apartments available in town, before I moved out of my Uncle's basement. He'd be better off buying a house, because like hell is he finding an apartment in this tiny place."

Sheriff Stilinski's face paled. "You're kidding, right?" A rare, almost petrified tone echoed in the Sheriff's voice. He reached into his desk, fiddling with a cell phone. "I'm probably going to have to childproof the house, then. Crap, maybe Melissa could help with that? Need to double lock and reinforce the gun case." He paused, palming a hand up against his face. "Wait... Scotty could probably break through that... I'll have to get one of those special locks like the department uses."

As the Sheriff went into a spiraling meltdown, much to Derek’s amusement, the office door swung open, with Deputy Jackson Whittemore standing awkwardly in the doorway. A sweat coated the young man's face.

"What is it, Whittemore?" Sheriff Stilinski spat, glaring death into the young man's direction.

Flinching, Jackson backed off, biting his bottom lip. "Sir, there's a call from Blue Moon. Wouldn't say what was wrong, but they're asking for Hale and Hale only. No cops allowed on the property, as usual. That's all they would tell me, Sir."

Derek and the Sheriff exchanged a nervous glance.

"That's all you got from the call, kid?" Sheriff Stilinski stood up, slamming both hands on the desk. "No story? No idea of what we're sending a fellow Deputy into?" His voice boomed, hitting Deputy Whittemore right in the gut.

Jackson backed away further, shoving both hands into his pockets. "I... She wouldn't let me talk. Erica, I think? When I asked what was going on, she hung up."

"Out." Sheriff Stilinski ordered, pointing out of his office.

That one, simple word left Jackson scrambling, slamming the door behind him, before apologize profusely through the glass for the noise.

The Sheriff rolled his eyes, groaning audibly as he rubbed his forehead. "I will kill his bastard of a father at my retirement party, for sticking me with this Academy newbie in my office. No real-life training, Hale. Not even working as a traffic cop, and before he knows it, little precious Jackson Whittemore has a job as a deputy, over 20 better applicants in the County."

Derek shrugged, cracking his head back and sighing in the air. "What can you do? The Mayor's
The office has de-facto control of the Sheriff's department funding and final say on employment. Just be grateful that he's not your partner, Boss." He glared pure, unconcentrated death in the Sheriff's face. Six months of frustration with the spoiled brat, all concentrated in Derek’s eyebrows.

"Have I mentioned the legion of bonuses you're getting at Christmas for babysitting?" Sheriff Stilinski attempted a feigned, insincere smile.

Rolling his eyes, Derek stretched out into the sky. "He's not going to Blue Moon, though. I don’t trust that Rookie with traffic tickets. I'm parking his ass here until I understand what's going on. You too, boss." He stood up, striding out of the office.

The Old Man rose a hand, stopping Derek. "Your shift ends in twenty minutes, Derek. I can send Parrish, he's got a good repor with the Blue Moon. He's not one of your people, but he's pretty damn close, right?"

Derek shook his head, sighing. He'd forgive the Sheriff's innocent mistake about Parrish for now, but would educate the man later. "No, Parrish isn't. If they're asking for me, I'll go.” He folded his arms, gut churning. "They only call me in when they know one of our kind is about to make a scene they'd rather humans or any other species not see. Which means it's something you or Parrish wouldn't be able to understand or fathom."

"I'll get backup prepped. Should I call SWAT? Maybe WERE? Sheriff Stilinski reached for his phone, gazing up and down the on-call list.

Shrugging, Derek stood just by the door. "I'll let you know, boss. I don't even know the situation yet. No theatrics, I promise."

"Thanks, Hale." The Sheriff took in a deep breath, attacking the phone line and organizing the entire Sheriff's department at a fervent pace.

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Blue Moon, a run down tavern just barely into the Beacon Hills County Line, fell under Sheriff Stilinski's jurisdiction. In the midst of the woods, with dozens of cars parked outside, the specialty bar was packed to the gills as it was every night.

Slamming the door shut to his police cruiser, Derek dusted off his uniform, wrinkled and messy from the work week. He took in a breath of air, scenting the area. Booze, stale sex, and vomit hit his nostrils, forcing Derek to recoil at the smell.

"How the hell does anyone stand this place? Disgusting." Derek murmured under his breath, before striding up to the place, and swinging open the oak door to the cabin-like decor.

Once inside, the natural candle lighting flickered over the country-style tavern, with a low roar of conversation buzzing in the back of Derek's head. In the far corner, two men were in the midst of an all-out brawl, blood dripping from their noses as their friends cheered them on in their fist-fight. Not far from the brawl, a man and a woman ground into each other, rubbing every inch of each other's body, in a frenzied dry-hump in a booth. A few low moans could be heard echoing from the bathroom he chose to ignore.

Derek passed by all of it, stopping at the bar side, and leaning up against the counter. "Erica! I'm
Popping out from the back, a solid woman carried two full cases of beer in each hand, slamming them on the counter. She smirked and Derek, eyeing him from head to toe. Erica smirked, brushing the golden curls from her face. "You sure are, Officer. Should I start up a soundtrack and start handing out dollar bills?" She whistled between her teeth.

"Please don't sexually harass the off-duty cop who should be collapsed in bed from exhaustion. I've worked a full week, and I'm ready to go home." Derek rubbed his forehead, sighing as he glanced around the bar. As far as he could see, it was just a normal Friday night for the bar. "What's the problem?"

Erica's charming features melted, biting down on the bottom of her lip. Wordlessly, she nodded at the end of the counter.

Following her gaze, Derek spotted a man covered up in a black hoodie. Deep into his tenth bottle of booze, the male did little to hide the gross sobbing from his chest, or the tear stains that littered the counter. Derek could taste the alcohol on his tongue, from clear across the bar.

Though the more pressing issue, and what set a cold fire in Derek's stomach, was the five-year-old boy fast asleep on the floor, next to the man's feet. The boy's clothes were torn and ratty, hanging off his frail, bony body. Aside from the soft, brunette curls on the boy's head, he looked like a pale skeleton.

"Robert Lahey. I'm sure you already knew about his wife, but he just lost his oldest son earlier this week. I hear he was overseas in the military." Erica shook her head, sighing painfully. "Losing a mate and a pup? Yeah, I'd probably be spiraling out of control myself, I get it! Though I couldn't sit and watch him mistreat Isaac anymore. That's why I called and asked for you. The humans wouldn't give a flying fuck."

"Mistreat? What do you mean?" Derek darted his eyes to the young pup, curled up in a ball. From outward appearances he couldn't spot any injuries, or scent any open wounds. He knew of the Lahey Family, and their numerous issues since the loss of Mrs. Lahey, but had never heard of abuse.

Erica leaned across the bar, whispering in Derek's ear. "I gave the pup a burger, and he ate it down like it was the first thing he'd eaten in years. Isaac ate five more after it, and cried through the whole meal." She ripped open the cases of beer, swiftly refiling the iced buckets behind the counter. She kept her gaze on Derek, voice in a quiet hush. "It's not the first time this week, either. Boyd on the day shift will vouch for me, Robert spends all day in the place, and doesn't feed or pay his pup any attention."

Derek lowered his head, angling away from the crowd. "Has he struck the boy? At all? Did you witness it?"

Cringing, Erica slammed a bottle down in the ice. "The boy came in with a black eye, about an hour ago. He clutched his stomach, which has dots of red all over the front. Smelled like blood, which is why I called the cops. It's already healed, Derek, you know that, but I'll testify to that fact. I'd even go to a human court, if I had to."

Derek growled under his breath, leaning away from the bar. He stepped backwards, moving over to an empty corner in the tavern, where he grabbed the cellphone out of his pocket. One speed-dial later, and Sheriff Stilinski picked up on the other line.

"This is Deputy Hale, I am going to need our regular backup at the Blue Moon, and a few extra
Deputies for interviews. Park AWAY from the building, and do not enter the property lines. I will subdue and bring the suspect to you. Call in DHS, there's a pup involved."

Over the phone, Derek could make out the thumping of the Old Man's heart. "How bad, Derek? Is the pup okay?""

"Just one drunk suspect, and I have a witness to child abuse and endangerment." Derek glanced back to the bar, as the child rose up, wiping his sleepy eyes. With the boy's body upright, Derek spotted blood around the navel area. "I won't have any troubles on my own, not with this guy, and we won't need to consult the County Alpha. This is a clear-cut situation."

Silence ebbed over the phone, followed by a deep, relaxed exhale. "Be careful, Hale."

"Always." Derek hung up the phone, re-joining Erica's side. He could see the worry in her eyes, the woman's hands busily tapping against the wood.

"You're bringing human cops to my bar, Derek. Couldn't you have just taken the kid and ran?" Erica glared at Derek, face narrowed and clearly pissed. "I don't want humans stinking up my bar. You couldn't have asked for just the Hell Hound?"

Derek shook his head. "My people, Erica, are coming. People I've spent years training on how to act around our kind. They're not coming onto the property, and won't be scenting around your land. We've got to document all of this for the trial when it comes around, and take statements. If the County Alpha sticks his nose in, we need every advantage to make sure Robert pays for his crimes."

Still fuming, Erica grabbed a bottle of beer, breaking off the neck of the bottle with just just her hands. She poked the cleanly broken end in Derek's face. "You lie to me, Hale, and this will be the fate of "lil' Derek".""

"Clear." Derek rolled his eyes, nodding in Robert's direction. "Help me make this a cleaner takedown. Can you get the kid away from him? Maybe warn the patrons to back away? This won't be pretty, Erica, and I don't need anyone else getting involved."

Erica laughed, shaking her head. "Nobody would get involved with Deputy Derek. There's not a soul in this state who'd cross the second strongest werewolf in the country. Give me ten minutes."

"I'm not-" Derek attempted to argue, to little avail.

Leaning up against the bar, Derek let Erica work her magic. Soon enough, the tavern patrons fled, leaving the area empty, save for Robert, who continued to nurse his bottle of beer.

The last to leave was Robert's son, who Erica had scooped up, without the father even noticing. As the pup passed, Derek smelled the faint hint of cinnamon and tears waft by.

Winking, Erica shut the tavern door, leaving just Derek and Robert in the Blue Moon.

Taking in a deep breath, Derek strode over to Robert, eyes firmly trained on the man's every move. Mostly shaking, Mr. Lahey did little more than stare into empty space.

"Mr. Lahey? Can you turn around and face me, please? We need to have a talk." Derek kept a safe distance from the man, hands over a pistol.

A gruff, indecisive huff from Robert displayed the man's clear disinterest.
"Now, Mr. Lahey. Take off your hood, and turn to face me. Don't make this any harder than it needs to be. I know what you've been doing to your son." Derek's hand balled into a fist, as he took another step forward.

Robert snarled, spinning around and swiping the air in Derek's direction. His hood fell backwards, revealing a wolfish, wrinkled, and monstrous face. Flashing pearly white fangs, Robert's face and mouth were coated in blood. His claws, too, in the same sick, red hue.

All of which smelled of a familiar, tear-stained cinnamon.

Derek growled, his echoed voice rumbling the area around them.

"Robert, did you hurt Isaac? Not that I need to ask, I can smell it all over you." Derek reached behind himself, retrieving a pair of cuffs, embedded with odd symbols around the silver-stained coating. "Put your hands behind your back, Robert. We're going to the station to talk this over. I'll hear your side of the story, and make sure you're given a proper attorney that specializes in our kind."

Laughter.

Dark, menacing, horrific laughter left Robert's throat, accompanied by a series of low, violent growls. Through his nose, the man snorted. "You don't understand. It's that little bastard's fault! ALL IF IT!"

Off the bar stool in a split second, Robert pushed Derek backwards, using his chest to pin Derek to a wall. The wood behind them cracked in response, splintering off and decorating the floor.

Robert crowded next to Derek, eyes blurring the lines between gold and burnt brown. A crazed, feral gaze that Derek saw right through.

"Robert, back down. You're losing control, and you're about to go feral. Isaac doesn't need that, and nobody in this town needs to hear a report about a feral werewolf. Think of the Families in the area, and think about your son. The County Alpha won't tolerate this." Derek gently pushed back, towering over Robert and easily forcing the man to fall on his backside.

From the ground, Robert covered his eyes, manic laughter and growling replaced by deep sobs, and soft whines escaping his nose. "One pup. We should have stopped at one! That little shit had to be born, and he take my wife because of it!"

Derek cringed, stepping away from Robert. His breath hitched, air finding it hard to make its way into his system.

"Then his older brother just HAD to make a better life for his pathetic little brother, because his drunken Dad wasn't good enough! Had to go into the Marines and get himself killed! A fucking flag is all I have left of my son! Two piles of ashes in my home that shouldn't be there!" Robert continued to sob into his hands, body shaking from the force. "It's all his fault! I should have killed him already, but he hasn't suffered enough! My claws don't come close to how I feel! He needs to suffer MORE, DAMMIT!"

In a flash, Robert's sanity fled.

Derek saw Robert's glowing golden eyes darken completely, bordering on black. The sciera of his eyes bled gold, giving his eyes a fully animalistic, frenzied appearance. There was no more reasoning with the “man”, with no more “man” existing in his mind.
Robert lunged up, claws exposed. He swiped at Derek, making contact with the officer's face. Blood spurt from the contact, covering the walls and floor surrounding them with globs of red.

Head down, Derek clutched his face. Blood oozed onto his hands, dripping onto his uniform.

Yet, Deputy Hale didn't cry out in pain. Nor did he move, one hand still firmly gripped on his handcuffs.

Instead, he lifted his head, with long wounds gouged into his face. Stoic, Derek merely shook his head. "You just assaulted a Sheriff's Deputy, with the intent to kill, and admitted to abusing your child, in front of a witness." The deep cuts in Derek's face mended in an instant, skin and muscle stitching themselves together, blood evaporating into the air. He wiped the remains of blood from his face. Before long, Derek’s face was as it had been, not a few moments ago.

Robert garbled an attempt at words, body hunching over, bones cracking as his hands hit the ground, walking on all fours. His chest and back expanded to twice their size, limbs shrinking proportionally. He growled, spinning his head around to spot the "witness".

Erica waved from the doorway, a sad smile crossing her face.

Leaping forward, Robert's mouth was open, snarling and ready to attack Erica with a wide, fang-riddled muzzle.

In a blur, Derek appeared between Robert and Erica, faster than either eyes could spot. Derek grabbed Robert's face, forcing his muzzle shut. He kneed the man in the groin in the same movement, slamming him into the ground as the wolf cried out in pain, howling into the air.

In one fell swoop, he had Robert on his stomach, the man’s wolf-like arms behind his back, and cuffed. Applying pressure to the man's back, Derek fished out a silver collar from his belt, affixing the metallic contraption to Robert's neck. He set it in place, shrinking it to the appropriate size before pressing the spring-loaded trigger on the side.

Roaring and bucking at Derek, Robert convulsed under the Deputy's weight, as the collar administered twelve needle pricks into the man's neck. The werewolf-specific sedative took effect almost immediately, ending Robert's struggle, as he slowly fell into a deep, peaceful sleep. His wolf-like features shifted back into the more human-like facade of his everyday self.

Derek rose up, taking care to cuff Robert's feet as well. From there, he went about busily adjusting the collar onto Robert's regular-sized neck, ensuring all of the sedative had been injected. With each movement he made, Derek kept his blood-red eyes down, slowly returning to their usual green hue, shade-by-shade. Not a drop of sweat dripped from Derek’s body.

"Damn, Hale. You scary. Then again, you're an Alpha, so I shouldn't be all that surprised. All of you fuckers are terrifying." Erica faux-clapped in his direction.

"Wasn't a real fight. He was clearly drunk, Erica." Derek waved Erica off, hefting Robert on his shoulder, like a rag doll. "Where's the pup? This is going to be a long night for him, and I need to make sure he’s healthy. Then get his statement as quickly as possible. I don’t want Duke involved in any of this, if I can help it."

Derek walked out, ignoring the incredulous glare that Erica offered him.

"A loner, just like they say. I never figured an Alpha would act like that.” Erica followed after Derek, sighing quietly.
Police cars littered the highway, just outside the property lines of Blue Moon. Blue and red flashed across the night sky, with a group of deputies taking official statements from the bar's patrons, Erica, and Robert's son, Isaac.

Derek and Sheriff Stilinski stayed in the warm summer grass with Isaac, sitting cross-legged as the boy munched on more of Erica's cooking. The pup wasn't much for speaking, making the hopes of getting an immediate statement quickly vanishing in Derek’s mind.

Breaking the quiet, the Sheriff shifted anxiously in his seat.

"You've got a pretty big appetite, kiddo. Did Miss Erica make a good meal?" Sheriff Stilinski smiled softly, keeping his hands (and all movement) kept safely in his lap.

Isaac nodded, managing a meager smile. "It's good. Daddy doesn't cook or let me eat food, so I was really hungry."

The casualness of the statement struck Derek in the gut, threatening to bring his own lunch back to the surface. Keeping his composure, Derek buried the disgust, flashing a tiny smile. "Why wouldn't your Daddy let you eat food?"

"Um..." Isaac put down his hamburger, scooting away from Derek and the Sheriff. He tucked his knees under his chin, burying his face.

Derek stopped the Sheriff from reaching over, holding his boss' hand in place. Shaking his head, Derek carefully scooted over to Isaac's side, with a wide enough berth to leave the pup a safe space.

"Isaac? You know I'm a werewolf, right? You can trust me, little one. Whatever you say, I will believe you, whole-heartedly. I know how to hear the truth in your voice." Derek offered his hand, laying it carefully on the ground between him and Isaac.

Lifting his head up, Isaac sniffed the air. He eyed Derek up and down, eventually relaxing beside the Alpha. Reluctantly, Isaac took Derek's offering, grasping Derek's massive hand. He gulped, but nodded. "Okay."

Derek grasped back, feeling the child's rapid, fearful heartbeat. "Isaac, did your daddy ever hit you? Or did he ever use his claws somewhere to hurt you? Can you tell me the truth?"

The air, electrified by the short whimpers Isaac attempted to hide, forced Derek's hair to stand up on end.

After what seemed like a short eternity, Isaac nodded again, hiccuping as tears stained his face. The boy's hand went to his navel, clenching his torn clothing.

"Where? Can you show me?" Derek asked, not breaking eye contact with the boy.

Hesitant, Isaac shook nervously as he pointed to his face, head, stomach, back, and groin. Floodgates broke, as the child let large tears slip down his face. "Daddy said he didn't love me anymore. That it was my fault mommy and big bro died, and I had to be punished for being a bad boy!"
In the background, Jackson's face paled, and the rookie officer ran off to the side of the road. The sound of dry-heaving could be heard all around, earning several disgusted groans from the nearby werewolves.

Derek ignored his partner, focused on the pup breaking down in front of him.

"Why doesn't daddy love me? Why'd mommy die? How come big bro went away?" Isaac blubbered, voice breaking into incomprehensible garbling. "I want mommy! I want big bro!"

Derek grabbed Isaac, pulling him into a tight hug, and letting the child use his shoulder to cry on. Snot, tears, and pathetic whimpers coated Derek's uniform. The Deputy gently patted the pup's back.

As Isaac screamed, louder and louder into Derek's shirt, the boy's features began to shift. His otherwise human ears craned backwards, becoming pointed, long, and wolf-like. Hair grew on and around Isaac's face, as fangs popped from the pup's mouth.

"Give me a bit, boss. Back away, slowly. No sudden movements" Derek waved off the Sheriff and several of the other deputies who'd gathered around Derek.

They gave Derek space (rapidly and with paling faces), as requested, watching in awe as the child partially shed his human side, turning into a true werewolf.

The boy's nose flared, and claws popped from his hands and feet. Isaac's grip into Derek's back soon drew blood, which did little to phase the Deputy.

Following Isaac's lead, Derek's allowed his own face to a more muscular, rigid, wolfish version of Isaac's, with glowing, blood-red eyes. Larger fangs draped out of his mouth, creating a monstrous vision that several of Derek's fellow officers cringed at. "Shh... Shh, it's okay. Let it out, Isaac, let it out."

Doing just that, Isaac dug his claws into Derek's body, howling into the officer's shirt. The shrill noise cracked through the area, forcing the humans to cover their ears. Several of the wolves from the bar bowed their heads in respect, broken from their drunken stupor.

Unaffected by the noise, Derek ruffled Isaac's hair, clinging the pup close. The screaming lasted for as long as Isaac's lungs could handle. Eventually, the pup wore himself out, sniffling in broken hiccups as his death-grip on Derek's back weakened. Before long, Isaac's eyes slammed shut, calming down as he forced himself into a sleep.

Both Isaac and Derek's shifts melted away. Derek waited a few minutes, ensuring the pup was asleep in his arms before waving back the Old Man.

Sheriff Stilinski walked away from Erica's interrogation, leaving her in Deputy Parrish's capable hands. He joined Derek's side, eyeing the small child carefully.

"Like deja vu, Derek. I feel like I'm in my twenties again." The Old Man rubbed the back of his neck, sighing painfully.

Derek nodded, gently laying Isaac in the back of his squad car. He covered the pup with his jacket from the front seat, making sure the pup could relax properly. "Not really. I still had my Uncle Peter, who raised me like his own. Isaac doesn't have that." Shutting the door to the cruiser, Derek turned to face his boss. He, folded his arms avoiding the Sheriff's gaze. "I knew about Isaac's Family, through my Uncle. Robert abandoned his birth pack from the north, and was essentially disowned for marrying a human-born. Isaac's mother was a bitten wolf, from a family that weren't
fond of our kind. Neither of Isaac's families would take him in, that's for certain."

"Damn." Sheriff Stilinski leaned against the police cruiser, eyeing the child in the back. His aged face seemed to tire out even further. "Not what I was wanting to hear, Derek. I had DHS on the horn while you worked your werewolf mojo on the boy. They're not going to send anyone out."

"Why am I not surprised?" Derek's hands balled into fists, blood dripping from the palm of his hands.

"Derek, I'm sorry. I tried to get them to send an agent to at least assist in the transition, but the law is the law. All abandoned or removed pups from werewolf homes become property of the County Alpha's pack, if no other relative is willing to claim them." Sheriff Stilinski pulled out his cell phone, rummaging through his contacts. "Do you want to call Deucalion, or should I?"

"Nobody's calling Deucalion." Derek stole the Old Man's phone, shaking it in the air. "Isaac's father's in jail, he has no noteworthy bloodline, the child of a bitten, and very clearly a runt. The County Pack would eat him alive, probably torment him for being weak, and I'd be arresting him ten years from now." His eyes blazed red, turning back to spot the resting pup in his car. While the wounds in his back had already healed over, he still felt the echo of pain and agony from the pup ebbing inside of him.

Pain he knew all too well.

"What other options do we have? Do you have any idea of a local werewolf pack or Family that would take him in? Are any of them looking to expand?" Sheriff Stilinski eyed the rest of the area, at the dozens of werewolves surrounding them. All who avoided the pup, the cops, and the situation like the plague.

"Of course they're not. They want blood children, blood pack. No pack would ever take a strange pup, especially one with a bitten parent." Derek kept his mouth shut, covering his eyes. His heart thudded, chest burned, and gut churning.

This was his fault.

Because of his call to arrest Robert Lahey, Isaac would probably be just as bad off as he was. Knowing the County Alpha's pack, probably worse.

Then it hit Derek, like a ton of bricks.

"This is my fault. That kid bonded with me, and shared his pain. Isaac probably hasn't had that in God knows how long. This is MY responsibility."

Derek's red eyes burned brighter, as the Sheriff eyed the Deputy cautiously.

Shaking off his eerie eyes, Derek shoved the phone back into the Sheriff's front pocket. "Yeah, there is one. Mine. I'll take him in, finally shut up my Uncle and sister about starting a pack. I'm an Alpha, I have the authority." He brushed off the Sheriff, pulling out his own cell phone. Gulping, he rummaged through his contacts, hand hovering over "Alpha Duke".

"Excuse me?" Sheriff Stilinski eyed Derek like he was a madman, jaw firmly planted on the ground.

Shrugging, Derek ignored the Sheriff's incredulous glare. "I said, I'll take him in. I'll call Duke, he's an old family friend, and I know he won't care about me taking the boy off his hands. They'll have the papers drafted up in twenty minutes to get him off their hands. It'll probably put them in better graces with the police department, too."
"Why?" The Sheriff put a hand on Derek's shoulder, eyeing him cautiously. "Son, no offense, but this is out of the blue. You've never talked about building a pack. In fact, you've been pretty adamant about not building one."

His eyes darted to Isaac, still fast asleep in the car. Something primal, deep in his chest, came to the forefront. "This was my call, boss, my responsibility. Even if I hadn't made the call, Isaac just bonded with me in a way that only packmates would bond. Maybe he did it because he was starved for any kind of attention from his disgrace of a father, maybe he did it by accident, not knowing the consequences, it really doesn't matter. It's something that humans wouldn't understand, but... In my culture, that kind of bond can't be ignored."

The Sheriff rubbed his face, eyeing the young man carefully. "I don't know about all that werewolf stuff, but... Derek... Are you sure? You're pushing thirty, but this is a big responsibility for a single man to take on. Trust me, I know from personal experience how hard it can be. Especially for one so young."

Derek laughed, quietly. His hand shook violently as he pressed down on Alpha Duke's contact, and the phone began ringing. He brought it up to his ear, shaking his head. "I have no idea what I'm doing. I just have to do it."

"Spoken like a true parent. He said the same thing to me, five years ago." Sheriff Stilinski stood by Derek's side the entire time, standing close by the young man through the entire phone call with the County Alpha.

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Next Update By: 05/29/2016
At twenty-eight, Stiles Stilinski finally felt "old". Not in the literal sense, of years lived on the planet, or that he physically felt aged, but actually as someone with genuine maturity. Something that the Class Clown of Beacon High never expected of himself.

In the living room of his nearly-vacant New York apartment, the lanky, pale man pulled at the ends of his brown hair. His eyeglasses threatened to fly off with each turn of his head, in the abject horror of having a group of teenagers offload his boxes and furniture to the transport truck just outside the front door.

"Watch it! That box is marked fragile!"

"Take the legs off the couch! You're not going to get it through the door like that, did you even bother to measure!?"

"No, no, that's my suitcase! It's going with me to the airport, put it down!"

"How the hell did you manage to put a hole in the wall? It was a wicker chair! Like hell am I paying that out of my deposit, call your manager, he's forking that bill!"

"No, you may NOT use my laptop to order lunch! You're not even done moving my shit!"

"You clogged the toilet? Then plunge it! I'm not your father, I'm not going to unclog your shit for you!"

By the early afternoon, with his apartment cleaned out, Stiles fell flat onto the dusty hardwood, laughing gently to himself. Five hours of living hell, with over-energetic part-time, underpaid teenagers on summer vacation, packing his life’s belongings into a shabby looking moving truck.

"Now I know why my dad looks as old as he does. Oh my God, I was such a piece of shit. I'm buying him a cake when we get home." Stiles spoke to the air, taking in a deep breath.

Sitting up, Stiles groaned, stretching into the air. After briefly checking his phone, Stiles hopped up. "Scott! It's time to go! Pack up whatever you're reading, you can finish it on the plane!"

Stiles busied himself around the house, double checking every nook and cranny. "Fridge is empty. Cabinets are bare. Checked the dresser drawers last night, closets emptied. Mail already forwarded. Laptop, phone, and charger are in my carry-on. Landlord has the keys..." A bright smile beamed, accompanied by a sigh of relief and a week's worth of last-minute stress finally over.

"Scott! Come on, it's time to go! I'm serious, put down Charlotte's Web, it'll still be there when we're in the taxi!" Stiles took a moment and shivered as the words left his lips. His father clearly possessed his body from across the country, because like hell did he actually say that of his own free will.

Mentally groaning, Stiles dropped his bags, and jogged off to the second bedroom of the house. He opened the door, spotting his son sitting in the middle of the barren room.
A young boy of five (five and three quarters, as Stiles was often reminded), Scott Stilinski stood a good half foot taller than boys his age, with a head of thick black hair that curled at his bangs. Unlike his father, Scott had a warmer, tanned hue of skin.

"Come on, Scotty, it's time to go. Paw Paw's waiting for us, and we've got to get a move on if we're going to make our plane!" Stiles walked closer to his son, extending his hand.

With a huff, Scott ignored his father, scooting farther away. He held tightly onto his red backpack, with a plush wolf's head poking out of it, smothered by the sheer volume of books crammed inside of it.

"Damn." Stiles thought, praying this wasn't "it". He plastered on a smile, leaning over Scott with a stern glance. "Come on, Scotty. We're really got to go. Aren't you ready to see Paw Paw and get moved in?"

"Don't wanna. This is MY room." Scott folded his arms, snuffing through his nose.

Stiles glanced over his child's puffy, angry face, mentally swearing every obscene word he hadn't been able to use since Scott's birth. Everyone in the area that knew about the move, from the noisy grandmas next door, all the way to the muscleheads at his gym, had warned Stiles about this possibility.

Not that Stiles needed to know his son was stubborn. He'd known that for years. "Revenge", Stiles' father had told him.

"Scott. We've got to make our flight, and have to leave right now. Come on, Paw Paw is waiting and can't wait to see you, little buddy!" Stiles grinned, bending down to his son's level. He ruffled Scott's hair.

Scott's face softened for all of a moment. He pouted, burying his head into his backpack.

A low blow, perhaps. Scott's favorite person in the whole world was his Paw-Paw. The Old Man spoiled Scott at every chance, even from across the country. They Skyped every night Paw-Paw wasn't pulling a night shift, always ending in a good night story, complete with "voices".

Stiles' victory was short lived. Soon after, Scott sneered and put his nose high in the air.

"No!" Scott barked, turning around and facing away from Stiles. He huffed again, clearly fuming. "This is MY room, dad. MY room. This is OUR house. I'm not going! Paw Paw can move here, instead!" During his short rant, Scott's eyes glowed a gentle gold, ears pointing and miniature claws expanding from his nails.

Stiles didn't back away from Scott's aggressive posture. Instead, he moved closer, sitting next to Scott and pulling the pup into his lap. He kissed the top of Scott's head, hugging around Scott's waist.

"This is his den, where he feels safest. Of course he doesn't want to move." Stiles thought to himself. Taking in a deep breath, Stiles poked Scott in the side, earning a ticklist laugh from the boy, voiding out any semblance of aggression from the tiny werewolf. "Okay, Lil' Buddy, let's talk this out, okay? Remember why we're moving to Beacon Hills?"

Scott nodded. "Because Paw Paw is there."

"You're right! We're going home so we can be with Paw Paw, and because I have a new job there!" Stiles braced himself, biting down on his other lip. "Do you remember the other reason?"
Another pout formed on Scott's face. His ears fell flat against his head, dropping his gaze.
"'Because I can't run in the park when I look like a werewolf? Or play on the playgrounds with the other kids? Oh, and because the mean lady at the bodega calls me bad names?"

"Mrs. Bewl can fuck off to the deepest depths of grocery hell." Stiles thought, before prodding Scott in the side again, earning another giggle and a bright smile. "That's right. There's not a County Alpha for New York City, and there's a lot of ordinances that aren't good for werewolves. If Daddy had known that a long time ago, he would have gone to a different college!"

Not that Stiles had much of a choice. Staying in California, and staying home had been impossible after Scott's birth. That, and the best college of child psychology was in New York, which actually taught psychology from more than just a human perspective. His doctorate from that college, in that mixed program, could guarantee him a position anywhere in the United States.

Of course, Stiles knew New York, like most of the east coast, wasn't werewolf friendly with their 90% human population. He just hadn't realized how horrible they truly were, until he'd lived there with a pup himself, and heard the shit that could leave their mouths.

Shaking off the mental pictures of hell from their family outings, Stiles grinned. "In Beacon Hills, there's just as many werewolves and supernatural species as there are humans! It's like a big ol' melting pot of everything! You'd be able to make friends, and you can go to school with all the kids in the town! You won't have to go to a special school, like you would here in New York."

Scott pouted again, leaning over and rubbing his hand against the hardwood floor. "This is my home, dad. I'm gonna miss it, and my tummy's hurt all morning."

Stiles pulled his son into a tight hug, picking him up and kissing his forehead as he lifted him into the air. "I will too, Scotty. But you know what? I bet you'll love Beacon Hills just as much. Don't you love running around the forests in Paw Paw's backyard?"

A light sparked in Scott's eyes, excitement running through his veins. He shyly nodded. "Yeah."

"How about Miss Melissa's cooking, especially those spicy burgers? Or Auntie Lydia spoiling you rotten and taking you shopping?" Stiles pulled out all of the guns, while walking with Scott out of the child's room. Because while he advocated open conversations with Scott about everything, he was not going to miss a plane over it.

"Yeah!" Scott beamed from ear to ear, practically bouncing in Stiles' arms.

Stiles felt the chorus of angels singing in the back of his head, knowing victory was in his grasp. Reaching the living room, he snagged his rolling luggage, carry on, and re-adjusted Scott's position in his other arm, trotting towards the front door. "You know what else? I promise we'll get you a bigger room, and you can stuff it full of as many books as you want! Books to the ceiling, if you wanted!"

"Really?" Scott's eyes couldn't possibly grow any larger, for fear of rolling out of their sockets.

"Is Daddy lying? Come on, lil' buddy, I know you can tell!" Stiles paused at the front door, locking it as he and Scott stepped through it.

Leaning onto Stiles' chest, Scott planted his ear right above his father's heart. Just as Stiles shut the door behind them, Scott shook his head. "No! You never lie, Daddy!"

Stiles exited the front of his apartment, stopping at the end of the stone steps. Glancing back up, he and Scott paused briefly.

Stiles nodded, raising a hand up to call a taxi. "Me too."

The lump in the depth of Stiles' chest came back to the surface as the taxi pulled up beside them. A searing, cold pain that he'd buried five years earlier, after his entire world fell apart.

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For the second time that day, Stiles began to sympathize with his father. Because subjecting his father to three flights a year was an act of unrelenting cruelty that he would apologize for with two cakes upon landing.

If it wasn't the massive pre-flight line, the TSA bitch that groped his ass, or any of the MANY delays that would force him to rip more of his hair out, then the passengers that he sat next to clearly would.

A sad day in the world when Scott, a five (and three quarters) year-old acted with more tact than most whiny adults.

Yet, when it was all said and done, Stiles and Scott made their way out of security, waiting for Stiles' suitcase to make its debut on the retrieval line.

Scott yawned loudly, holding onto Stiles' leg to keep from falling over. Somewhere in between Scott's nap on the plane and the baggage retrieval, he'd shifted. A pair of pointed ears, a furry, wrinkled face, and baby fangs crept out of Scott's mouth.

"I'm hungry." Scott whined, rubbing the sleep away from his eyes.

Stiles nodded, ruffling Scott's hair. "When Paw Paw gets us, we'll go get something to eat, first thing." Swearing under his breath, Stiles kept a lookout for his luggage, ready to explode if they'd lost his only clothes he'd have until the transport truck arrived.

While waiting, Stiles barely noticed as an elderly woman with soft grey curls stepped beside him. She squealed in delight, leaning down to Scott's side as she picked up her own bag.

"Aww! What a cute little pup! Look at those adorable little ears!" The Old Bag leaned down, eye to eye with Scott, grinning as her own features shifted, into an aged, wrinkled mess of a werewolf. Her eyes, a golden hue, matched Scott's perfectly. "Where's your mommy and daddy? What are you doing here all by yourself, sweetheart?"

Stiles cringed, turning to face the woman, and missing as his bag passed by in front of him.

Scott leaned up, tugging on Stiles' pants as he smiled. "This is my Dad! I don't have a Mom."

As if a bucket of cold water was thrown on her face, the woman shifted back. She stood up, facing Stiles incredulously. "Oh! This is your... Son? Oh, I didn't know! You both look so... Different."

Stiles rolled his eyes. Few things irritated him more than people pointing out the difference in species between him and his son. What pissed him off even more was those who pointed out the racial difference, on top of it. As if it were any of their business.

Not that it mattered, or was worth the time to argue. Human, werewolf, banshee, demon, it didn't
really matter. Everyone in the world had the potential to be a real asshole. They weren't worth his time.

"Yep, this is Scott Stilinski. My pride and joy!" Stiles scooped his pup up, kissing the top of Scott's head, and embarrassing his son in the process. He spotted his luggage coming down the line once again, ready to make a beeline away from the Old Bag.

"But... Your son's... He's a werewolf, right? You're a human, I can smell it on you. How's that possible?" The woman kept glancing back and forth between them, her mind clearly blown from such a simple fact.

"Yep, this is MY son. My ex-fiance’ was a werewolf. That a problem?" Stiles' tone went flat, holding his son closer. It was at times like these he wished his eyes could do the glowy werewolf thing, capable of scaring off others.

"No, of course not!" Taken aback, the Old Bag cleared her throat, fiddling anxiously with her purse. Her nose stuck up high in the air, scoffing under her breath. "It's just, surprising, that's all. In all my years, I never thought I'd see the day when a werewolf actually... Well... Went through a full nine months with a human's offspring inside them. Back in my day, Halflings like that thing would have been termi-"

Putting Scott down, Stiles covered his son's ears, taking care to block out any noise he'd soon hear. He smiled at the Old Bag, chuckling gently. "Please don't insult my pup or any pup with that kind of talk. I'd appreciate him having some innocence left after everything he's been through in his life. Hell, you don't even know half of what his life has been, and you just assume you know everything because you're a wrinkled prune who's probably seen it all."

Several individuals around Stiles, a mix of species, stared at him in disbelief. None more so than the woman herself. Sure, most humans wouldn't dare to talk or insult a werewolf like that, but Stiles wasn't "most humans". He'd grown up with werewolves his entire life at school, and been babysat by a Hellhound until he was 14. Their cultures weren't scary to him, at all.

Stiles brought his nose closer to the Old Bag, right in her face. "Frankly I'm disgusted that someone of his own species would say such vile, disgusting things about a pup. A pup that you didn't even realize had a human father until he brought it up. A pup that smells, acts, and IS 100% werewolf, that even your own nose couldn't tell the difference in. So you can take your hypocritical world view, like the rest of your fucked up generation, and shove it up your coal pipe."

Stiles snagged his suitcase off the line, faux-growling through his nose at the woman, tugging Scott away. "Don't be around that lady, Scott. She's not very nice, and clearly comes from a pack with no manners or sense of respect!"

"Okay, Daddy." Scott waved to the older woman, innocently. "Bye, mean lady!"

Ignoring the dropped jaws and generally dazed crowd all around them, Stiles and Scott left the immediate vicinity, making their way into the front entrance to the airport. A large number of people were gathered, in a sea of warm hugs, reunions, and jovial gatherings.

He scouted out the area, looking for any trace of his father. Stiles stomped his foot with each step, chest racing and mind fuming. "What the hell did I leave New York for? If I wanted to hear that bullshit, I would have gone grocery shopping next to my apartment. Bitch."

"Stiles!"
Jumping up, Stiles squawked, brought out of his funk and focusing on the other end of the airport. Next to the lobby's fountain, Sheriff Stilinski waved like a madman, already red in the face and face beaming. Beside the Sheriff, a woman of tan complexion, sharp, black curls, and a saintly face, waved with equal fervor.

"PAW PAW!" Still shifted, Scott kicked off from Stiles, running on all fours for half the distance between them. He leapt into the air, clinging onto Sheriff Stilinski with full force. Scott hugged his grandfather's neck, wrapping his tiny legs around the man's midsection.

"Scotty! Oh my God, I've missed you so much!" Sheriff Stilinski teared up, kissing Scott's forehead and cheeks, and devolving into a softly sobbing mess of a grandpa.

"Me too, Paw-Paw!" Scott lifted his head back, beaming at Miss Delgado. "Hi Melissa!"

Stiles finally joined the hug-fest, watching as Scott leapt and hugged Melissa with no less ceremony than he had for his grandfather.

"Hey Dad! Good to see you!" Stiles dropped his bags, as he and his father hugged it out. They didn't move, didn't speak, and stayed like that for several minutes.

Stiles accepted a long time ago that his father wasn't the best communicator. Whether in his line of work as the Sheriff, as a father, or as a window in mourning at therapy, everyone knew the "Old Man" only spoke when necessary, and never about his feelings.

So Stiles didn't expect a melodramatic reunion. Silence was golden, and merely being there with his father again, after so long, was enough.

As the two broke their hug, Sheriff Stilinski wiped the tears from his eyes, snorted back the snot he'd accumulated, and laughed. "Took you damn long enough, son. We've been waiting!"

Rolling his eyes, Stiles laughed. "Yeah, we had a layover, and our first flight was delayed by an hour." Turning to face Melissa, Stiles gave the woman a one-armed hug, while Scott clamored back into the Sheriff's arms. "Speaking of which, this little guy is starving, and I'm about to pass out. Dinner?"

"Oum's Korean Barbeque?" Sheriff Stilinski rose an eyebrow, with a mischievous grin.

Scott's eyes grew ten sizes, mouth agape in a gasp, and hands clenched together, as if in prayer. "Yes! Please Daddy?! Can we go? Can we go? That's got the really cool guy with white hair and dances with the spinning knives! He's so cool!"

Stiles sighed, prodding his father in the chest while Scott rambled on, endlessly. "You play dirty, Old Man."

Playing innocent, Sheriff Stilinski scoffed. "She only lets me eat rabbit food. Between you and her, I can't get a damn burger in Beacon Hills to save my life." He glared at Melissa, who rolled her eyes in response.

"I swear, did you even look at your last report from the heart hospital?" Melissa glared at Sheriff Stilinski, poking him repeatedly in the shoulder.

Stiles eventually shrugged, picking up his suitcase and huffing. "Fine, Dad. We'll go to Oum's, but Melissa and I have the right to cut you off at any time!"

Stiles' father grinned like a supervillain, having finally been victorious in taking over the world. He
patted Stiles on the shoulder, reaching for his keys. "I'll be good, son. Come on, our car is parked at the edge of the lot, but it shouldn't."

Melissa yanked the keys out of the Sheriff's hands, giving him a stern glare. "How about Scotty and I go pick up the car, so you two can... Talk." She offered her hand to Scott, who took it with no hesitation.

Both Stiles and his father paled at the word "talk", each knowing damn well what she meant.

The two waited until Melissa and Scott were far out of sight, skipping off to the parking lot, until Stiles rubbed the back of his neck. He sat down on the top of his luggage. "How's life treatin' ya, pops?" A nervous chuckle left his throat.

Sheriff Stilinski tapped his foot, plopping down on the edge of the water fountain, beside his son. "My best Deputy just took a week's leave from work. Now I've been responsible for babysitting that spoiled shit Whittemore all week, and I want to pull the rest of my hair out."

"Jackson's not that bad, Dad. You really need to give him a chance." Stiles cringed on behalf of his friend, knowing that Jackson's attitude would never mesh well with the rest of the Sheriff's department. Or the fact that Jackson’s father had a net worth in the millions, and practically owned the town of Beacon Hills.

"He's not ready, Stiles. He should have joined the police force, instead, gotten a few years under his belt, or some kind of special certification, like everyone else in my office did." Sheriff Stilinski sighed, waving his son off. "It is what it is, I don’t want to talk about the brat anymore, he's nothing but a headache." The Sheriff grumbled, fiddling anxiously with his hands. "Frankly, given what happened, I should have made Hale take a whole month off, but if he's out of the office, we're screwed on any non-human incidents."

Pure silence between father and son erupted, with only the gentle sound of water pouring just behind them. Neither glanced at the other, both with forlorn expressions crossing their faces.

"Have you had a chance to look into what I asked you about? Let's just get the bad news out of the way already, so I can enjoy the rest of my coming home party." Stiles crossed his legs, sucking in a deep breath. "Did you find Scott an Alpha? Anyone outside the County Alpha's pack?"

The Sheriff shook his head. "I called in every favor I had with the supernatural communities. Alpha Satomi says she's too old, and doesn't want to meddle in the affairs of others. Alpha Sandez, in San Francisco, isn't willing to travel. Alpha Reynolds outright refused, not wanting to even see the "Halfling". The last one? Well... Before I had the time to ask Alpha Hale, he took his week's leave."

Stiles shrugged, clapping his hands together. "That was about what I figured. Thanks for trying, dad."

Rubbing the scruff of his beard, Sheriff Stilinski sighed, painfully. "Why's it so important, son? There are plenty of wolf families that grow up without an Alpha. I thought that was common?"

Stiles' stomach wrapped in knots, removing whatever hunger he'd had mere moments ago. "Werewolves pups have developmental stages, just like Human kids do. Unlike humans kids, pups are supposed to be "taught" these special stages. Because I'm not a werewolf, Scott's missed three of them, and needs an Alpha, or an equivalent of one, to get him back on track."

"Is that bad?" The Sheriff's gaze snapped up, clenching the fabric of his pants until they threatened
"Not bad, per se, but just a really bad sign of immaturity that he'd probably get teased for. Scott can't howl, he hasn't expressed any interest in hunting, and can't control when he shifts." Stiles' foot shook up and down, while he folded his arms. "These are things he's supposed to learn from his parents. Things I'm physically incapable of teaching him, or instilling in him. The things Emma would have taught him."

The Sheriff cringed at Emma's name, grasping both hands together. "Then we'll need to find him someone."

Stiles nodded, eyes thousands of miles away. "I was a freak in school, Dad. The one who never had any friends, and got stared at because of my ADHD. If I didn't have Emma and Jackson growing up, I wouldn't have had anyone. I'm not going to let Scott be like that, I want him to have a normal childhood."

"We won't let that happen, Stiles. There are hundreds upon thousands of werewolves in the County, more just outside of Beacon Hills. We'll find one who can show him the ropes, I promise." The Sheriff put his arm around Stiles, patting his son on the shoulder.

Stiles' face shook, reddening in the process. "I don't care if I have to suck a werewolf dick to get it, but I'll find an Alpha who'll teach Scotty what he needs to know. Here in Beacon Hills, he has a chance to be a normal pup, and make friends, and be proud of his culture." He put his arm around his father's shoulder as well, patting him right back. "I'm talking to Duke, first. Maybe I can talk sense into that man's head."

Stiles pretended not to watch his father's face slowly collapse upon itself, hearing those words.

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Stiles, wiped out after the trip to Oum's, unpacking his belongings, getting Scott ready for bed, reading a bedtime story, and freshening up, would have loved nothing more than to crash in bed. Instead, he found himself in the oldest mansion in the Beacon Hills city limits, a few hours just before midnight. A Victorian-styled, 3-story mansion that stood as long as the city's founding. As the headquarters for the County Alpha, few managed to get within the property lines without getting the boot, even fewer saw the inside of the hallowed halls without a three-month long waiting list.

Yet, Stiles waltzed inside the property, escorted by seven people around his age, and hugged by virtually every member of the Alpha's pack.

"Glad to see you, again! Congratulations on the job!"

"My son's starting elementary school this year! He's so nervous, I can't wait to tell him that Uncle Stiles is working in the building!"

"A Doctor? Oh, sweetheart, I'm so proud of you! We all are!"

“Missed you, Stiles! We love you!”
Guided to the study, Stiles gave one final hug to the parade of werewolves he'd been surrounded by, before shutting the door behind him.

The Alpha's study, a regal room with stocked bookshelves lining each wall, and a roaring fireplace that made little sense to have blaring at the start of summer. Two plush chairs were sat in front of the fireplace, facing away from the door.

Stiles strode to the edge of the room, taking the open seat. He bowed his head, keeping his eyes trained firmly to the ground. Sweat poured down his neck, a combination of the room's unbearable heat, and the situation in general. "Thank you for seeing me, Alpha Deucalion. The honor is-"

A booming laugh left from the chair across from him. "You're fine, Dr. Stilinski. No need for ceremony, how long have we known each other? Since you were in Kindergarten?"

Lifting his eyes, Stiles' gaze focused on the 98-year old werewolf, and County Alpha, Deucalion. "Duke", to his friends and family.

Who, despite his advanced age, maintained a clean, unwrinkled, pale complexion. The man's eyes were wrapped in a silken bandage, matching his snowy-white hair. Taller than Stiles by a solid foot, but lacking any muscle definition, and about twenty pounds underweight.

"It's been a while, Duke. Oh, and it's just Stiles, for you. None of that Doctor bullshit to friends and family." Stiles beamed, leaning back in his seat, crossing his legs. "How's the last couple of years treated you?"

Duke chuckled, reaching for the coffee mug in front of him. His hands fumbled picking it up, arm shaking the whole way to his mouth. "Unkind. I should have retired ten years ago. Being an Alpha this long has put more strain on my body than I'd anticipated. I lost my eyes a few months ago, unfortunately. My blood is thin, and I apologize for the excessive heat, I'm constantly cold and feeble."

Looking away from the painful sight before him, Stiles shook his head. "Still no successor?" Stiles took his own turn to chuckle shaking his head. "I see you're as picky as ever."

A devilish smile left Duke's lips. "I have so many to choose from, and none of them have met my requirements. I'm still waiting on someone to rise up and prove themselves. None have." He sat his coffee down, taking in a deep breath. The Alpha coughed, leaning back and resting his head on the back of his chair. "How is my Great-Grandson doing?"

Stiles grinned, reaching inside his jacket and producing a candid photograph at Scott's fifth birthday, ages earlier, inside a small locket. Leaning over, he put it in the palm of Duke's hand. "He's doing great! Not even in Kindergarten, and he already knows how to read, write out his Alphabet, and even do a little math! I spent more on books for that pup than I do anything else!"

"My, my. What a smart little pup. I loved reading at his age, myself." Duke smiled, clutching at the locket in his hand. His fingertips trailed the intricate detailing, popping open the locket. He didn't turn down to gaze at the photo, instead sniffing the scent of a young pup from inside of it. "Thank you, Stiles. I appreciate this, more than you know."

Clear as day, Stiles could spot the old man's hand shaking, wrapped around the locket. Which, he didn't believe for a moment came from his age.

"Scott would love to see you, Duke. He's at the age where he's been asking about his mother,
and..." Stiles paused, sighing loudly as he shook his head. "I'd never keep Scott from meeting you. Even after everything that happened, enough time had passed that it should be safe for you and the pack to meet him."

Hitching his breath, Stiles felt cold, even in front of the blazing fireplace and heat of the summer. His sweat evaporated. "What I'm trying to say, Duke, is that I want him to know his Great-Grandfather, and know his birth-pack. He'll be going to school soon, and he'll meet the other pups, anyway. They'll smell like him, and he'll know, it's just a matter of time."

Duke shifted his seat closer to the fire, the man's face turning away from Stiles. "Regarding your request... For one of our adult werewolves to train Scott?" He dodged Stiles' question entirely, shutting the locket in his hands and tucking it in his front shirt pocket. "I'm afraid we cannot accommodate you. Too many of them are still ashamed from their actions during the birth, and are still close with Emma. A matter of cultural pride, Stiles. Truly, it's us, not Scott."

"I figured as much, Duke." Stiles swore under his breath, running a hand over his face. He feigned a smile, nodding. "Still, I thought I'd try."

"I can offer you some advice, however." A shy smile crossed Duke's lips.

Stiles' head shot up. "Really? Do you know someone who can help? I'm serious, I'll take anyone who's not an asshole, comes from a good family, and isn’t a pedophile."

Duke laughed, waving Stiles' thought away. "Seek out Alpha Derek Hale. He's one of your father's newer deputies."

"Hale? That name sounds familiar." Stiles reached into the back of head, trying to pull a face with the name.

"A few years older than you. He was a fairly famous member of the High School Lacrosse Team. Took them to state." Duke said, reaching to his side and producing a manilla envelope. He pulled its contents out, a stack of thick papers. "Graduated top of his class at the Police Academy, and is a certified member of the Werewolf Enforcement Recon Embassy, WERE. An organization that only 5% of law enforcement werewolves are capable of completing. Interpol attempted to recruit him several times over, as well as our own federal government. The Secret Service sought him out, aggressively. He's the second strongest Alpha in our country, without a shadow of a doubt."

Stiles' face dropped by a mile. "This guy's a deputy? In a Podunk town like Beacon Hills? What the fuck is he doing here?"

Duke set his notes aside, pushing them to Stiles. "Regardless of his background, or why he's here, that is the man who I believe would be the best to train Scott. I've already run a thorough background check on him, and I know his family, personally."

"Really?" Stiles snagged the envelope from the side table, rummaging through them. On the front of the file, he spotted Derek's profile picture. A man, probably in his thirties, with sharp brown eyes, and a rugged, overwhelming presence of power. Mostly in the eyebrows. "Do you think he'd do it? I mean, I'm not a werewolf. I have a doctorate in child psychology, and that's about all I have going for me."

"Which works in your favor, because I'm certain he would use your own expertise." Duke coughed again, hacking himself to death for several minutes. He waved off Stiles' attempt to help. "Alpha Hale recently started his pack. A young man, Isaac Lah-... Well, I'll supposed he's Isaac Hale now, legally. Regardless, Alpha Hale has recently adopted a son, who's gone through some difficult experiences. I'm sure someone of your education would be greatly appreciated to get Isaac through some difficult times that are sure to come. Though advice on being a single father? Far more
valuable a trade, in my opinion."

Stiles gulped, in awe over the man's credentials. One didn't get much more "macho Alpha werewolf" than this guy. Hell, the man's eyebrows alone could probably make a perp piss his pants. This was the perfect kind of guy who could teach Scott everything he'd need to know to make it in the real world.

"You're sure he'd be good with Scott? I mean, what's his opinion on humans? Not everyone is as accepting as you are, Duke. There's still a lot of that old-world mentality on cross-species pups."

Stiles put the file away, wishing he could stare Duke straight in the eyes for an honest response.

Duke's smile, however, spoke volumes. "I can attest with great certainty that Alpha Hale harbors no ill will towards humans. I'm sure your father would give Derek a glowing review in his attempts to bridge the gaps between humans and werewolves in our County."

"Dad would approve? Good enough for me, dad hates everyone." Stiles thought, pushing Derek's file back into Duke's hands. "Alright, then. I'll give this Derek guy a try! I bet my dad could get me a meeting with him."

Shooting out of the seat, Stiles extended his hand, shaking duke's firmly. "Thanks, Duke. I really appreciate everything. I wouldn't have been able to get where I'm at without your financial support in my education, all of your advice on raising Scott, and getting me my connections in New York. You've made my life and Scott's life a thousand times better than what I would have been able to do on my own."

Duke chuckled, struggling to stand on his own two feet. He held onto Stiles for dear life, wobbling on his bony legs. "I still wish you'd allow me to purchase you and Scott a home. Something spacious, with a lot of land for the pup to grow up in."

Rolling his eyes, Stiles patted Duke on the back as the two hugged tightly in each other's arms. "I've got to be responsible at some point, Duke. That's one thing I'm going to give Scott myself, a good home, and a good bedtime story every night until he's a hormonal teenager who hates me."

"I know you'll do just that!" Duke broke their hug, as his face lit up. "Oh, Stiles... Just a moment. Speaking of bedtime stories..." He stumbled several times over, reaching the tallest bookcase in the library. With shaking hands, he touched many spines, before plucking an ancient tome from the middle of the case. After dusting it off, sniffing it once for good measure (just to be sure), Duke limped to Stiles' side, putting the book in the young man's arms.

"Grimoire", the tome read.

"My great-grandmother brought this with her when she first came into this country. A book of fairy tales and magic, read to all the pups in our family when they were about Scott's age. An heirloom, of sorts, actually." A gentle smile, accompanied by a single tear from under his silken bandage, crossed Duke's face. "If he enjoys reading that much, I'd like for him to have it. None of the other pups in the pack care for it much, and none of my children were very attached to it. I doubt they'd miss it when I'm gone."

Ignoring the lattermost depressing commentary, Stiles nodded, holding onto the book as though it were gold itself. "He'll cherish it, Duke. Thank you."

Stiles made his way to the door, after a quick goodbye to Duke, stopping as his hand touched the doorknob.
"Can I ask how Emma is doing?" Stiles asked.

Duke eased back into his chair, sinking his head slowly into the side of the chair. He paused for a moment, hand balling into a tight fist. "Still in southern Mexico, with the old family, living with her Aunt. Teaching little ones, children and pups, how to read and write in English. She calls every couple of months."

A gentle smile crossed Stiles' face. "Can you give her a message?"

Duke nodded. "If these old bones make it long enough to speak to her again."

Taking in a deep breath, Stiles gripped the doorknob, threatening to break it off. "Let her know that if she ever wanted to see Scott, I'd be more than happy to arrange one, and that... I'm sure Scott would want to see her, too."

Except for the flickering flames, eating away at the cinders in the fireplace, silence broke throughout the home.

Stiles huffed. "I don't blame her for what happened. It wasn't her fault, it wasn't my fault, and it wasn't Scott's fault. What happened in the Hospital was nature, and out of all of our hands."

Opening the door, Stiles stuck one foot out the door. "Even if she can't be his mother, Scott deserves to know her, at the very least."

The door closed behind Stiles.

Deucalion sunk in his chair, coughing into his hand. As he pulled away his hand, blood spotted the palm of his hand. He wiped the blood away on his shirt. "I'll let her know."

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On the next chapter: Derek Hale isn't sure what he's doing. In a week's time, his Alpha came to the surface, prickling and grinding his heart into oblivion for having a pup that was so visibly miserable, and broken from his birth family. He has no idea what he's doing, and worries that he's going to screw up. Thankfully, Jackson Whittemore is on the job, and surprisingly helpful in giving Derek the push he needed to genuinely bond with Isaac. As Derek and Isaac make their first trip into town as father and son, Isaac meets a nice young pup in the park, who he immediately bonds with over the monkey bars. A boy who declares Isaac as his "best friend". Derek doesn't care who this "Scott" is, Derek can't wait to meet the boy's parents and make sure Isaac smiles like that more in the future.
Chapter 3

"Daddy... Stop, I... I can't breathe." Cried out a weak, pained voice of a young boy.

"Good! Disgusting little bastard pup." Hummed a dark, deep tone of an older man. Broken laughter accompanied the words.

"DAD, STOP IT! YOU'RE KILLING HIM!" Called out a frantic young woman.

“The bastard will get what's coming to him, Laura. My mistake will finally go away, and we'll be a real family again.” More laughter, and the sound of hands wringing a tender, soft neck.

Gulping for air, Derek shot up in his bed, covered in a cold sweat. From his bare stomach, all the way up to his forehead and down to his toes, a chill ran across his body. Derek breathed in and out in a slow, rhythmic pattern. The morning sun glinted off him, shining light on the one bedroom apartment, and its bare, minimalist furnishings.

Derek ran a hand through his sweat-drenched hair, grunting through his nose. "Goddamnit. You're a thirty year old man, you should be over this shit by now." He glanced to his side, spotting the alarm clock blinking the time. 9 AM, well past his usual morning routine..

Sheets shuffled by Derek's side, prompting the Deputy to jump once more. His eyes flashed red, until he recalled the first, and only member of the Beacon Hills Hale pack.

Derek glanced to his side, spotting Isaac curled in a tight ball, under the covers, and attached to Derek's thigh. Engulfed by one of Derek's WERE t-shirts used a makeshift pajamas, the pup gently snored, unaware of the world around him.

"Thank God. Never thought you'd go to sleep last night. Poor pup." Derek smiled, reaching down and patting the pup's head.

Stirring, Isaac groaned and wrapped his arms around Derek's waist as he stretched out. He yawned, burying his nose in Derek's side. Since the accident, Isaac had seldom left Derek's side, except to use the restroom, or to take a shower. They hadn't yet left the apartment, either, while Isaac mentally recovered, and became used to his new Alpha.

Derek yawned. "Come on, Isaac. Time to get up. We've got to go shopping today, you can't keep walking around in my t-shirts and eating hot pockets." He shook the pup's shoulders.

Raising his head up, Isaac yawned once more, planting his head on Derek's lap. "G'morning... Alpha." His eyes shut once more, half-snoring in the process.

"Alpha? Still not quite used to that word. Hell, I still don't feel like one.” Derek gulped, shaking off his apprehension. What Isaac needed was a strong, capable Alpha, who could give him a better life. Otherwise, why had he even bothered taking the pup in? “Come on, Isaac. We need to get going.”

"Five more minutes? Please? I'm still sleepy, Alpha." Isaac begged, crawling on top of Derek and planting his head on Derek's neck.

Chuckling, Derek nodded. "Five more minutes, then, but JUST five minutes. Then we have to get up." He felt Isaac's smile on his neck, and Derek happily allowed the pup to snooze on his neck.
Few things provided a sense of safety to another werewolf than being around an Alpha. Ingrained in centuries of instinct, an Alpha acted as a guardian of sorts, allowing others of their kind to know they were safe. Superior strength, intellect, and survival skills, ingrained into strong genetics. Supposedly, anyway.

While it wouldn't take the painful memories away, or begin to make up for the trauma the poor pup had endured, Derek was thankful that he could at least give Isaac a good night's sleep, without a nightmare to wake him up, cold and alone.

After ten minutes passed, Derek finally huffed and gently shook Isaac's shoulder. "Come on, you've got to wake up. We're not lazing around today, we've put off everything all week. Dr. Delgado needs to give you another check up at the hospital, and she's going to help us find you a therapist... A friend to talk to." Derek gently ruffled Isaac's hair, which forced the pup to sit up in place.

Isaac rubbed the sleep from his eyes, nodding as he yet loose a loud yawn. Tiny fangs popped in his mouth, in the midst of an uncontrolled shift. "Okay, Alpha. Can I have some more eggs for breakfast? I'm really hungry."

"I'll also need to get us some more groceries. Your stomach is a bottomless pit." Derek thought, as his nerves eased up on the sight of Isaac's ribs not protruding quite as much as they had a week earlier.

"Of course. Why don't you go hop in the shower and get dressed for our day out. I'll have breakfast ready when you get out." Derek hopped out of bed, snagging a nearby tank top and putting it on. Nodding, Isaac followed behind Derek, and pulling open the drawer they'd stuffed most of his clothes (the few items they could scavenge from the deplorable condition of the Lahey house) in.

Derek left Isaac to his own business, and made his way out of the bedroom and into the combined kitchen/living area. He switched on the television set to a local news program, fiddled with the coffee maker, and pulled out several ingredients from his nearly-empty fridge.

Just as the sound of the shower turned on, Derek's ears piqued to the sound of footsteps hopping up the outside door. He flashed his eyes, claws, fangs, and muscles bulging in shift. Suppressing a growl, he stormed to the front door, becoming a wall between the entrance and his bedroom.

"Alpha Hale, I know you can hear me! Open the damn door!" Erica screamed. Taken aback, Derek's shift faded. "Erica?" He opened the door, as told, immediately pushed backwards as Erica stormed through, two massive boxes on each of her shoulders. The smell of meats, spices, and several brands of cheese wafted in the air around her.

"Thanks! These things aren't really heavy, but they're a bitch to balance!" Erica slammed both boxes on the kitchen counter, dusting her hands off. Derek raised an eyebrow, shutting the front door behind him. "Erica... What are you doing here?"

Smiling giddily, Erica hopped over to Derek, poking him in the chest. "A special delivery for the newest Alpha in Beacon Hills, and the asshole that left me with a broken wall at my bar. Seriously, did you see the crater left after your little bout with Robert? Tacky as hell."

Derek rolled his eyes, rubbing the bridge of his nose. "Technically, that was Robert who caused the damage. Don't even think about suing the police department either. You can't get blood out of an onion, you know."
"Damn!" Erica snapped her fingers, huffing. "Oh well, insurance will cover it anyway, I was just messing with you. Anyhow." They both walked into the kitchen area, where Erica opened up the first box. She produced foil-wrapped containers. "Home cooked meals you can throw in the oven and be done with, a busy parent's favorite meal! Boyd and I wanted to offer them to you, as a thanks for helping out Blue Moon, being a generally nice guy taking in the pup, and... To appease you?"

"Appease me?" Derek took one of the foiled wraps, pulling back the cover and drooling at the sight of the thickest steak he'd ever seen in his life.

Smirking, Erica brushed past Derek. She opened his freezer, filling it with the contents of her box. "Look, I'm not going to beat around the bush. Boyd and I have been looking for a pack to join in the area, and we'd like to join you. Actually, we've been waiting for God knows how long for you to start one up, Alpha Hale."

Derek chuckled, shaking his head. "Me? Why me? You should go to Alpha Deucalion, he's the County Alpha and has a much larger pack. My territory is a one bedroom apartment that I don't even legally have ownership over."

Snorting, Erica snagged the steak from Derek's hands, re-wrapping it, and stuffing it in the freezer. "Yeah, and the old fart's pack lives in the past like a majority of the werewolves in the fucking world. Old world thinking, from when we still lived in the forests, hunted live game to survive, and all that bullshit. Like, we're talking 15th Century thinking in a modern world. Doesn't really mesh well with me, if the Blue Moon was any indication of that."

"I suppose." Derek shook his head, knowing full well how she felt. Most werewolf packs lived based on the Old Laws, clinging to their wild heritage like it were holy scripture. Which is exactly why Derek refused joining Duke's pack, despite their constant offers.

"So! I figure a modern thinker like you, who didn't cast off a runt like that asshole Duke's pack would have done, has to be a pretty good Alpha in the making." Erica finished filling Derek's freezer and fridge, grinning in his direction.

Derek waved the thought off. "Regardless of what I look like, I'm not looking for a pack, Erica. Isaac's the exception, not the norm. If he hadn't come along, I wouldn't be an acting Alpha at all. I appreciate the thought, and the food, but I--"

Reaching the entrance, Derek opened the door for Erica. He sighed, glancing away from her. "This is MY home. It's perfectly fine."

"Derek, the apartment sucks, and raising a pup in here is going to be impossible. He'll break the foundation by the time he's ten, pack or no pack, so you need to get over it, sweetie." Erica rolled her eyes.

Reaching the entrance, Derek opened the door for Erica. He sighed, glancing away from her. "I
appreciate the offer. I'll try and give it some thought, but right now, I don't really see myself as anything but a County Deputy, and Isaac's caregiver right now. I'm not interested in being an Alpha to a pack."

"I understand." Erica raised up, pecking a kiss on Derek's cheek. She smiled, patting him on the chest. "Which is exactly why I like you, Hale. You've got a good head on your shoulders, don't have the whole power-hungry Alpha thing going on like most of them, and have the nicest ass this side of the Mississippi."

Groaning, Derek shoved Erica out of the door and onto his front porch. "Again, don't sexually harass the off-duty Deputy, Erica!"

"You make it so hard, Hale! So, so, hard!" Erica laughed, bumping into Jackson in the front driveway.

They both grunted, backing away from each other.

"Sorry! Excuse me," Erica said, bumping past Jackson and heading off to her truck on the side of the road.

Jackson hopped up the entrance stairs, waving to Derek. "Hey Hale, how's it going?"

Before Derek could even say hello, Jackson let himself inside of the house, carrying a large red gift bag in his hands.

"Jackson? What are you doing here?" Derek grimaced at the smell of Jackson’s disgusting cologne, pinching his nose through the worst of it.

"Well, you know the Old Man. Without you around to babysit me, he's got me doing jack crap. Mostly paperwork the rest of the Deputies don’t want to do." Jackson plopped down the oversized gift bag on a coffee table. "Right now, though, he's got me going "undercover" to make sure you're doing okay. All without you knowing I'm spying on you, per the entire department’s demands. Oh, wait..." He smirked, dramatically sighing as he'd been "caught".

Derek groaned, flinging himself down on a sofa chair. "Do I even want to ask what everyone in the department is saying?" Few things were as potent as the Sheriff's department gossip train. Derek was 99% certain that the entire town was aware of his actions at the Blue Moon. How exaggerated they were, depended on which of the Gossip Dorks told the story.

Plopping down on the couch, Jackson kicked his feet up on Derek's table. "Kira's already drooling at the chance to babysit, but I think she just misses her Skulk. Aiden and Ethan both think you're insane, but they're both dudebros still stuck in their frathouse world. Oh, and Parrish would never admit it, but he's dying to come see the kid and help out. Apparently he and Lydia are still having zero luck on having kids anytime soon. Cross-species fertilization is a real bitch."

"The Boss?" Derek asked.

Jackson laughed. "Well, he’s got his own circus of monkeys to deal with right now. His son’s back in town, and I think his grandson is a little more energetic than he expected. Not that I’m surprised. I went to school with the Old Man’s kid, and Stiles was the walking billboard for ADHD. Fucker never stopped moving. Between him and Ema, I-.” His face scrunched up, shaking off a memory. "Anyway, the Old Man would probably love you coming back soon, so we can be at full staff. You practically do half the Old Man’s job, anyway."

“I’d be happy to. Just as soon as I find a babysitter or a daycare that would take Isaac during the
daytime.” Derek thought, biting his bottom lip. He wasn’t sure how Isaac would handle being on his own, given the circumstances. Though bringing the pup into the office, or on patrols, was out of the question.

Ignoring the knot in his stomach, Derek focused on the oversized gift bag on the table. "What's this?" Derek poked inside the gift bag.

Jackson smiled, smacking Derek's hand away. "That's for Isaac. A gift from his Dad's partner, and a must-have for all pups. I figured you probably hadn't gotten him a lot of toys. You don’t look like the Toys R Us kind of guy."

A pale coloring crossed Derek's face. "Toys? Oh my God... I'm such a dick." He hadn’t thought about toys. Totally focused on getting Isaac clothes, food, and a medical checkup, he hadn’t even thought about what the pup would want to play with. Hell, he hadn’t bothered asking. "I... We're going to town today, I'll take care of that, then."

"That’s what I figured.” Jackson shook his head.

Reaching inside the bag, Derek pulled out Jackson’s gift. His jaw fell to the ground as he pulled out a plush black wolf, about the size of a living puppy, wrapped in a thick layer of scent-resistant plastic. "Stella Luna" read the tag, alongside the cut-off price tag that Derek knew would have been in the three to four digit price range. Based on the quality of the plush, alongside the Chanel logo, likely the latter.

"Jackson... This is way too much.” Derek shook his head, ready to force it back into Jackson's arms.

"No, it's not, and you're taking it." Jackson shot up, glaring at Derek incredulously. "Because that kid went through hell, and he deserves something nice. A toy that'll always make him feel safe, and loved." He pointed to the wolf, and then to Derek's chest. "These are special plushes, Derek. Once you take the wrapping off, it sucks in the scent of whatever werewolf holds it. Even washing it won't get the scent off." Jackson gently pet the crinkled plastic, sighing through his nose as his eyes glossed over. "I figured it would be good for Isaac. Especially while you’re at work, to have something to keep with him, and know you’re always thinking of him."

Derek, surprised by the stoic expression on Jackson’s face, nodded absently. "It is." He took the plush from Jackson’s hands, smiling. “Thank you, Jackson. This is a really nice present, I’m sure he’ll love it.”

“Yeah.” Jackson spun around, eyeing Derek’s apartment. "Jesus Christ, you live like a college bachelor. This Den sucks ass, Hale, there is zero room to build a fort."

Derek growled, as the short-lived respect for his partner vanishing with nary a care.

"Alpha! I don't know how to tie my shoes! Can you do it for me?" Isaac stepped into the living area, as his damp hair dripped over the floor. He carried his shoes in one hand, shaking his wet hair as he walked.

Stopping just short of Jackson, Isaac’s glowing eyes went wide, earning a yelp from the pup. He dashed behind Derek, dropping his shoes in the process.

“Hey, it’s alright. This is a friend, Isaac. I wouldn’t let anyone in the Den that I didn’t trust.” Derek put a hand on Isaac’s shoulder.

Isaac peeked out from behind Derek’s back, eyeing Jackson cautiously. He came out of hiding soon
enough, with one final nod of approval from Derek.

"Hey there, I'm Jackson, Derek's partner. Nice to meet you." Jackson stepped forward.

Derek reached out, attempting to warn Jackson not to spook Isaac (for fear of his human hand being bitten off).

An unnecessary warning turns out, as Jackson bent down to Isaac’s level. Making direct eye contact, and a safe distance away. He extended a hand, which Isaac took after sniffing the air around him.

"Hi, Jax." Isaac smiled, exchanging glances between Derek and Jackson. “You’re a policeman, too? Like Alpha? Are you Alpha’s friend?”

Jackson nodded, chuckling to himself. “Depends on if you’re asking my boss, but yeah. I’m a Deputy Officer. I suppose you could say Derek and I are friends. We’ve been partners a couple of months now, and your Alpha hasn’t killed me yet, after all! He’d be pretty good at it, too! Have you seen him fully shifted? Scary strong!” Raising two hands up, Jackson faked a growl, flashing his flat human teeth.

Derek groaned.

Isaac giggled. “Nah, Alpha’s not scary! He’s really nice! He bought me strawberry ice cream last night! We ate the whole tub!”

“Ice cream, huh? A whole tub?” Jackson shot Derek a snarky glare.

With folded arms, Derek huffed. “My diet is none of your business.” He glared a deadly red, focused all on Jackson.

Jackson threw both hands up, standing back up and stepping several lengths away from Derek. "Alright, alright. Back down, big bad!” Turning his attention back to Isaac, he smiled sweetly. “Say, I heard you guys are heading into town! Derek was just telling me that he's taking you WHEREVER you want to go for lunch, then he’s going to buy you some toys, and THEN you guys are going to the park to play!"

Derek opened his mouth to explain to Jackson the need for a trip to the hospital, and that he would be making breakfast. Instead, he held his tongue, watching as Isaac’s eyes widened. In that boy’s eyes, Christmas morning had come half a year early.

"Really?!" Isaac beamed from ear to ear, gasping in disbelief.

“Oh, of course.” Derek cleared his throat, glancing over his messy attire and bedhead. “Why don’t I go get washed up, and we can head out to town. This probably works out better, we’ve got plenty to do.”

Hopping over to Jackson, Isaac tugged at the officer’s shirt. “Hey, Jax? Will you play with me while my Alpha gets ready to go? Then, can you go to eat lunch with us?”

“Sure! I’d be happy to! I’ll call in my lunch break. What are we playing?” Jackson said, plopping down in the floor with Isaac.

A cold sweat rippled down Derek’s neck, staggering back to his bedroom. He had to be living in the Twilight Zone, because like hell was the mayor’s spoiled brat actually letting his body be used as a jungle gym for an over-eager pup.
The twilight zone continued for Derek, as Jackson bought enough clothes and toys to keep the pup warm and entertained for years. Followed by a trip to a pizza joint (that Jackson also funded) with a creepy animatronic bear, and a huge arcade section.

During the three or four hours out in town, Derek hadn’t cracked his wallet open once. Perhaps his pride as an Alpha should have refused Jackson’s continued generosity, but his partner’s insistence (and Derek’s less than stellar bank account) made him swallow that pride.

Standing in the middle of the arcade, Derek’s awe focused on Isaac’s incessant giggling, and Jackson’s beaming smile.

Loud dings erupted from the arcade machine, as Isaac yanked out the plethora of tickets that came out. "Look at all the tickets I won, Alpha! Look, Jax! Did I do okay?"

Derek nodded, wordlessly, with a short smile.

"You did great!" Jackson bent down, a handful of tickets in his own hand. He counted them, whistling under his breath. “Dang, Isaac. You’ve got more than I do! I guess that means you’re just way too good for me!” He handed over his own tickets to Isaac, combining them together into a hefty pile. "Now, go take them up to the counter, and the nice lady will let you pick out a prize!"

Isaac looked down at all the tickets, jaw gaping in the process. “Really?! Are you sure?! There’s so many tickets here!”

“I’m very sure, Isaac.” Jackson ruffled Isaac’s hair, pushing him off to the nearby counter.

“Thanks Jax!” Isaac yelled, giggling as he jogged to the counter. He handed his tickets to the part-time worker, who pointed out to the selection of prizes he could choose from.

With Isaac distracted, Jackson elbowed Derek in the side. “Okay, I know you’re not a real “people” person, but you could at least attempt to talk with the kid.”

“Excuse me?” Derek countered, raising an eyebrow.

Mimicking Derek’s response to Isaac’s excitement over tickets, over-exaggerating his bland expressions. Jackson shook his head. “Okay, seriously, he’s a kid. He’s gone through a shit life so far. Pump up the excitement a little bit, and be there for him! Even if it’s over some stupid tickets, he’s looking for some approval from his new father figure! Or Alpha figure! Whatever the two of you have!” He signaled in between Derek and Isaac, face scrunching into a frustrated glare.

Derek dropped his head, glancing away. “I’m not... I don’t...” Sighing, Derek shook his head. “I don’t want to screw him up. Hell, I don’t even know what to say to him.”

Hand balling into a fist, Jackson threw his head back, huffing. “You’re not going to screw him up, Derek. Anything is an improvement over Robert, wouldn’t you say?” Jackson rubbed his forehead, stealing a quick glance with Derek. “How were you raised, Derek? Do you remember your old man?”

Flashes of memories crossed Derek’s thoughts. Of blood, and bruises, and pain. Followed by
warmth, love, and unbridled support in everything he did. With, naturally, sarcasm, wit, and a firm hand that never tolerated bullshit.

“My Uncle Peter took my sister and I in when I was a little older than Isaac. Peter was ex-military, enjoying an early retirement from WERE. All Alpha in everything he did.” A short smile crossed Derek’s face. “Peter was a good man.”

Jackson slapped Derek’s shoulder blade. “Good, then you should have some kind of example to draw from. Or, hell, just remember how you were treated as a kid. Things you hated, things you loved.” He reached into a pocket, pulling out his cell phone. Jackson groaned, rolling his eyes. “The Old Man’s wanting me back. Apparently my lunch break’s been up for a while, and there’s an accident report he wants me writing up.”

Clasping a hand on Jackson’s arm, Derek squeezed his partner’s shoulder. “Alright, thanks for coming out like this, Jackson. Both Isaac and I really appreciate it. You really did too much for us. As an Alpha, I owe you a debt to repay.”

“Yeah, yeah. No problem, Partner. Isaac’s a cool kid, and you’re obviously hopeless.” Jackson shook Derek’s hand, stepping away and heading to the front entrance.

A curious twitch crossed Derek’s forehead. One that wriggled in the back of Derek’s head all day, since Jackson presented Stella Luna in the apartment. "You really are surprisingly good with pups, Jackson. Where’d you learn all this?"

Waving off the question, Jackson stopped briefly at the exit to the pizza parlor. "Yeah, well, the Old Man says I act like a child. Makes sense I'd get along with them, wouldn’t it?"

Thump. Thump-Thump.

"A lie?" Derek thought, passively, staring intently at several of Jackson’s nervous fidgets.

"You ever need a sitter, or need anything for Isaac, just let me know, alright? I don’t do anything with my life, and my dad's credit card is endless. Might as well make the best use out of both of them, am I right?" Then, just like that, Jackson exited, without bothering to look back

"Alpha?" Isaac asked, tugging at Derek’s shirt.

Glancing down, Derek tore away from his curiosity of Jackson, and right into Isaac’s excited face. In the pup’s hands were two tiny, worthless, thirty cent plastic figures barely a few inches in length. One was a vividly yellow duck-like creature, holding a cupcake. The second, a goofy looking bear in a top hat.

“Look what I got, Alpha! I picked the duck for me, and the bear for you! The ticket lady says they’re best friends!” Isaac reached up, and forced the bear into Derek’s hand. “Do you like it?”

Derek’s chest burned. He felt his eyes burning red, heart flipping over in an odd mix of emotions he couldn’t quite describe. He smiled, nodding as he threw an arm around Isaac, pulling the pup into a hug before pulling him up. Isaac laughed, being carried on one arm.

“I love it, Isaac. Thank you very much.” Derek answered, as he and Isaac made their exit from the restaurant. Stepping into the warm sun, Derek eyed the city park, just across the street. A handful of pups, humans, and other supernatural creatures, were clearly having a load of fun on the equipment.

“Want to go to the park, now?”

“Can I? Really?” Isaac hitched his breath, practically vibrating in Derek’s arms. Far too excited
than any child should have been for a visit to the park, as if he'd just been given the world. Derek wished he'd wrung Robert’s neck when he had the chance.

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To Derek’s dismay, Isaac didn’t made friends all that quickly at the park. As he’d feared earlier in the week, the bigger pups pushed him around, and out of their circles. Any and all attempts to share a piece of equipment was met with blank stares and disinterested responses.

Even pups, werewolves were highly instinctual. They all sensed Isaac as a runt, an outsider, and “off”.

That is, until Isaac hit the sandbox.

Derek smiled, watching as another pup leapt into the sand, spraying the grains all over the place, and into the faces of some of the other pups who’d been bugging him. The dark-haired, tanned pup opened up immediately, talking Isaac’s ears off.

After they worked together to build a sandcastle, Isaac and his friend went to the jungle-gym, climbing all the way to the top and hanging off the rails like monkeys. Both laughed, made faces, and play-pretended about any and everything that came into their heads.

The better part of an hour passed before Isaac and his friend ran up to Derek’s side. Both pups were sweating, red-faced, and panting.

"Alpha, can I have a drink? It’s really hot!” Isaac asked, pointing the bottles of water Derek had bought from a nearby stand.

“Of course.” Derek handed a bottle to Isaac, who gulped down the contents immediately.

Isaac’s friend waved to Derek, pointing to another bottle before extending a hand. "Hi! I'm Scott! Can I have one too?"

Derek shook the pup's hand, raising an eyebrow. "You really shouldn't talk to strangers, Scott. Or ask strangers for food or drink."

Shaking his head, Scott pointed to Isaac. "Isaac told me that you're a policeman. My Paw-Paw's a policeman too! Policemen don't do bad stuff, so it's okay."

“No, it’s not.” Derek opened his mouth to argue, flinching at the shrill yell from across the park.

"Scott Stilinski!"

A well-dressed man, all limbs, jogged across the park. He stopped just next to Scott, glaring death into the pup’s face.

Derek sniffed the air, taken aback by Scott and this other man’s scents... Matching. Clearly father and son, yet... The older male was a human, his son, a werewolf. A rare thing to see in the world, even in twenty-first century.

"Scott, what have I told you about talking to strangers without me there?” The other adult tapped his foot, folding both arms.
"Not to, Daddy?" Scott answered, tilting his head innocently.

"Yep, and what did you just do?" The pup’s father rose an eyebrow.

"I talked to Mr. Hale! He’s not a stranger, I knew him! Isaac told me his name, so he’s not a stranger!" Scott answered, with a sly smile.

Something like a stroke hit the older man, tugging at the ends of his dark hair. "Ow.. Ow, my head. I swear... I swear I said that same freaking line to my dad at some point. Oh God, it’s happening. It’s happening just like Dad said it would."

Derek chuckled, bemused as the father gently booped the top of Scott’s head, faux-growling at the pup. Scott’s father laughed, warm and hearty, before during back to Derek.

"I am so sorry for the scene. Nothing against you, at all, but I’ve been trying to drill in his head for the last six months to not approach people he doesn’t know. I swear, he tries to make friends with the lawn gnome outside my dad's house, so there's no telling who he'd actually stop and-

A pickup in the other man’s heartbeat, and a glimmer of recognition struck Scott’s father. "You're Alpha Hale."

“How’d he know I was an Alpha?” Extending a hand, Derek nodded. "That would be right. I’m Derek Hale, and this... This is my son, Isaac Hale. Nice to meet you.” He stumbled over the unfamiliar words, but noticed the shy smile crossing Isaac’s face.

Relief flooded Scott’s father. "I'm Stiles. Stiles Stilinski, you, uh.. You actually work for my dad! Sorry, that’s how I knew you, I’ve just... You know, I haven’t met you. I haven’t been home in a few years, but I’ve heard a lot about you!"

Derek hitched his breath, standing up to meet Stiles’ gaze. His jaw dropped, and an unrestrained laugh crossed his lips. "You're the Terror of Beacon High? You?!"

The already pale Stiles lost what little color he’d kept in his cheeks. Covering his face, Stiles groaned. "Oh my God, have I still not outgrown that nickname?! That was over 10 years ago!"

Derek chuckled, shaking his head. "No, and apparently all of the high school pranksters are in awe of your work, and try to outdo you every year. The Fart Bomb incident in Mrs. Honey's room last year was apparently an attempt to replicate your formula. Deputy Parrish threw up when he arrived on the scene, but claimed yours was still the far superior bomb. Deputy Whittemore arrested a few punks who tagged a brick wall, and chastised them for such a shoddy job."

"Oh God... I’m not going to have any respect in that school, am I? Dr. Stilinski? Yeah, no, I’m going to end up being “The Terror”. Oh God..." Stiles faked tears, shaking his head and groaning through his mouth.

“I’d definitely say you’re going to have some admirers.” Derek pointed in Stiles’ face, glaring at the Doctor. “Teach any of the punk kids anything new, and the entire Sheriff's Office, your father included, will throw you in a cell.”

Stiles rolled his eyes. “Yeah yeah, my dad already gave me the tenth degree.”

A pair of little hands reached up, tugging on Stiles’ shirt. Scott was bouncing up and down. "This is Isaac! He's my best friend now, Dad. You were right, I made a new friend fast here!" Scott reached over, grabbing Isaac's hand and holding it tightly.
Isaac smiled, turning up to Derek and beaming. "Alpha, can Scott be my best friend? We had a lot of fun, and he's really nice!"

Derek and Stiles both stared fondly at each other’s child, short smiles crossing each of their faces. Soon after, relief flooded both of their bodies.

"I don't see why not? How about you, Stiles?" Derek asked, turning to the Sheriff’s son. As far as "trust" went, nobody could beat a Stilinski. Derek learned that as a child.

Yes, Stiles had clearly been a troublemaker in his youth, but few people in the Sheriff’s department spoke highly of anyone than Stiles.

"Sure! I think that sounds absolutely perfect!" Stiles answered, just as quickly. He nodded back to the park. "Why don’t you two go play some more? We’ll do boring dad stuff, and you guys can do the exciting pup stuff!"

“Okay!” Scott yanked Isaac after him, and both were back in the thick of adventure once more.

Standing in silence, Derek and Stiles watched their children playing in the park for several minutes, each of their faces unable to contain an eager smile.

"Uh, Alpha Hale? Can we talk?" Stiles asked, clearing his throat. He signaled to the bench behind them.

Derek sat down, next to Stiles, as they both kept a watchful eye on their children. "It's Derek. I can't stand formal titles. Should I be calling you Doctor?"

"Same with me, no titles, please. Well, at least not people I like, anyway."

"Um... I was actually going to run by your house later today. Dad told me you were off work all week, so... I was going to run by and hope to make an appointment. I know you Alphas are pretty busy, and there’s usually a wait time, but-"

Derek shook his head. ‘I’m not a typical Alpha, Stiles. It’s just me and Isaac. I don’t have a secretary, a Second, a pack, or a mate. No appointment necessary.” He sighed, rubbing the back of his neck. “So, what did you want with me, Stiles?"

An erratic heartbeat struck Stiles’ chest, to Derek’s surprise.

“It's about Scott, and I'm hoping to get some help. A favor, actually. Alpha Duke recomended you, actually. My dad agreed you’d be the best, too, hands down."

“The Boss said that? The Boss needs a favor from me? Why didn't he ask? He knows I'm indebted to him.” Derek’s jaw gaped slightly, before he caught himself.

Stiles lowered his head, balling hands into tight fists. “It’s really personal, and not something I’d ask lightly. I mean, we’re not a pack or anything, but the Stilinski family would be indebted to you if you'd help us with-"

"Of course I will. Anything your family needs, I’ll help with. I don’t care what it is." Derek answered, without a moment's hesitation.

Taken aback, Stiles’ head made a hairpin turn, in pure disbelief.
A few days had passed since Stiles met Alpha Hale in the park. In those few days, Stiles could already tell that Scott and Isaac would be best friends for the rest of their lives.

They’d already had their first sleepover (only mildly destroying Sheriff Stilinski’s living room), and bonded over their mutual love of the Sheriff’s storytelling skills. They shared a bed together, each of them snoring into their respective Stella Luna stuffed wolves. (How Jackson afforded Scott one five years earlier, and Isaac one now, was beyond Stiles's comprehension.)

The day after, the pups spent an entire day at Derek's apartment. Isaac shared his toys with Scott, as they created an action-adventure playtime extravaganza with stuffed animals. (Mr. Bunny and Mr. Bear defeated the horde of green arm man, sitting on a lego throne.)

Carrying Scott to bed after the , Stiles beamed at his son's excited explanation of his day at Alpha Hale's house.

"...then Derek took Isaac and I to the park! We played on the jungle gym again, and climbed to the VERY top! Then he bought us both snow cones, and we got to go see Paw Paw and Derek’s friends at the Police Station, and THEN we went hiking and I pet a duck!" Scott bounced in Stiles' arms, vibrating with excitement.

Stiles walked into his old bedroom in the Stilinski house, re-designed for Scott's tastes. Toys littered around his toybox, and a plethora of stuffed animals on his cartoon-themed bed. He dumped Scott on the bed, helping tuck the pup in. "So you had a fun day? Are you excited for tomorrow morning's training?"

"Yes! I can't wait! Derek said we're gonna learn how to howl, and then we're going to pretend to hunt! Then, when I get bigger, and I learn all the cool hunting stuff, I can go catch dinner for you and Paw Paw and Melissa! Isaac's gonna get dinner for Derek and his Uncle Jackson!" Scott squealed in delight, messing up Stiles' attempt at tucking.

Leaning over, Stiles flipped on Scott's nightlight, and picked up stray laundry around the room. "Oh really? Are you going to get me a Zebra? You know, I could really go for a Platypus! Something nice and exotic!"

"DADDY, there aren't any Zebras or Platypuses here!" Scott groaned, flopping down on a pillow. He facepalmed, clearly dissapointed in his father's skills in zoology.

Stiles chuckled, tossing Scott's action figures into the toybox. He stopped at the bookshelf, snagging "Grimoire" from the shelf. Scott adored his great-grandfather's present, and the old-world fantastical stories of magic, adventure, and even the "icky" romantic bits.

"Daddy?" Scott asked, huddling under the covers, making sure that all his stuffed toys were around him, and all of them covered with the warm blanket.

"Yeah, Scotty?" Stiles grabbed a nearby footstool, plopping down and turning to the appropriate page in the book.

Scott fidgeted, glancing away from Stiles. "I asked Isaac where his mommy was, because Derek isn't married, and I thought everyone had mommies and daddies. Isaac said he didn't have a mommy anymore, because she died. Is that why I don't have a mommy? Did my Mommy die too?"
Static struck the room, as a bolt of electricity shot down Stiles' spine, and straight to his chest. He nearly dropped the book on the spot, only barely stopping himself from vomiting over it.

"Daddy?" Scott rose his head, tear laden eyes staring right into Stiles' soul.

Stiles joined Scott on the bed, scratching the top of his son's head. "No. Your mommy's not dead, Scott." Taking in a deep breath, Stiles laid back, staring into Scott's curious gaze.

"Where's my mommy, then? Did we leave her in New York?" Scott asked, face paling in horror.

Chuckling, Stiles shook his head, pressing a gentle kiss on Scott's head. "No, Scott. We didn't leave her behind in New York." He paused for what felt like a short eternity. A practiced speech he'd worked on for a good year and a half vacated the recesses of his memory.

"Your mommy got sick after you were born. There was something in her head that told her she couldn't be your mommy. Something that she couldn't make go away with medicine, and something none of us could make any better. So, your Mommy moved away, so she could try and get better." Stiles splurted out, biting the side of his mouth until he tasted blood.

"She rejected you. Because of me. Because my blood was in your veins, and centuries of werewolf instincts screamed at her to reject the birth of a "weak" offspring." Stiles thought, gripping the sheets with one hand, and gently petting Scott's head with the other.

"Why'd she get sick, Daddy?" Scott asked, frowning.

"I don't know, Scott. People get sick, and we don't always know why." Stiles bit down on his bottom lip, picturing the ashen face of his mother in the hospital, moments before her death. Then the pale, lifeless gaze from Ema, and her hours of sobbing, unable to hold her own child. "Life isn't always fair or nice."

"Are you going to get sick too? What about Paw-Paw? Or Melissa? I don't want Isaac to get sick!" Scott clambered into Stiles' lap, gripping onto him, staring up at his father. He shook, digging claws into Stiles' sides.

"Oh no no no no no, Scott, it's not contagious!" Stiles leaned over and kissed his son's forehead. He hugged Scott into a tight hug, and didn't dare let go. "Only mommy and daddy werewolves get it. I'm not a werewolf, so I won't ever get that sickness, ever. I promise! Paw Paw and Melissa can't get it. Isaac's your best friend. Even Alpha Hale can't get it!"

After a few moments of reassurance, Scott let his grip go. He sniffled, planting himself in Stiles' neck. "Promise promise?"

"Super promise." Stiles booped Scott's nose, still hugging his son tightly.

There were plenty more questions from Scott. Questions about Ema's "sickness" (that Stiles evaded to the best of his ability), about what Ema looked like (Stiles promised to give Scott a picture the next morning), and if his mommy loved him (which he answered "yes", without a single doubt in Stiles' mind).

Stiles stayed with Scott for longer than he usually did. They read two extra stories in "Grimoire", and talked through random nonsense they'd watched on television. Far past his bedtime, Scott finally fell asleep, snoring into Stella (hugging all of his stuffed animals), and allowing Stiles to walk out of the bedroom, at last.

Shutting the bedroom door, Stiles spun forward, spotting his father mere inches outside the door. In
one hand, Sheriff Stilinski brought up a bottle of amber liquid, jiggling it in the air. "That sounded like a whiskey conversation."

"Make it a double." Stiles fumbled out.

Father and son migrated to the kitchen, prepping tumbler glasses to the brim with whiskey. Stiles popped a bowl of popcorn, while his father pulled out the beef jerky.

Plopping down at the kitchen table, neither man spoke for several minutes, using alcohol to mitigate the silence.

Two shots in, and Stiles finally crumbled. "I'm sorry." He slammed his head down on the table, groaning into the cherry wood.

"Sorry? What for?" Sheriff Stilinski poured each of them another shot, raising an eyebrow.

Stiles laughed, raising up to sip at his drink. "For yelling at you after mom died. For being an asshat in middle school and high school. For being a bastard kid, in general."

Sheriff Stilinski chuckled, shaking his head. He threw back a shot, sighing. "Stiles, you don't have to apologize."

"I do." Stiles slammed his glass on the table. "Scotty is a Godsend compared to what I was. I'm feeling firsthand what you probably felt as a single father, and... Seriously, dad, I owe you... So much." He fought back tears, slamming his eyes shut. "I don't know how you did it."

Taking in a deep breath, Sheriff Stilinski pinched the bridge of his nose. "For the record, I was never mad at you for being you. Since you were born, you've always been energetic and your mother's little clown. Sure, I was disappointed in "The Terror of Beacon High", you being suspended left and right, and the property damage bills I had to pay because of you."

Stiles cringed. He pondered how much some of his stunts actually cost the Stilinksi household.

The Sheriff reached a hand across the table, clasping Stiles'. "In the end, you never killed anyone and never burned anything to the ground. You graduated from college and got a doctoral degree, while raising one hell of a kid on your own, in a strange town, and halfway across the country. I must have done something right."

"He's got our mouth, you know. Mom's probably laughing her ass off in heaven." Stiles choked on his words.

The Sheriff poured each of them another glass. "I look forward to Scott's evolution of the Stilinski sarcasm. I pity you during Scott's teenage years."

Each of them laughed, staring into their glasses.

"I guess you heard my talk with Scott? I finally had to tell him about Ema." Stiles reached for the beef jerky, tearing half of a stick off in his mouth.

"I did." The Sheriff stuffed his mouth with popcorn.

"How'd I do?" Stiles chewed the jerky, taking out his anger on the dried meat.

"Considering you were trying to explain werewolf rejection to a five-year-old, while not villifying his blood mother, I'd give you an A+." The Sheriff shook his head.
Stiles swore under his breath. "I wanted to tell him a lot more. Like how excited Ema was to be a mother. How much I loved her, and how excited to finally start our family. That she was going to put up with a human wedding for me, even though we'd been mated for years. Or how the County Alpha's pack was ready to welcome him with open arms, born human, born werewolf, or anything in between. That he was the hope for so many people to bridge the gap between our species."

Those days still played in the back of Stiles' memory. Christmases and Thanksgivings with the County Alpha pack. Moving into the Alpha House, and living with Ema and his new in-laws. Cooking for parties of a hundred or more, and teasing Ema's father over his poor barbecuing skills. The drive to the hospital, and the excitement over finally starting his family.

Followed by the crash of it all plummeting into the ground.

The Sheriff nursed the last of his beverage, pushing the empty glass to the side. "Maybe someday, Ema can tell Scott herself."

Stiles shook his head, face freezing in place. "I doubt it. She doesn't even live in the country anymore. You... You didn't see her face that day, dad..."

Another awkward silence filled the room. Each of the men ate through a pile of the junk food, saying nothing.

Sheriff Stilinski tossed the empty containers of food into the trash bin. He reached into another cabinet, producing a container of illegal Oreo cookies. "Werewolf Practice for Scott tomorrow, right?"

"Yeah. Derek said he's going to practice with Isaac, who's a little behind, too. Which I think is going to work loads better, considering how well those two get along." Stiles laughed, smiling as he snagged a handful of cookies. "It helps that Scott thinks Alpha Hale is the coolest werewolf he's ever met. I caught the pup bench-pressing a curtain rod this afternoon."

Sheriff Stilinski snorted, choking on a cookie. He and Stiles both laughed. "Derek's a good man, and my best Deputy. Too good for our office, that's for damn sure."

Stiles rose an eyebrow. "So, like... Alpha Hale is a WERE graduate, right? Why the hell is he in a Podunk town like ours? He seems way over qualified to be a deputy."

"He is." Sheriff Stilinski dropped his head, glancing away from Stiles. "Every year I consider firing him, so he'd be forced to take a better paying position. Then, every year, I realize how lost our town would be without him. I'd be shooting my own foot, and making Derek unhappy at the same time."

"What do you mean?" Stiles asked.

The Sheriff shrugged. "The usual, Stiles. Werewolf population, across the country, is on the rise, and our town is no different. Even if we have Parrsh and Yukimura, a hellhound and a kitsune in their primes, neither of them compare in strength to Derek. Hell, neither of them compare in strength to most werewolves. Without Derek, our police force would be entirely dependent on the County Alpha to keep order."

Cringing, Stiles felt his stomach flip. "Ouch. That just screams quid pro quo."

"We've got enough of that shit going on with the Whittemore family strong arming their brat into my office. The bastards practically own our department and its funding." The Sheriff rolled his eyes, reaching for the bottle of whiskey.
Stiles slapped his father's hand away from the bottle. "You've got to lay off Jackson, Dad. He's a really good guy if you'd just give him a chance. Trust me when I say he's a VERY valuable asset to the force, if he'd ever get his head out from his ass."

"What is wrong with Jackson? What's he waiting for? He's been on his own for years now."

Stiles thought, gently reminding himself to set the prick down for a talk later that week.

"Yeah, yeah... Whatever you say, son." Grabbing a second handful of cookies, the Sheriff stuffed his face. "I don't want to talk about work, Stiles. I've got two days off, and would like to enjoy them without thinking about the greenhorn."

Stiles stole the remainder of cookies from his father, glaring him in the eye. He sighed, popping one in his mouth. "Alright, alright..."

While sealing up the bag of cookies, putting on a pot of coffee, and rummaging through the fridge, Stiles missed his father's audible gulp.

"Stiles?" The Sheriff froze in place.

"No more cookies. I've already let you get away with way too much shit tonight." Stiles answered, watching coffee pour into their old pot.

Taking in a deep breath, Sheriff Stilinski stood up and walked to his son's side. He planted a hand on Stiles' shoulder. "Melissa and I are... Getting very close. Closer than just boyfriend and girlfriend. I... I wanted to talk to you about it. Everything's just been so busy lately."

Mouth agape, Stiles stared at his father in genuine shock. The Old Man, remarrying? Stiles never thought he'd see the day.

"Should I be calling strippers, bulk ordering booze, and planning a trip to Vegas?" Stiles asked, mouth in a wide smile.

Sheriff Stilinski rose an eyebrow, shooting Stiles an incredulous glare.

"Alright, pops. Fine, I can tell what kind of tone this conversation is going in." Stiles hummed quietly, reaching inside the fridge. He retrieved a bottle of champagne he's brought from New York, jiggling it in his father's direction. "Happy booze time now, am I right?"

Chuckling, the Sheriff nodded.

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After an all night conversation with his father, and becoming mildly hungover, Stiles woke begrudgingly at the crack of dawn. Using every dastardly threat in his repertoire, Stiles managed to get Scott out of bed, cleaned up, and out the door earlier than either of them would ever be comfortable doing.

They drove to the local preserve, owned and operated by the County Alpha, but public land that was approved for hunting, training, and camping. A fifteen minute hike later, and Stiles finally spotted Derek and Isaac at one of the many campsites. The father and son went camping the night prior, if the discarded packages of hot dogs, marshmallows, and flickering fire were any indication.
Taken aback, Stiles dropped his jaw at the impressive sight before him. In a tank top and athletic shorts, Derek's overwhelming physique was on full display. Somewhere in between professional bodybuilder and star athlete, the Deputy could very likely crack a tree in half. With his thighs alone.

"Scott!" Isaac exclaimed, wide eyed and far too alert for someone to be at five in the morning. He rushed over to Scott, hugging his friend with all the strength he could muster. "Guess what, guess what?! Alpha took me camping last night! He let me start a fire, we put a tent up, cooked food, and he told me stories about the Hales, about my Aunty Laura, and someone I'm supposed to call Poppy Peter! I got to sleep under the stars, and it was really fun!"

Mumbling halfheartedly, Scott wiped the sleep from his eyes, using Isaac's shoulder as a makeshift pillow.

"Not a morning person, Scott?" Derek asked, dousing the last of the fire. He strode over to the rest of the group, smiling in the pups' direction.

Stiles shook his head. "Like pulling teeth. Scott's more of a... 9ish kind of kid. Sometimes 10ish if it's not a good cartoon day. Probably gets that from me, I've always been a night person. To be fair though, I got that from my dad, so really, it's his fault."

"Which is why nobody talks to the Boss until at least 10 AM or he's had at least two cups of coffee." Derek shook his head, bending down to the pups' level. He clasped a hand on each of their shoulders. "You two ready? We've got a lot to go over this morning, and the faster we start, the faster we finish."

Isaac and Scott both nodded, with varying degrees of excitement (and consciousness).

Derek took the boys a short distance away, to the start of another hiking trail, covered by a sea of trees on either side of the road. The path curved up, down, sideways, and inclined at several directions. An "expert" level path, if the sign next to the entrance was to be believed.

While Derek removed his shoes, socks, and instructed the boys to do the same, Stiles leaned up against the sign, clearing his throat. "So, uh... Do you need me to do anything? Is this some secret werewolf initiation thing? No humans allowed?" He laughed nervously, teetering back and forth on the ball of his foot.

Truth be told, Stiles wasn't sure how to act around Derek. He seemed easygoing enough, a far cry from Alpha Duke's strict adherence to tradition, or like any of the stuffy Alpha's he'd met during his college career.

For lack of a better term, Derek seemed... Normal.

"Werewolf initiation?" Derek cocked an eyebrow, and Stiles felt the Alpha's incredulous judgement radiating from his red eyes.

Stiles rubbed the back of his neck. "I'm a little out of my element on this one."

Rolling his eyes, Derek patted each pup on the back. He walked past them, shifting to his wolf-like half. Scott and Isaac followed his lead, shifting into their furry faces, their tiny feet digging into the earth with their clawed toes.

"Stiles, you're his father. You need to be involved, too. Don't worry, you've got a part in all of this as well." Derek pushed Stiles alongside him, deeper into the trail. Stiles chose to ignore the playful, almost sinful grin on Derek's face.
They walked along the path for several minutes, Derek encouraging them all to stretch out their legs and arms. "Do either of you know why werewolves howl?" He asked, stopping just before a massive tree with dozens of limbs.

"Um... To scare off bad guys?" Isaac asked.

"To sound real cool like Mr. Parrish?" Scott offered.

Derek shook his head, smiling. "Not quite." He pointed out the forest surrounding all of them. "Werewolves howl to signal the rest of their family, or their pack if they're in one. If we're in a big forest, like this one, you would howl to let the know where you are if you got lost."

"Couldn't we just yell real loud?" Scott asked, pointing to his father. "Daddy can yell REALLY loud. Paw Paw says everyone in town could hear him!"

Derek chuckled, while Stiles groaned under his breath. "You could, yes, but not all werewolves can hear as well as an others. Besides myself, or other Alphas, I doubt a normal werewolf could pick up a yell much better than a human at long distances." He prodded Scott's throat, trailing down to Scott's chest. "That's why all werewolves have strong throats. When we howl, it's loud enough for a full pack to hear, from a long distance away."

"Really? How far away?" Scott asked. His face lit up, practically smashing his face into Derek's personal space.

"I could hear you anywhere in the city limits, Scott. Your father could probably hear you from about a mile or two." Derek answered, unaffected by Scott practically hanging all over him, asking half a dozen questions.

Stiles chuckled at his son's excitement, and pleasantly surprised at how well Derek handled Scott's endless stock of energy. Duke had been right about Derek. He really was a quality Alpha.

Derek stood up, ruffling Scott's hair. "Alright pup, let's give it a shot. Have you ever tried?"

Dropping his head, Scott kicked dirt around the edges of his shoes. "No... I don't know how."

"That's fine, Scott. I couldn't do it well until the first grade, so that's not a big deal." Derek turned to Isaac. "Isaac? Can you give Scott an example? Just like we practiced last night."

Isaac nodded, grinning. "Just like this, Scott. Growl in your tummy, then do like this, and do a screaming growl!" He cocked his head back, sucked in air, and howled into the sky. A broken, pitch-cracked howl that teetered on the edge of a screech, but a howl all the same. A dozen or so bird squawked, flying away from their area.

Stiles winced at the noise, feeling the loud vibrations on the air.

Folding his arms, Derek nodded. "Good job, Isaac. Your throat will get stronger once you get a little more meat on those bones." He prodded Isaac's chest, earning a quiet giggle from the pup. Turning to Scott, Derek flashed his teeth. "Your turn, Scott. Give it all you've got, alright?"

Scott cleared his throat, forcing a growl in his stomach. He tilted his head backwards (far too much to be effective), and shot open his mouth.

More like a dying wail of a sea-lion mixed with a yodel, Scott's attempt at a howl broke all three ears surrounding them. Isaac and Stiles covered their ears in pain, while Derek flinched.
Stopping the moment he heard Stiles yelp, Scott's face cracked into a broken mess. "I'm sorry Daddy!" He rushed over to his father, hugging Stiles around the waist. On the verge of tears, Scott buried himself in Stiles' stomach. "I'm sorry! I'm really sorry!"

Despite the ringing (and potentially ruptured ear drum) in Stiles' ear, he bent down and ruffled Scott's hair, feigning only a casual amount of pain. "Hey, it's okay Scotty. You got the loud part down really well!"

"He's right." Derek bent down to Scott's side, patting him on the back. "The big problem was that you still tried to yell more instead of growling more. You're a werewolf, not a human. Screaming like a human with werewolf lungs and throat is only going to make a wail like you just did." Derek bent down, pressing his hands into Scott's chest. "Start a growl here."

After wiping away some stray tears and a sniffle or two, Scott nodded. He growled right where Derek's hand laid, making direct eye contact with the Alpha.

Derek's eyes flashed a brighter red. "Good. Now make it louder."

Stiles felt the rumbling from Scott on the air, and watched the pup's eyes golden eyes grow brighter and brighter with each second.

"Good. Tilt your head back." Derek ordered.

Scott leaned his head back, as Derek's hand guided his head to the right angle.

"Right here, Scott. Now, growl in your throat like normal, but use all the air in your lungs." Derek stepped backwards, just as Scott ripped open his mouth.

"Howl" wouldn't be quite the right word. Stiles flinched back as his son let rip a roar, not unlike that of a lion. Much like Isaac's, the tone cracked and rippled in places, but far closer than his first attempt.

Flushing, Scott closed his mouth, glancing off to the side. "Uh... Did I..."

"Yeah, you did!" Stiles exclaimed, running over and offering Scott a high-five. "That, little buddy was awesome!"

Derek nodded, chuckling with a big grin on his face. "He's right. Well done, Scott. Like Isaac, your throat muscles will develop more as you grow, but you've got the basics of it down." He eyed both Isaac and Scott. "If either of you are in trouble, or get separated from us, I want you both to howl as loud as you can. Stiles or I will come running."

"Okay Alpha! Can we start hunting now?! Are we gonna get a cow?" Isaac asked, bouncing up and down and tugging at Derek's shirt.

"We're getting a cow?" Scott's face crumbled, pouting as he stared up at Stiles. "I don't wanna kill a cow. Cows aren't mean!"

Derek and Stiles both stifled a chuckle.

"Not quite. I don't think either of you could take a squirrel, let alone a cow. So we're going to start with an easy target that we're just going to practice on. We won't be hunting, and won't have any claws out. Just a playful game, with someone that even pups would be able to take down." Derek bent down between the pups, pointing up directly at Stiles. "Stiles will be our target. I'm going to teach you both how to sneak up and tackle a target to the ground."
"Stiles will be the what, now?" Stiles glared at Derek.

Derek grinned, a little too eagerly. "Get running. The boys will be chasing after you, and try to take you down. Right now, they're not up to taking on a live animal, but a high school counselor and the bane of the Sheriff department's existence every prank week?"

"Daddy's really slow. He can catch him, easy." Scott whispered, a little too loudly into Isaac's ear.

Gasping, Stiles pointed right into Scott's direction. "Traitor!"

Derek brought both pups into a huddle. "We'll give the target a five minute head start. Now... Here's my plan, and it's the basis of the basics. Anyone can do this trick"

Clearly, Stiles' fate had been sealed. Against his better judgement, Stiles jogged off on the path, and into the depths of the forest. Several minutes passed, and Stiles managed to get pretty far into the forest. Well past his "head start".

Things were quiet. Way too quiet. Especially for his kid.

Stiles stopped in the middle of the path. He turned around, listening for the sound of footsteps.

There were none.

"This will not end well for me." Stiles thought, creeping in the woods.

A crack, high in the air, sent a chill down Stiles' spine.

Glancing up, Stiles gulped. In the trees were Derek, Scott, and Isaac, perched on a branch. All their eyes, glowing, all grinning with pointed fangs.

"Now." Derek ordered, in a short, curt whisper.

Scott and Isaac leapt from the trees, yelling like a pair of monkeys through the air.

"No! Not like this!" Stiles yelled, attempting to kick off and run away from the boys. Instead, he fell flat to the ground, as Scott and Isaac landed on his back. Scott put his un-clawed hands into Stiles' side, while Isaac grabbed at Stiles' shoulder blade. Their combination pinned Stiles to the ground, effectively tagging Stiles as dinner.

"We got him!" Isaac exclaimed, hopping up and down happily on Stiles' back.

"We did it! Alpha Derek was right! Daddy was EASY to catch!" Scott laughed, high-fiving the air with Isaac.

Faux-dying, Stiles planted his head in the ground, making exaggerated noises. "Ugh. Vanquished by expert hunting pups. Avenge me, Paw-Paw! Avenge me!" He called out, raising a hand up into the air. With his "final breath", Stiles slammed his eyes shut, tongue rolling out of his mouth.

Derek landed mere inches away from Stiles' head, in a squatting position, hovering over Stiles. He smirked, playfully. "Cut down in his prime. My boss is going to be pissed about this."

Stiles squawked, sweat dripping down his neck. "This is a WERE graduate. Why do I get the feeling he knew exactly where he was landing?"

"Did we do good, Alpha?" Isaac asked, now sitting cross-legged on Stiles' back. Scott, too, sat behind Isaac and looked expectantly at Derek.
"My poor back..." Stiles mumbled, ignored by the rest of the party.

Alpha Hale nodded, briefly. "Pretty good. You both landed a little low, though. Next time, aim for the neck and upper body. Land too low, and you might get bucked off if you attacked a wild animal. Luckily, you just attacked Stiles. He doesn't have a killer instinct."

"Gee, thanks Derek." Stiles grumbled. He raised himself up, grabbing both Isaac and Scott under his arms and hopping back up to his feet. "Very scary, the both of you! If I were a bunny, I'd totally be dinner now."

Isaac and Scott exchanged horrified glances before both staring blankly at Derek.

"Do we... Do we have to kill bunnies? I like bunnies!" Scott asked, voice shaking.

"I don't want to kill a bunny!" Isaac added, in equal horror.

Derek shook his head, face-palming exasperatedly. "No, we're not going to kill any bunnies." He glared impending death on Stiles for mentioning "bunnies".

Stiles flinched down, using both pups as a shield from the Alpha.

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Stiles' back ached by the noon that afternoon, and would probably need to soak in hot water later. Scott's bubble bath would be rescheduled that night, and Stiles would not be swayed by puppy eyes.

By the end of the path, both pups were able to leap out of trees, and land on Stiles' neck with decent accuracy. Derek repeated his advice around a thousand times before the pups caught on, but the prideful smile on the Alpha's face seemed to wash away any frustration he might have felt that day.

Despite the aches and pains, Stiles laughed as he felt Scott and Isaac hanging off his neck, grabbing both the pups off his back and into his arms.

"Got you again!" Scott giggled.

"I got you too, Mr. Stiles!" Isaac exclaimed.

Sitting both pups down on the path, flashed a smile in Isaac's direction. "You can just call me Stiles, Isaac. We're friends, right?"

Isaac gasped, covering his all-encompassing grin. "We are?!" He immediately spun to face Derek, waving excitedly in Stiles' direction. "Alpha! Can I be Stiles' friend too? Can I?"

Derek glanced away from Scott, who he'd been helping howl often-on since earlier that morning. He nodded, giving Isaac a thumbs up. "I don't see why not. You've tackled him plenty enough today, and he hasn't eaten you, so... He must be pretty friendly."

"My Daddy doesn't eat people!" Scott huffed in Derek's direction.

Isaac glanced up to Stiles, giggling. "Nah, Stiles wouldn't eat me! He's really nice, Alpha! When I stayed the night with Scott, he and his Paw-Paw told really good stories!"
Chuckling, Derek nodded. "I know he's a nice person, Isaac. I've known his Paw-Paw since I was a pup." He smiled fondly, for all of a moment before pointing up to the trees. "You two get to climbing. We'll do one or two more tree takedowns, and move on to something different."

Scott and Isaac scrambled excitedly to a nearby tree trunk, using their claws to climb more efficiently. Each pup tripped at certain points, only to be caught and helped out by the other.

Stiles and Derek walked along the path, giving each of the pups time to "prep". They both chuckled, hearing a few arguments between the pups in the trees, before silence crossed the area overhead.

"My little man is all grown up and... Hunting humans! I'm so proud..." Stiles wiped away an imaginary tear, shooting a smile in Derek's direction. "Thank you, Derek. Scott has been really excited about this all week, and he's had a blast with this, and getting in touch with nature. Seriously, you don't know how much this means to us."

"My pleasure." Derek stretched out into the air, taking in a deep breath. He made several remarks to the pups up in the trees, mostly regarding their lack of stealth, before turning back to Stiles. "I'm surprised you helped all the way through. Honestly, you helping as a target was just a joke I made at the beginning. I didn't expect you to actually go running off. I do appreciate it, though. Having you involved made Scott want to put his everything into it."

Stiles held back the urge to smack the musclehead Alpha in the back of the head. He, instead, folded his arms and scoffed in Derek's direction. "Scott's my son. I'd do anything for him." He paused, glancing away from Derek. "To be honest... I'm glad I could be a part of this. Sometimes I wish... I could connect with Scott as a werewolf."

Stomach warbling, Stiles felt the grip of anxiety take hold of his lungs, crushing them on the inside. He knew Scott loved him, and Stiles would never stop loving Scott. Still, there were certain things Stiles wished he understood about his son.

Like how smell, even that of strangers in public, could sometimes bring Scott to tears with little provocation. The sheer empathetic link between werewolves and other species transcended human understanding. ("He's like a raincloud, Daddy! Can I go give him a hug? He needs a hug!" Scott would sometimes proclaim, before running off to hug an obvious drug addict lying unconscious in a dark alley.)

Or the need for constant physical contact, and the theoretical lacking of any concept of personal boundaries. (God bless Scott, but Stiles put his foot down on his pup wanting sometime to tell him a story while he went potty.)

So much that Stiles could never fathom as a human. A connection he'd never have with Scott.

"Hey." Derek slapped Stiles' shoulder, bringing him back into reality.

"What? Oh, sorry... I got lost in my head for a second." Stiles answered, clearing his throat. "I uh... What were you saying?"

Derek sighed, glancing down at his feet and absentmindedly picking at the band of his shorts. "I don't know if this sounds rude or not, but... Have you ever considered taking the bite?"

"I got tested the week Scott's mother found out she was pregnant." Stiles huffed, frowning lopsidedly. "Only a 15% chance of taking the bite and living it. I was too underweight at the time, and apparently failed the psych test. I've tried working out for mass, but even now I'm barely hitting 20%." He shook his head. "I know what it's like to grow up with a parent that died. Like hell am I
going to put Scott through that if I can help it."

Derek grimaced, turning away. "I'm sorry... For what it's worth... It's clear that Scott thinks the world of you, werewolf or not."

Silence wanted between them. Followed by a screech that rang through the air, as a flash of sandy hair flew down from the trees.

Spinning around, Stiles caught Isaac mid-air, laughing maniacally. "Ha ha! The prey has become the predator! All mine to eat!"

"AHH! Stiles is gonna eat me!" Isaac giggled, while Stiles pretended to gnaw on his head.

"No eating!" Scott yelled, dropping down from a topmost tree and grasping onto Stiles' back.

Stiles played along, dropping to his knees on the ground. He released Isaac, and Scott quickly came to the pup's rescue.

"I saved you! Come on and hurry before Daddy blows on your tummy!" Scott squealed, pulling Isaac away in one hand. The duo were up in the trees, screaming from the "Monster Stiles" and circling around the area.

Derek plopped down next to Stiles, unable to contain a grin. "Isaac seems to get along well with you. He loves Scott, too, that much is obvious. I'm glad, he's pretty nervous around other adults, after... You know."

A rippling cold gripped Stiles' chest. Between the Sheriff and Derek, Stiles had a pretty accurate idea of what happened with Isaac and his biological father. Of course, Isaac's bed-wetting at the previous sleepover, and the wailing of apologies had been the better indicator.

"He's a sweet kid." Stiles adjusted his position, sitting cross legged, in front of Derek. "I'm guessing you're using your Alpha influence to keep him calm? It really works wonders, a hell of a lot better than drugs, that's for sure."

Surprise struck Derek's face, aside an gaped jaw. "You can tell? How?"

Stiles chuckled. "Kids are resilient, but Isaac's pretty calm and easygoing for someone who just watched his father be arrested, after beating the shit out of him. I'm sure you're a big help in that department, Mr. Bestest Alpha, his words not mine, but even miracles have their limits. That, and your eyes are always red when I've seen you around. Nothing massive, and definitely not a full suppression or that crazy Alpha-command bullshit, but more like... I'm guessing you're just exerting a tiny bit of your presence as an Alpha, to anchor him and let him know you're protecting him. My professor, Dr. Marin, used it as a common therapeutic technique."

Derek nodded. "That's... Incredible. You're dead on the mark. I didn't even think humans knew about that."

Playfully, Stiles gently nudged Derek's chest. "Hey now, I studied children of all species from around the world while I was in New York. Selkies? Banshees? Leprechauns? Elves? I know them all!" A proud smile crossed Stiles' face, glancing up at the trees and spotting Scott and Isaac plotting on a branch, talking in hushed whispers. "But... Every chance I got, I studied werewolves, for Scott. Actually, I studied and was a graduate assistant of Dr. Marin. She wrote the book on werewolf care, for werewolves, by a werewolf. We had dinner practically every other night"

Derek nervously shifted in place, worry spreading across his face. "Is that wrong? What I'm doing
with Isaac? I mean... I know my Uncle Peter would do it for me growing up, but... Isaac and I... We're different people, and I don't want to-

Stiles shook his head, watching the big bad Alpha squirm into a nervous mush. "Nah. You're not burying the trauma, you're just easing it away. No different than an anxiety pill I would have prescribed for a human. Though... Easing it away isn't going to be a long term fix. Have you found him a therapist yet? He really needs to talk all of it out, and as quickly as you can."

Relief flooded Derek's face, quickly replaced by a low grumble, with a stoic expression. "Not yet. I haven't found one in town that's willing to take on a werewolf case like this. The closest one is about two hours away, and my insurance won't cover it. Bastards."

"Uh, no offense... But you're clearly forgetting the best option out there. It's a guy with two thumbs, two years of actual experience in the field at a college support center, and who had one hell of a mentor." Stiles pointed to himself, smiling from ear to ear. "If you want, I can help Isaac out. No charge, and we can do the sessions wherever you'd like. A lot of pups do better in their own home environment, where they feel safest."

Derek hitched his breath, clearly dumbfounded by the offer. "You will?"

"Sure!" Stiles gestured all around them. You're helping me out with Scott, I can definitely help you out with Isaac! I'd say that's a pretty fair trade."

Stumbling over his words, Derek eventually nodded, clearing his throat. "I.. I'd appreciate that very much. The Hale pack of Beacon Hills owes you a debt of gratitude."

Stiles rolled his eyes, gently slugging Derek in the shoulder. "Forget about it, seriously." He paused for a moment, surprised by the dead of silence surrounding the woods. Not a single footstep, creaking branch, or mischievous snicker crossed his ear.

Derek and Stiles exchanged a knowing glance.

"Those little twerps are sneaking up on us, aren't they?" Stiles whispered.

Derek grinned, a mouth full of fanged teeth. He'd didn't move a muscle, chuckling to himself. "Are they really going to try this on me? Damn... They've got balls."

Before Stiles could ask what Derek meant by that, Isaac and Scott shot out from a nearby bush, one on each of Derek's side.

Derek shot up, spun around, catching two flying pups mid-air. He tucked them under his arms, and grinned at their wide, surprised eyes.

Stiles's jaw gaped open. He hadn't even heard Scott and Isaac climb out of the trees, and certainly couldn't have caught them both at how quickly they'd darted.

"We almost got you?" Scott asked, grinning sheepishly. "Surprise?"

Derek hefted them both in the air, dangling by their shirt collars. He playfully growled at them, bringing his face within inches of theirs. "Not in a million years, either of you."

Both were dropped to their feet, as Stiles snickered at Scott's displeased expression.

"Told you it wouldn't work! My Alpha's the strongest, ever!" Isaac said, puffing his chest out, proud. Despite his failure, Isaac seemed pleased at Derek's performance.
Scott folded his arms, huffing. "We'll get him NEXT time."

Grimacing, Stiles adjusted his glasses, groaning into the palm of his hand. "Of course my kid would be the one who tried to sneak up on a WERE Police Officer, in broad freaking daylight." He thought, exasperatedly.

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Notes:

Thanks for reading this far! Comments are always welcome, and I appreciate any input!
At the edge of Main Street, Derek stood over a hot red convertible, occupied by a young couple. He scribbled out the rest of their speeding ticket, a scowl crossing most of his face. Passersby avoided Derek completely on-foot, some taking the long way around to miss him (and his terrifying demeanor) entirely.

"Come on, we were barely over the speed limit!" One of the passengers exclaimed, laughing meekly.

Derek rose an eyebrow, keeping his focus on the ticket in front of him. "So you admit you were speeding? Very honorable, not many would accept responsibility for their actions. I'll knock a dollar off the ticket."

The couple cringed at each other, as the driver smiled sheepishly in Derek's direction. "Officer, surely you could just... Give us a warning? We've never had a ticket before in our life, and our record is clean."

Ripping the ticket out of the book, Derek shoved it in the driver's chest. "No. Drive like your kids were playing on this street, or stay off my street." He strode back to the police cruiser, sliding into the passenger seat. Slamming the door, Derek tossed the ticket book into the vehicle's console. "Drive. Go park out by Monty's."

Jackson, in the driver's seat, threw the car into gear. He pulled onto Main Street, shooting Derek a snarky glare. "What's crawled up your ass today? I've seen you give three tickets since we became partners. You've given four today, alone."

Derek leaned against the passenger window. "They were speeding. They broke a law."

"Don't give me that crap, Derek. Spill, partner. You're in a shitty mood." Jackson demanded, stopping at a red light.

Growling under his breath, Derek tapped his foot repeatedly against the floorboard. He huffed, shaking his head. "He cried again when I left for work. After I walked out the door, I heard him sniffle, crying in Stiles' chest."

"Isaac?" Jackson asked.

Derek nodded, watching the town pass by him on the main road. Since returning to work at the Sheriff's Office, Isaac hadn't taken the long hours away from Derek all that well. The pup improved every day, but the tears still streamed down Isaac's face each morning. Then, each night, Isaac would ask if Derek had to go back to work the next morning, clearly disappointed if the answer was "yes". The pup's crumbling face haunted Derek's thoughts every night.

"I feel guilty, leaving him." Derek gulped, feeling the bile rise in the pit of his stomach. "Isaac's been through so much, I feel like I should stay with him. My shifts are unpredictable. I have overtime and extra shifts to work. What kind of an Alpha am I?" He grimaced, banishing the thought of finding a different job immediately. Derek's loved working for the Old Man, and loved the force. This town was his home, and where his mother had been laid to rest.

Jackson parked their vehicle in front of the local Asian-themed restaurant. "Hey, don't feel too bad, Derek. He's staying with Stiles and Scott, right? I'm sure he has a fun time every day. Knowing Stiles, he probably has a party every day. With cake and a confetti cannon." He turned to Derek,
with a sly smirk. "Am I wrong?"

A short smile crossed Derek's face. Jackson wasn't wrong, and Derek knew it.

There were days Derek questioned if Stiles was a human or not. Stiles worked so well with Scott and Isaac, and kept the pups entertained all day long that Derek never heard the end of the amazing "Stiles" once he got off work. In fact, most days, Derek had a rough time getting Isaac back home after a day with the Stilinskis. A few times, he ended up crashing on the Sheriff’s couch, lacking the heart to force Isaac back home, or to interrupt their play session.

Jackson chuckled. "I'm sure Isaac misses you when you leave. You're the closest thing to a father that he's ever had. Probably the only person on the planet that cares he exists" He flipped on the speed radar, glancing away from Derek. "It's only natural he'd cling to you, Derek. Though, he needs to learn that there are other people in this world that care about him, too. Or Kindergarten will be hell for him and you both."

"Don't even say that word to me." Derek snarled, recalling the mountain of paperwork and the meeting with the local elementary school. Apparently, getting Scott and Isaac in the same classroom would take an act of God, and approval from Alpha Duke. Which he would get, come hell or high water.

"Is Depty Whittemore going to miss having a jaw?" Derek retorted, smirking right back.

While the partners bickered back and forth, the police scanner buzzed to life, squealing inside the cruiser.

"Hale, Whittemore, this is Deputy Parrish. We have a call in from the Whittemore Estate. Mrs. Whittemore is hysterical, and we can't get much out of her. Can you two head over there and see what's going on?"

Jackson's smile died, shooting a nervous glance to Derek. Instantly, Jackson switched on the overhead lights, blew the siren, and squealed back onto Main Street.

Derek grabbed the scanner's microphone. His body tensed. "This is Deputy Hale. We are en route to the Whittemore Estate. What were the details on the call?"

"We didn't get much. The old bag was screeching about some teenagers and a broken window. Kira's still on the line with her. Old Man's running to the Mayor's office to grab Mr. Whittemore. You two are the closest ones to the estate."

Within just a few minutes, Jackson and Derek arrived at the Whittemore estate. A gated, palatial mansion with all the amenities a celebrity could ever hope for. They paused, only for a moment, to allow Jackson to punch in the security code for the main entrance. He raced inside, skidding to a halt at the front door.

Jackson shot out of the vehicle, pointing to a shattered front window to the mansion.

Derek bolted in front of his frantic partner, pushing him behind at a safe distance. They ran inside the front door, following the shrill sounds.

Not far inside, a prim, thin woman with charcoal black hair stood several feet above two teenagers, screaming profane language at the top of her lungs. A pair of teens Derek knew from the County Alpha's pack were yelling right back. Liam Dunbar, a lean, tanned thirteen-year-old and member of
the local baseball team. Beside him was Mason Hewitt, a dark-skinned teen the same age as Liam, with a lanky build, and Deucalion's personal prodigy. Both teens were in varying states of shift.

"I'm trying to tell you, I'm sorry! I'm not trying to do anything to you!" Liam yelled, pointing to a broken window in the nearby dining room. "My Alpha will pay for the damages! Everything was an accident!"

Mason stepped forward. "Mrs. Whittemore, please calm down. This is all a big accident, like Liam said. He didn't mean to break your window. I have Alpha Deucalion's phone number right here! Please, give him a call."

Mrs. Whittemore glared at the pair of teen wolves. She sneered at them, laughing in their faces. "Do you think I'm stupid? Do you really believe that I'm that stupid?" She laughed, pointing at them. "I know exactly what you... What you THINGS are up to!"

The scent in the room changed, tinging Derek's nose with a disgusting, rotting odor. Derek cringed, wiping his nose. "Mrs. Whittemore! Is there a problem here?" The officers came in between the teen wolves and Mrs. Whittemore, defusing the situation.

"Mother, calm down. What's happened?" Jackson asked, gently taking his mother's hands.

Slapping Jackson's hands away, Mrs. Whittemore glared at her son. "Yes. I want both of these miscreants arrested." She pointed to the broken window. "They destroyed my personal property, trespassed by climbing our security fence, and then broke into my home!"

"The door was unlocked. We knocked and rang the doorbell." Liam yelled, turning to look directly into Derek's gaze. "Mason was helping me practice at the open field! I knocked a home-run out of the park, and heard a window shatter. I came to apologize and give them my Alpha's phone number! My pack is responsible for the damages."

Derek turned to face Jackson's mother. "Is this true?" Not that he needed to confirm, he could spot the baseball in question still lying in the dining room. A ball that sported Mason and Liam's scent on it.

"How do I know that's the truth? What if I hadn't been home? They might have very well taken off with our personal belongings." Mrs. Whittemore stuck her nose in the air, scoffing. "I know how all YOU people act."

Liam rolled his eyes. "My parents are both doctors. I don't need any of your shit, lady. My pack makes more than your lazy-ass old money family does in a year."

Mason slapped his hand over Liam's mouth, flashing golden eyes at his friend.

"What did you say, you little twerp!?" Mrs. Whittemore shrieked.

Derek groaned, shoving both teens behind him. "Not helping, Liam. Shut your mouth and get behind me, now."

Mason laughed, peeking out from behind Derek. He glanced up in Derek's direction. "What Liam means is... We wouldn't need to steal anything. Besides, he's been at baseball practice all afternoon. The homerun he hit caused the damage. That's why we ran out here, to see where the ball landed. This wasn't on purpose, obviously."

"I know." Derek whispered, smiling briefly at both teens. "Just be quiet and smile a lot. I'll get you to your Alpha as soon as I can."
"I want them arrested, Jackson! Now!" Mrs. Whittemore screeched, pointing to the teenage wolves. Jackson shook his head. "Mother, they're werewolves. Human laws don't apply to them. Derek and I need to take them to the County Alpha, and he'll pay for the damages. That's the standard procedure."

Derek nodded in agreement. "He's correct. The Sheriff and Alpha Deucalion will work out an appropriate arrangement that benefits all sides. That's the basics of how Supernatural and Human law enforcement work together."

Ignoring Derek completely, Mrs. Whittemore brushed off Derek. "You're taking their side? You're taking those disgusting, low-life mutts' side?"

Liam and Mason's faces paled, stumbling backwards.

Derek's hand balled into a fist. His claws expanded, body slowly shaking from the urge to shift. He stopped Liam from leaping forward, pinning the teen's shoulder and anchoring him to the ground.

Few people would get away with calling any werewolf a "mutt" and keep all their teeth. Had Mrs. Whittemore not been such a prominent figure in Beacon Hills, Derek would have done the damage himself.

"Mother!" Jackson shouted. He narrowed his eyes, flashing a set of flat teeth in her direction. "You've said enough. Derek and I are going to take the kids to the County Alpha, and that's all there is to-"

A crack rang out in the area.

Derek's eyes narrowed, focused on the bright red mark now coloring Jackson's face. The spot where Jackson's mother had just slapped her son, nails and all. Blood trickled down the marks where nails had made direct contact.

“CELIA!” An older male bellowed.

All eyes focused at the entrance of the Whittemore Estate. An older man in his later fifties rushed inside, his graying brown hair and tanned suit bobbing as he ran.

Jackson, clutching his bruised cheek, barely noticed as his father came to his side.

“Alan! Thank goodness you’re here. I need you to take care of this situation immediately.” Celia ranted endlessly, ignored by everyone involved.

Mr. Whittemore took Jackson’s hand, cupping his gently bleeding cheek. “Are you alright, son?”

“I’m fine, Dad.” Jackson spat. He stepped away, shying away from the eyes focused on him. “Just… Can you please deal with mother? She’s blown this all out of proportion. Derek and I should already be on our way to the County Alpha with those two kids. I don’t care if you are the mayor, we’re not arresting them.”

“No, of course not.” Alan glanced in Derek’s direction, nodding approvingly. “Please, do your job, Deputy Hale. We won’t interfere. I apologize for this mess.”

“Like hell we won’t!” Celia shrieked.

Alan silenced her immediately with a stern finger in her face. “Be quiet. Go upstairs and leave this
“But, I-” Celia stammered.

“Now, please. You know our arrangement, Celia. Break it, and I'm not going to be quiet anymore.” Alan kept his back to Celia, focused entirely on Jackson. “Go on, son. We won’t be filing charges, or requesting damages. Please give my apologies to Alpha Duke for the scene.”

Jackson rubbed his cheek. He spun around, stopping in front of Derek. “Come on, let’s go. Oh, and we never speak of this fucking nightmare again.”

Derek nodded in agreement, taking both teens and guiding them back outside to the cruiser. He chose to ignore the chorus of screaming from inside the Whittemore Estate as he drove away.

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Derek felt sorry for Liam and Mason. Getting scolded by an Alpha, especially one as old and honored as Alpha Deucalion was the stuff of nightmares. Even as an adult, leaning at the far end of the Alpha’s study, he felt nervous chills swirl in his gut, hearing their spirited lecture. He felt ten years old again.

“...and at what point did climbing a security fence seem like a sensible idea? Or entering into a house where you had not been invited inside? Or YELLING and SHIFTING in front of someone, that would clearly exasperate the situation?!” Duke’s bandages were removed, a pale set of brick red eyes (bordering on grey) staring them down.

Liam and Mason’s heads dropped lower, focused entirely on the floor.

“Good intentions, perhaps, wanting to apologize and do the right thing to take responsibility. Horrible execution, and a lack of critical thinking. You, especially, Mason, I’m disappointed in. I’d expect my pupil to exercise more wisdom than that.” Duke muttered, folding both arms.

“I’m sorry…” Both teens said in defeated unison. Mason all but crawled in a hole to die, while Liam bit his lip to the point of drawing blood.

Duke sighed, rubbing his forehead. “Both of you will have all electronics confiscated for the rest of the week. This weekend, you’ll both work in the gardens with Danny and Ethan. From what I understand, they’re re-planting the entire estate’s roses. Next week, you’ll work with Aiden at the farm, sweeping the stalls.”

“Yes, Alpha.” Liam and Mason answered.

“Do this, and all is forgiven. Now, go. I believe you both have parents waiting to give you another lecture or twelve.” Duke ordered, shooing both of the teens out of his Study.

Derek waited, watching Liam and Mason reluctantly scurry away from their Alpha’s wrath. Once alone, Derek shut the door to the study.

Duke collapsed into his seat, as both eyes dulled into hollow white globes. He sucked in air, choking as he attempted to catch his breath.

Cringing, Derek glanced away from the pitiable sight. The smell of death, mold, and rot filled the
room in one swift motion. “Duke’s not got much time left… Why is he still clinging to his status as Alpha?” He thought, balling his hand into a fist.

"I understand there was a scene?" Duke muttered, clearing his throat.

Derek nodded, moving closer to Deucalion's side. "We all know Celia Whittemore hates our kind. She wasn't fond of Liam and Mason in her home, but there was no actual harm done. I'm sorry to say that they had heard themselves be called the “M” word."

Deucalion sighed, leaning back into his armchair. He closed his eyes, reaching over and fastening bandages (dripping in a silvery substance) over his eyes. "It's not the first time, and won't be the last time. Many fear our growing numbers, and would lash out immaturely rather than discuss their fears maturely. Though in Celia’s case, there's a deeper fear than most, given what she went through."

Cocking an eyebrow, Derek pondered momentarily about what Duke meant by that. Instead he shook off the urge for idle gossip. "Not all of them are bad, Duke. I wouldn't be here today if not for a human."

Duke smiled, reaching out to pour himself a cup of tea from a set in front of him. "Indeed. Speaking of humans, I understand that you've taken to training Scott Stilinski while you're training Isaac? Some of my pack have seen you with them on the county trails."

"I am. Do you know Scott?" Derek asked, tapping his foot anxiously. Who'd been watching him?

A short smile crossed Duke's face, easing his wisened features. "How's he and Isaac doing with their training? Things going well?"

“You're dodging my question, asshole.” Derek thought, before shaking off his irritation. "Scott's a full blooded wolf at heart. Good instincts, and learns fast. Really, he doesn't need me at this point, but he's very... Thirsty for knowledge and wants to one-up me." He smiled, able to picture Scott's smile from a mile away. The little prick still tried to find Derek off-guard and "catch" him when they were in the woods. A feat impossible by any werewolf in the country, save for one. "Scott’s a good pup."

Duke glanced away, with a gentle smirk. "I see... How about Isaac? Is he faring well with you?"

Derek nodded, sliding down into the seat across from Duke. He crossed his legs, staring into the open fire that filled the room with a near-unbearable heat. "Isaac's a sweet pup. Far too gentle for the world that he came from. He's not as eager as Scott out on the trails, but has a big heart and one hell of a sense of scent. Cares a lot for animals, and I anticipate us having a pet in the next few months, once he's broken down the last of my defenses."

Both men chuckled.

"Install hardwood flooring before you do. My oldest granddaughter broke down my defenses, and our living area was ruined within a month. Ema always had me wrapped around her finger." Duke took a sip of his tea, hands shaking from the exertion.

Derek nodded. "I'm considering buying a house at this point. My apartment doesn't have enough space for Scott and Isaac to play in, and we don't have a backyard."

"Is that so?" A sly smile crossed Duke's face. "If you're in need of land, don't hesitate to ask. Much of Talia's land remain on our borders and are untouched. Per Peter's instructions, of course, it's titled in your name."
Derek’s neck tensed, breath caught up in the bottom of his throat. He cleared his throat, glancing away from Duke. "I'm not entitled to the Riviera land. As I told my Uncle, it should go to a member of the Riviera pack. If any of them are still left, that is."

A sound of discontentment left Duke’s lips. "Talia would have wanted you to have it, Derek. It was her personal property, up until the day she passed. Not pack property, by any means. She'd already been excommunicated by that point. By law, it’s yours."

Derek balled his hand into a fist. "I'd rather not talk about my mother, Duke."

"Very well. The offer stands, Derek.” Duke set his tea aside, atop a stack of manilla files. “With a growing pack such as yours, I'm sure you'll be in need of better lodgings than a small apartment."

"Excuse me?” Derek asked. "Growing?"

Duke hid a mischievous smile with his hand. "Is Scott not a member of your pack? What about the Stilinskis? Surely they've come under your wing, have they not?"

Dumbfounded, Derek’s mouth gaped. He hadn't thought about it. Certainly, he’d acted, in an unofficial capacity, as Scott's Alpha by teaching him the basics of hunting, tracking, and howling. A bonding experience that all pups in a pack share with an Alpha, alongside their parents. Realization struck Derek, as the air in his lungs tightened.

Like Isaac, he felt oddly… Protective of Scott. He felt invested in Scott’s success, and wanted the pup to grow just as well as Isaac did.

"I don't know.... That's not why I'm training Scott. I did it for the Stilinskis, and my debt... I'm not... I'm not trying to build a pack." Derek’s words, like his thumping heart, fumbled around with uncertainty.

"Is that really so wrong, Derek? Wanting to build a pack?” Duke reached over, lacing his bony fingers over Derek’s. “As I’ve said many times, I have no qualms with a second Alpha in my territory. In fact, many are eager for you to rise up. A WERE graduate could only bring about a highly successful pack. You, Derek, who I’ve known for years, I know would be an amazing Alpha. One who’d bring many people a great deal of happiness. Of course, you’d bring yourself joy in the process as well."

Derek’s face froze. His chest tightened, picturing the long days training Scott, and spending out on the trails with Stiles.

The last week’s, surprisingly enough, had been… Fun. Nights weren't spent wallowing in a dark room, or weekends taking every overtime shift that came up at the Sheriff's department. His life wasn’t all about work anymore.

"May I make a suggestion? From an experienced father of many, and as an Alpha who’s served well over fifty years in his post?” Duke muttered, breaking the awkward silence.

Derek nodded, in a daze.

Duke smiled, patting Derek’s hand. "Offer the Stilinskis membership to your pack. Start there, start small, with people whom you trust."

“…” Derek stammered.

"I know you're not eager to start a pack, Derek.” Deucalion took his hand away, leaning back
against his seat. His head dropped. "You've lived a difficult life, and have good reason to be wary of large packs. Yet, by avoiding them, you also lose your hope of creating something truly beautiful. Something stronger than any family, and more precious than a diamond."

Derek slammed his eyes shut.

"I hope that you'll be able to find something just as beautiful in your life, both for yourself, and your child." Duke smiled, reaching once more for his tea. "After all, you'd be the force driving that pack’s laws, and no longer the victim of them."

Derek laughed, shooting up from the chair and turning his back to Duke. "When did this turn into a discussion about me? I came here to bring you Liam and Mason, which I’ve accomplished. If you’ll excuse me, I really need to get back to the station."

"Forgive the doddering old man. I’m a tad sentimental at my age and tend to ramble." Duke shook his head, smirking.

Thump. Thump-Thump.

Derek spun around, eyes focused on the old man’s chest, clearly making out the lie that had just left the Alpha’s lips.

Duke merely shrugged. "Forgive the lying, doddering old man, then."

Waving off the Alpha’s odd behavior, Derek exited the study, shutting the door behind him as he left.

Left alone, Duke coughed, hacking out globs of blood that spurted out of his hand. Blood trickled from behind Duke’s bandage, a tear crossing down his cheek. "Please hurry Derek… Please… Hurry. It… It has to be you.” He prayed, bowing his head before collapsing into sleep in his chair.

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Derek’s shift came to an end after his dealings with Alpha Duke. After attempting to phone Jackson and check up on him (to little success, his partner had vacated the Department after turning in the reports from the Whittemores), Derek clocked out for that week.

Thankful to be done with his work for the week, Derek hopped up the front porch of the Stilinski home. Despite the glazed fatigue of his eyes, Derek’s face brightened as the door opened up for him, with Stiles standing in comic-themed pajamas. Because, of course, Stiles would wear something like that.

"Happy weekend, Derek. My dad’s already crashed upstairs, and by the package of missing oreos I know he stole, I'm guessing you guys had a rough day.” Stiles closed the door as Derek stepped inside, locking it firmly behind them.

With little ceremony, Derek huffed through his nose and kicked off his work boots at the entrance. "Being around you, the Sheriff, and the other humans in our department spoiled me. I forget that not all humans favor our kind, and some are just begging to be punched in the face. With my teeth."

Stiles led Derek through the Stilinski home, heading upstairs to the bedrooms. He rolled his eyes,
sighing. "Was it Old Lady Jenkins, Fire Chief Jon, or the queen of the assholes, Celia Whittemore?"
He asked, stopping at the top of the staircase.

Derek scoffed. "I take it you've had run-ins?" He spotted Stiles' death grip on the staircase.

"You could say that. You could also say that I've been told I'm going to hell for having sex with a werewolf, my dick is tainted with non-existent werewolf STDs, I've got "doggy fever". and that my son is a satanic offspring who shouldn't exist. Of course, that's the mild stuff I've heard." Stiles stomped up the rest of the staircase, stopping in front of Scott's bedroom. He paused for a moment, huffing. "Of course, werewolves can be just as hateful. Though they just prefer to target Scott, call him a halfling, say he's not a "real" werewolf or some stupid shit. I'd rather them insult me instead, to be honest. Seriously, why does everyone have to be such an asshole? What the fuck does Scott's mother and father have to do with him as a person?"

Derek dropped his head, nodding in agreement. His chest tightened, heart fuming at the thought of anyone talking to Scott like that. In a nearby mirror, Derek caught a glimpse of his eyes flashing a deep, crimson red. His ears and fangs had shifted, breaking his control.

"It doesn't." Derek grunted out. He forced back his shift.

"Damn straight." Stiles murmured, cracking the door to Scott's room open.

Derek peeked inside the bedroom, gently smiling as the sight before him. Scott and Isaac were fast asleep, snoring under the sheets, surrounded by a sea of fuzzy toys. They both clung to their stuffed wolves, limbs crossing over one and other. He spotted evidence of blanket forts all over the room, and a dusty old tome bookmarked on the bedside that smelled of hundreds, if not thousands of hands that had touched it over time.

"Sorry, I tried to keep them up long enough to see you, but they had a big day. Both passed out around 8 o'clock." Stiles said, laughing quietly to himself. He nodded in Isaac's direction. "Do you want to wake him?"

Derek shook his head. "Let him sleep in peace. He had too many years without it."

Shutting the door behind him, Stiles led Derek back downstairs. He stopped at the downstairs closet, grabbing spare blankets and pillows. "Sorry our couch is lumpy. Better than the floor, at least?"

"I appreciate the hospitality." Derek pulled off his over-shirt, folding it neatly on a living room chair. He helped Stiles prepare a makeshift bed on the couch, before taking a seat next to him.

"What'd you have them play today to wear them out so much?" Derek asked.

Stiles chuckled, grinning from ear to ear. "First it was cartoons until they got bored, Isaac was enamored by all the Disney VHS tapes we had. Followed by breakfast, playtime outside, and ended with a big lunch. Naps barely long enough to be called naps. Then, for training's sake, I hid about 5 bucks worth of quarters all over the house with my scent on it. If they found them all, I said I'd take them out for snow cones."

"How'd they do?" Derek rose an eyebrow, surprised at the ingenuity. He'd had a hard time training either of the boys in tracking scents. In the woods, all they ever wanted to do was play around. It didn't help that scent-tracking was the hardest skill for any werewolf to learn, even in WERE. Derek, himself, was only sub-par at that skill.

"Found nine dollars" Stiles answered, giving Derek a thumbs up.
"Wha... How?" Derek sputtered over his words.

Stiles burst out in laughter, pointing all around the room. "Isaac was too good, and found spare change in the couch, under the carpet, and in my dad's bedroom. That little guy can find anything. When we got back, Scott begged Isaac to teach him. Which somehow led to a game involving action figures, Scott's stuffed toys, and War-Forts. King Stiles was devastated by losses all afternoon."

Derek's chest swelled in pride at his son's tracking skills. He listened passively at the rest of Scott and Isaac’s antics for the day. They listened to the late-night TV news, grateful that nothing had been mentioned about the Whittemore estate.

After serving coffee, Stiles leaned back against the couch. He took in a deep breath. He ran a hand through his hair. "So... Awkward question. I've been stressing over it all day, him-hawing around it this entire time, and I'd rather just go out there and ask it."

A deep, thudding heartbeat echoed in Stiles' chest. Derek faced him, unsure of what prompted such nervous energy. "Ask anything."

Stiles tapped his foot nervously against the floor. "Scott asked Isaac today why you were called "Alpha". So I had to explain to him all about the differences between a werewolf family and a werewolf pack. About the ranks of Alpha, Alpha Mate, Second, Betas, and... Well, one thing led to another, and I explained that you and Isaac were more than just father and son. That you were... A pack.."

Derek nodded. "Which is all true."

Groaning quietly, Stiles rubbed his forehead. "Which made Scott really curious about packs. He apparently thinks that it's the coolest thing in the entire world, so of course, Scott was asking today... If you were his Alpha, and if we were all a pack, since you've been training him like Isaac. Isaac said “of course” before I had a chance to step in, and now Scott... Well, he’s over the moon."

Derek's chest took its turn to thump deeply.

Stiles sighed. "Listen... My dad's already told me you're not really big into building a pack, and Isaac was a special case, of course. Training Scott is one thing, but pack membership is another. I didn't say anything to Scott right away, because I didn't know how you'd react, or if you're even recruiting."

Derek bit his bottom lip, glancing away. A short smile crossed his face.

"All of that aside... Is the Hale Pack interested in a smart-ass, a sarcastic kid, and an Old Man with heart problems? In the last couple of weeks, I can tell you'd be great influence on Scott as an Alpha. He's going to need someone growing up, someone I trust to guide him as he grows into an adult werewolf." Stiles laughed nervously, shaking his head. "Honestly, you're the only Alpha I've met who hasn't turned his back on Scott, or dismissed him entirely. If there's any chance...."

Derek's eyes flickered in a red light. "I'd be honored to have the Stilinskis as part of my pack. You, your father, and Scott. I'll make the registration official tomorrow." The words fumbled out of Derek's mouth before he could catch them, in the same way that he'd accepted the offer of training Scott. His face paled, catching on at the last second of what he's just said.

"W... What?" Stiles choked the words out, mouth agape.

Derek picked nervously at the side of the couch. He shrugged, haphazardly. "Scott's a good friend
to Isaac. He'll grow up to be a strong wolf, and I'd be honored to be a part of that. I owe your family that much, after all the kindness they've shown me." He stifled a gentle red blush under his eyes.

"Kindness? What kindness do you owe us for?" Stiles asked, shaking off the initial shock. “I thought we were trading training for babysitting and therapy?"

“Oh…” Derek crossed his legs. "Did your father not tell you? When I was a pup, the Old Man saved my life by killing my abusive father. Honestly, that’s why I became a police officer and graduated from WERE, so I could repay my debt to the Stilinski family and serve the town of Beacon Hills under him."

"Wait… Whoa, whoa, whoa… Hold up here!" Stiles’ jaw hit the floor, grabbing Derek’s shoulder and squeezing it tightly. “My dad… My dad killed a werewolf?! How the... How the hell did he do that?!"

"A silver bullet. They hadn't developed the tranquilizer cuffs back then, so he only had one option. Had he not stopped my father, I would have died.” Derek balled his hands together, remembering the “Old Man” in his prime. He’d looked a lot like Stiles, only buffer and with a lighter blond hair. Deputy Stilinski, at the time, had been Derek’s hero. "He saved my life, and my older sister's. My Uncle, who'd become the Hale’s East Coast Alpha, adopted us, and took us in. Laura inherited my father's status as the Alpha of San Francisco’s county. I inherited my mother's, when she'd passed away a few years earlier, in her territory of Beacon Hills."

“Wow.” Stiles fell backwards, laying down on the edge of the couch. “My Dad was actually that much of a badass? I just always though he was a la-... Hey, wait.” Flipping back up, Stiles made direct contact with Derek. "Both your parents were Alphas? How does that work? Each pack only has one Alpha who pass on that power to a successor, right?"

Derek dropped his head. "They weren't from the same pack. I was born as a bastard, out of wedlock by two Alphas that cheated on their mates. The son of Alpha Gregory Hale and Alpha Talia Rivera." Stiles rubbed the back of his head, laughing nervously. "I'm sorry, I shouldn't have asked that. I'm just… I've got this bad habit of forcing my foot down my mouth at least three times a day."

Derek shrugged. "You're my pack, there aren't any secrets between us now. I'm not ashamed of my mother, she was an amazing woman who loved me. Even though we were alone, those were the happiest days of my life. My father can go to Hell, though. He nearly made Laura and I give up on life."

“Oh! Well, then fuck that dude, hard-core.” Stiles said, clapping Derek’s shoulder. He laughed. “You showed that bastard, huh? WERE badass, am I right?"

Derek chuckled, shooting Stiles a smile. “I didn’t do WERE because of my father. I did it for the Old Man, and Peter. Peter trained me since I was a pup, so I could go into law enforcement and follow that dream. I did it for them, and to prove to myself that I was stronger than my past. Which I did.”

In that instant, Derek felt his shoulders lighten. Again, his mouth gaped. “How the hell did he get me to spill my guts like that?” He glanced at Stiles, wary of the man’s hidden skills.

Instead, Derek was met with a somber, quiet smile on the young Doctor’s face.
“Ema and I… Oh, Ema is Scott’s mother, by the way.” Stiles forced the rest of the coffee down his throat. He sighed. “We didn’t start dating until we were both sixteen, but had been friends since Kindergarten. I’d been an unofficial member of Alpha’s Deucalion’s pack until we’d mated at 19. Then I was a full-fledged member. I lived with them for a year or two, while Ema and I were getting our Bachelor’s.”

“Oh?” Derek said, surprised that such a traditional pack would allow a human in their midst.

Stiles shut his eyes. “Of course, after a couple of unfortunate things happened… The elder members of the pack elected to remove me from the Pack, despite Duke’s protests. Scott’s birthright into the pack was stripped. I was so mad… Infuriated. A few times, I pictured going over and punching the old bastards in the teeth.” The usually peaceful, contented gaze of Der. Stilinski melted. His face shook, tears gathering in the edges of his eyes.

“Stiles… You don’t have to-” Derek stammered, silenced by Stiles’ hand.

“There are no secrets between us, Derek. We’re pack, right?” Stiles said, taking a deep breath before continuing. He wiped the tears from his eyes. A short smile returned. “Scott was a big reason why I went into psychology. But… Part of me wanted to know. I wanted to know why everything happened the way it happened, and I… I wanted to know what went on in their heads. I just… I had to know why.”

After a moment’s pause, Derek dared to look Stiles in the eyes. “Did you find your answer?”

“I did. Surprisingly enough, though, it had nothing to do with my degree. I learned that people are just assholes, plain and simple.” Stiles chuckled, stretching out into the air. He sighed, bopping himself on the head. “All you can do is ignore them, and live life not worrying about it.”

Derek nodded, yawning as he stretched out. “I could have told you that without all those years of college.”

“Shaddup!” Stiles flicked Derek on the back of the head.

They both laughed, while Stiles gathered his and Derek’s empty mugs of coffee.

While Derek flopped down for the night, ready to get some well deserved sleep, his phone buzzed in a quick, no-nonsense melody.

“Who the…” Derek reached over, picking up his phone from the coffee table. Swiping it open, he spotted the message and felt ice shoot down his veins.

Peter: Care to explain why there is a Hale pack registered in Beacon Hills, a pup named Isaac having a new birth certificate issued with the name of “Hale”, and I wasn’t called? If I’m a grandfather, I’d like to have a little notice so I can spoil the hell out of the kid, and retire from this fucking nightmare of a job.

Derek rolled his eyes, quickly typing a response.

Derek: It's a complicated situation, and I know you're busy with the Board's Referendum. Was
going to call you when the Council convened for the year. Also, I'd expect three more registrations by tomorrow.

The response came instantly.

*Peter:* I'm never THAT busy that I can't take a phone call from my only son. Fuck the Board with a rusty rake, I can do whatever the hell I want with my time.

*Peter:* Have you at least told Laura of these "complications"?

Derek groaned, banging his head against his phone.

*Derek:* Laura's busy running her pack, and raising her pup. I didn't want to bother her just yet.

Like before, Peter's response was swift, mere seconds after Derek had hit “sent”.

*Peter:* I'm taking off next week and flying down. Call Laura, invite her over, and pray she doesn't murder you before I get there.

*Peter:* I expect a call in the morning, first thing, and I want all the details.

*Peter:* Or I will call Duke and have you arrested until you do.

*Peter:* Do not test me, son.

Derek sighed, rubbing his face. “Oh believe me, I’m not testing anyone, dad.”

Stiles passed by, flipping off the overhead lights to the home. "Everything okay? You look… Worried."

Feigning a short cry, Derek shook his head. "Ready to meet the Pack In-Laws?"

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Author Notes: Thanks for reading, and thanks for all the comments thus far! Comments are always appreciated!

The next chapter is going to be one of my favorites. :)


Stiles’ last visit to the Beacon Public Swimming Pool had been years earlier. Naturally, he’d been surprised at its upgrade to an aquatic resort, with several different pools, water slides, and a kid/pup friendly area for first time swimmers. Of course, he hadn’t come around to inspect it since coming home, given Scott’s fear of deep water, and lack of swimming skills. Attempts at getting his pup in the water back in New York often resulted in Scott clamboring up a tree and not coming down for hours at a time.

Rookie mistake, turns out, as he’d forgotten to discount the “Alpha” factor.

Stiles waded at a safe distance away from the group of active swimmers, capable of seeing Derek’s buff, towering physique from a mile away in the deep end.

“Daddy! Daddy, look! I’m swimming!” Scott shrieked in joy, as he held onto Derek’s arm for dear life (making the pup’s water wings ultimately pointless), in an attempt to dog-paddle across the pool.

“Stiles! I can swim, too! Do you see me!? I can do it!” Isaac, on Derek’s other arm, paddled with his feet, far more confident than Scott was.

Lifting his arm up, Stiles waved at the duo. He flinched in pain, feeling the sting under a white bandage that covered his left shoulder. “I see you! Good job guys!”

Derek turned their group around, swimming back to Stiles. He swam slowly, keeping pace with the pups’ basic skills. “Bravely”, Scott and Isaac flubbed out of Derek’s grasp in the shallow end, and swam a couple of feet, both grabbing onto Stiles’ chest, brightly smiling.

“Wow! Look at my two little fishes!” Stiles ruffled their hair, glancing over Scott. On his upper left chest was a freshly inked mark from a few days earlier. A set of three spirals, enclosed by a circle. The “triskele”, one that matched the massive mark on Derek’s upper back, and the tiny one on Isaac’s left chest. Since getting the mark of the Hale Pack a few days earlier, Scott hadn’t stopped smiling. (Or throwing off his shirt at the drop of a hat to show anyone who hadn’t seen it. Even in public.)

Derek clasped his hand on Scott’s shoulder. “Scared of the water, huh? Not my Scott.”

“Nuh-uh!” Scott responded, puffing his chest out. “I’m not scared of nuthin’!”

“Me either!” Isaac added, sticking his nose in the air.

Stiles chuckled, bopping both of them on the head. “Of course not! I’m sure you’re both ready to jump off the diving board, right?” He watched both pups pale on the spot, exchanging a panicked look between one and other.

“How about I do it with you both?” Derek offered, lifting himself out of the pool. Standing over Stiles, he extended both arms.

“Yeah, Alpha Derek will do it with us!” Scott took Derek’s hand, being lifted out of Stiles’ arm with ease. Isaac followed suit, as the trio took the long walk across the pool.

Stiles let out a deep sigh, sliding into the water and letting the cool water mask the sunburn he’d surely earn later that day. He watched Scott bounce excitedly, hand-in-hand with Isaac, speaking animatedly to Derek. Of which, Derek responded to each question, with a vivid smile.
“Scott’s happy. He’s got a friend. He’s happy being himself, and not hiding in his room, reading all the time. He’s active, and wants to be with his pack.”

Stiles’ chest thudded, and he smiled quietly to himself.

“Who the hell am I kidding? I’m happy too. I forgot how much I missed being around people.”

Years of isolation in New York, save for his professors, classmates, and the Old Man via Skype, had been lonely. He wasn’t into the dating scene, and his Saturday nights only got as wild as Caillou with Scott.

Since meeting Derek, he’d been out and about, with the pups, with Derek, and as a Pack. Trails, movies, the swimming pool today, and even an impromptu camping trip in the Stilinski back yard.

Deep inside his chest, a cold swirl shifted into a warm pulse.

“STILES STILINSKI, YOU SNEAKY LITTLE SHIT!”

“I didn’t do it Dr. Harris!” Stiles squawked, splashing in the pool, until he spotted a group of familiar faces.

A lithe, tanned male with punked up black hair, was his old friend, Danny Mahealani. Beside him was the bulky, blonde Deputy Ethan Mahealani. Hanging behind the two were Liam and Mason, both with beet red faces, and exhaustion written all over them. As they got closer, they all smelt faintly of roses and plant fertilizer.

On the lot of them, the bud and stem of a red rose, faintly shaped in a “D” pattern, were inked on their upper chests.

Danny jumped into the water with little ceremony, inches from Stiles. He threw his arms around the human, plummetting them both into the water.

Once out of the water, Stiles hugged Danny right back, pealing the sky with gleeful laughter.

“Danny Mahealani, you dickhole! Where have you been!? I’ve called at least three times to the house!”

Laughing back, Danny shook his head. “Dude, I’m Duke’s ambassador to the rest of the state. Being a Beta for a pack like ours is no joke. I’ve been traveling all month, working out deals with the other county packs on his behalf. Got back last night!”

“You? Promoted to Beta? That’s an Alpha’s right hand! How the hell did you get a gig like that?!?” Stiles laughed in the air, earning a quick slug from Danny, followed by another tight hug.

“STILES!” Liam and Mason shrieked in unison.

Liam and Mason were in the water soon after, throwing their arms around Stiles and crushing his chest. Danny was thrown out of the way, with nary a care.

“Stiles! Why didn’t you come see us!” Liam yelled, growling through his teeth. The teen’s face wavered, on the verge of heartbreak.

“We were supposed to play chess when you came back! I’ve gotten better, Duke’s been teaching me, and now I can totally kick your ass!” Mason cried out, burying his head in Stiles’ chest.

Stiles’ chest trembled for a moment. The last time he’d seen either of those pups, Ema’s nephews,
they’d barely come up to his chest. Now, here they were, as tall as he was. Both probably could beat his ass to the moon and back.

Stiles wrapped around their necks, all but wringing them out. “Sorry, guys! It’s been hectic since day one I got back. A lot’s happened, and I… I haven’t had a real chance to reconnect.”

Liam and Mason let up on their hugs, glaring daggers in Stiles’ direction.

“What was so important you couldn’t come and see us?” Liam spat, folding his arms.

A wail of laughter caught all their attention. They glanced over to the diving board, where Stiles stifled a snort.

Derek, a pup under each arm, threw himself off the diving board. He and the pups formed a “human” cannonball, creating a massive plume of water in the air, cascading a brief summer rain over the rest of the pool patrons. All dotted with excited squeals from two pups and a grown man (whom Stiles never thought was capable of making such a joyful expression). Scott and Isaac waded in the water on their water wings, paddling to their Alpha.

“I’ve been busy watching over my dorks. They’d be lost or kicked out of everything if I didn’t keep them in line.” Stiles pointed off in Derek’s direction.

Ethan slid inside the pool, jaw agape as he threw an arm around Stiles, hugging him from the side. “Please tell me that was Derek Hale. Holy hell, will I have the juiciest gossip next shift! Sir Alpha Grumpy actually screamed like a little kid!” He grinned wildly, releasing Stiles and pulling Danny into a side-hug. He pressed a gentle kiss on his husband’s cheek.

Liam and Mason dropped their heads, glancing away from Derek and rubbing the back of their necks. Both seemed to shy away from the Deputy, for whatever reason.

“Daddy! Daddy, did you see us! We went BOOM!” Scott squealed, hopping off Derek’s shoulder and swimming himself into Stiles’ open arms.

All eyes from Duke’s pack focused immediately on Scott. Danny’s face dropped by a mile, while Ethan bit his bottom lip. Liam and Mason sniffed the air around them, making an immediate connection.

Scott, too, caught a wiff on his nose. He turned to Stiles, clearly confused by the familiar smell. There was a brief silence, followed by a shallow, raspy gasp.

“Oh my God… No way it that our little Scotty!” Danny leapt forward and bent down to Scott’s level. “You’ve gotten so big! Last time I saw you, you were in diapers!”

Scott cocked his head, curiously. Yet, he eventually smiled, waving to Danny after Derek came to Stiles’ side and ruffled the pup’s hair. “Hi! Who are you?”

Bile rose in the bottom of Stiles’ stomach. Disgust at Scott not knowing one of his Godparents, and that being partially his own fault for running when he did. Words failed to form at Stiles’ lips.

Derek put a hand on Stiles’ shoulder, gripping it.

Brought back to the surface, Stiles signaled to the group of people, clearing his throat. “Scott, these are your cousins, Liam Dunbar and Mason Hewitt. Danny’s your Uncle, and this is his husband, Ethan.” He then signaled to Derek and Isaac. “Everyone else, this is Alpha Derek Hale, and his
“Yeah! See this?! It means Derek’s my Alpha!” Scott pointed to his chest, puffing out his chest to proudly show off his Triskele.

“You’re… Scott. That Scott. Aunty Em’s Scott.” Liam’s chest fell, turning to Mason. Inside his mouth, fangs protruded against his cheeks, forming an obvious outline.

Mason skirted his eyes between Scott and Stiles, quietly wading in the water. He then offered a quick smile, waving back to Scott with a faux-smile. “Hi Scott! Hi Isaac! Nice to meet you!”

Scott swam in front of his cousins, Isaac following after by a safe distance. “Hi! You wanna play with us? The water’s really fun!”

There’s a brief pause, as Stiles’ chest constricted, making breathing difficult. He knew damn well that everyone in Deucalion’s pack were informed that Stiles was exiled. That Scott wasn’t to be treated as one of their own, and not to interact with either of them. From the Alpha, all the way down to the youngest pup, the name “Stilinski” meant shit. Non-enforceable by pack law (Duke saw to that, thankfully), but highly encouraged by the upper-echelon of the pack.

Encouragement many of them followed, for a brief time, out of fear and pressure.

Yet, all that worry melted, watching Liam sigh through his nose and smile weakly.

“Sure! Wanna go play Chicken, Lil’ Cuz?” Liam asked, nudging Mason with his foot. “Mason can get Isaac, and you and I can be a team. Because, I mean, come on… We’re obviously the best team, am I right?” His eyes flashed gold, with a smug smirk to accompany it.

“Yeah! That sounds awesome!” Scott climbed onto Liam’s shoulders, supported by the teenage would. “What’s Chicken?”

Mason took Isaac by the hand, as their group waltzed over to the shallower end, so they could all stand without the need for wading.

Before long, Liam explained the rules of Chicken, and Mason showed them the finer points of grappling. The pups wriggled on Liam and Mason’s respective shoulders, soon turning into a giggling mess of tiny limbs attempting to shove the other off.

Derek grabbed Ethan, tugging his coworker after the kids. He nodded at Stiles, with a warm smile. “We’ll watch the kids. Catch up with your friend.”

Left all on their own, Danny and Stiles turned to face each other, faces uncertain.

“I guess the rumors were true, then? You and Scott actually joined the Hale pack? Duke told me that I’d need to work with you guys on territorial stuff.” Danny leaned against the edge of the pool.

Stiles nodded, watching Scott and Liam be defeated, falling backwards into the water with angry growls. They were up within seconds, ready for round two. Ethan positioned himself awkwardly onto Derek’s shoulders, as the fellow deputies joined the game.

“I trust Derek, and Scott needs a pack. Things have been good.” Stiles answered, leaning beside Derek.

Danny folded his arms, picking at the rose mark on his chest. “The old farts aren’t going to last much longer. Half our pack’s inner council are over 70 now. Once they’re dead, you know our
generation would have let you both back in. Duke can’t say no if all of us rallied.”

“If Duke lasts that long.” Stiles countered, shaking his head. “He looked like one foot to the grave when I saw him a few weeks ago.”

“You knew?”

Stiles nodded. “Duke’s been an Alpha too long. If he doesn’t pass that onto a successor, he’s going to die any day now.” He dropped his head, fighting back the tears that always threatened to come just thinking about Duke. “Besides, I didn’t want to wait that long. Derek wants Scott, and there’s no bullshit pack politics in a pack of two adults and two pups. Less backstabbing, and I’m pretty happy about all of that.”

Danny glanced at the bandage on Stiles’ shoulder, flinching at the words. “I’m sorry, Stiles.”

“Hey.” Stiles slammed a hand on Danny’s shoulder, offering a smile. “I don’t blame you guys, you know? I don’t blame Ema anymore, either. Shit happens. You guys were still kids in an adult world, just like I was.”

“I should have slit their fucking throats.” A growl rumbled in his chest. “Me, Lydia, Parrish? Even Jackson, if he’d fucking grow a pair already. We could have… We should have fought it. There were enough of us that could have done it.” Danny’s hand balled into a fist, hands trembling.

Stiles sighed, rubbing the back of his head. He focused his attention on Ethan and Derek, who were currently being attacked in a pincer-maneuver. Yet, the WERE graduate was not one to give in, and sideswiped both of the teens in one swift movement. The teens and pups all fell into the water, crying out in foul play. Ethan shot his hand up into the air, howling in victory.

“How’s Ethan doing?” Stiles turned to Danny, nudging his foot. A subtle change of the dark topic. “Have you two thought about adopting or having kids? You were always big about family.”

Off in the distance, round three of the Chicken fight began. Ethan grappled with Scott and Isaac at the same time. Dramatically, Ethan pretended to be overtaken by their combined strength, flopping off Derek’s shoulders, and splashing into the water.

Slowly, Danny’s face relaxed, as Stiles’ stiff stature eased away.

Danny chuckled. “Soon. Someday soon…. Maybe when Duke's pack settles the hell down.”

The topics of conversation turned lighthearted for Danny and Stiles. Catching up on old times, stories about their friends, work life, and of their respective adventures out of Beacon Hills. Stiles shared about his time in New York, while Danny regaled Stiles about the dozens of packs he worked closely with on Deucalion’s behalf.

Within half an hour, things were the same as they’d always been. They lounged, sunbathing on the edge of the pool, joking around while they sipped on some drinks from the concession stand. Which, of course, led straight into Danny’s favorite topic.

Danny gently nudged Stiles’ foot, with a sly grin. “So… You and Derek banging, or what?”

Stiles choked on his drink, sputtering spit over Danny’s face. He glared incredulously at his friend, shaking his head while he choked.

“What?!” Danny laughed, prodding Stiles in the forehead. “I know you’re into guys, too. You and I had our fling before you and Ema went steady!” He wiped the spit from his face, rolling his eyes.
“Derek is a sexy man cake that anyone would want a piece of!”

Stiles shoved Danny off the edge of the pool, and into the deep end. “As if!” He folded his arms, scoffing at the very thought.

“DADDY! Come on, come play with us! Uncle Ethan’s all tired!” Scott cried out, waving his hands from the other edge of the pool, still on Liam’s shoulders and on their 50th or so round. They’d quit keeping score, but if Ethan’s harsh breathing and tired stare, Stiles would guess that the pups were pulling ahead.

Stiles swam over to the group playing chicken, snickering when Derek bucked Ethan off his shoulders with little effort.

“‘They’re brutal…” Ethan mumbled under his breath, slipping underwater as bubbles rose to the surface.

“Oh, you big baby.” Stiles rolled his eyes, standing at Derek’s side. He gave the big bad a thumbs up.

“Come on, I think we can take on a couple of pups.” Derek said, smirking in Mason and Liam’s direction.

“HEY! We’re thirteen! We’re not pups anymore!” Liam spat back, growling through his teeth. Scott growled with his partner, roaring as both prepared for battle.

“Oh Lord… Here we go.” Mason sighed, dropping his head. Isaac patted Mason’s head sympathetically.

Bending down, Derek knelt before Stiles, offering a helping hand to get him up. As he did, Derek’s neck bared itself naturally to Stiles.

Stiles stepped into Derek’s hands, climbing up.

With one arm, Derek lifted Stiles out of the water and onto his shoulders. The bandage on Stiles’ shoulder slipped off, blowing away in the wind, revealing his own Triskele inked on his shoulder blade. The velvet black ink covered the faint, faded outline of a long lost rose mark that had once matched Danny’s. He wrapped his legs around Derek’s neck, now sitting on the Alpha’s shoulders.

“Charge!” Stiles ordered, pointing to Liam.

Derek growled, shooting forward as Stiles reached his lanky hands, aimed at Scott. Stiles and Scott grappled hands, gaining a quick advantage with their height.

“I’ve got you, Scotty!” Stiles shouted, as he bucked back and forth on Derek’s shoulders.

“Left!” Derek exclaimed.

“Huh? Left?” Stiles turned his head, now face-to-face with Isaac. The pup leapt off Mason, clinging to Stiles’ head.

“AH! A tiny werewolf! My only weakness!” Stiles screeched.

Between Scott and Isaac’s combined “assault”, Stiles wobbled backwards, threatening to fall off Derek’s shoulders completely.

Spinning around, Derek wrapped an arm around Stiles, before they both plunged into the water,
Derek taking the brunt of the hit.

Derek pulled them from the water, holding Stiles in his arms.

“My hero.” Stiles said, as Derek helped him back to his feet.

“They must suffer.” Derek glared in Liam, Mason, and the pups’ direction. He shifted the top half of his body, flashing his pearly teeth.

“And boy do I know all their weak points...” Stiles lifted his fingers, in a tickling motion.

Isaac and Scott scrambled behind Liam and Mason, screaming in “fear” at their respective fathers.

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Sunday morning came far too early for Stiles. At 8 in the morning, suffering from a mild sunburn, and exhausted from winding Scott down after an active day at the pool, all Stiles wanted to do was crash in bed.

However, a call an hour earlier had Stiles wandering in and out of the kitchen. He peered, drooling, at the black gold gathering in the bottom of the pot.

“Daddy?” Scott grumbled.

Stiles glanced to the living room, watching Scott wobbling on his feet, fighting to stay awake as he held on tightly to his blanket and stuffed wolf.

“Morning, Scotty.” Stiles strode over, picking up Scott and patting him gently on the back. He tucked Scott’s blanket and toy under his arm.

“When’s Alpha and Isaac coming over?” Scott buried himself in Stiles’ neck.

Stiles laid Scott on the living room couch, tucking him under the blanket and stuffing the toy wolf to Scott’s side. “Isaac’s coming over in a little while, but Derek has to work for a couple of hours. Go on back to sleep, I promise you’re not missing anything.”

As he settled Scott back into a short nap, Stiles heard a gentle knocking at the front door. He ran a hand through his messy, sleep-addled hair.

“Coming!”

Stiles pulled the front door open, met with Derek, decked out in his Deputy’s attire. Isaac was in Derek’s arms, wrapped around the Alpha’s neck.

“Good morning, Stiles. Thanks for taking my call so early.” Derek yawned, stepping inside the Stilinski home.

Stiles took Isaac from Derek’s arms, allowing the pup to snuggle comfortably into his neck.

“Stiles...” Isaac yawned, squeezing a tight hug. Unlike most days before Derek went to work, Isaac didn’t try to scramble back into Derek’s arms for just “one more hug goodbye”. He settled comfortably into Stiles’ neck, quickly returning to his happy dreams.

“Happy to. Want some coffee before you go?” Stiles nodding in the kitchen’s direction.

“Sorry, I really need to go. The extra shift should only be for about half a day, until Parrish gets
back from Lydia’s appointment.” Derek ruffled Isaac’s hair, pressing a short kiss on the pup’s head. “When I get off work, we’ll all go out to dinner and do something fun. My treat.”

“Ooh! I wonder which happy meal toy I can get this time?!” Stiles chuckled.

Derek rolled his eyes, taking his leave. The Alpha shut and locked the door behind him as he left.

“I want… Ice cream.” Isaac mumbled sleepily, as he tossed in Stiles’ arms.

“Of course you do.” Stiles laid Isaac down on the couch, next to a half-asleep Scott, who’d been nodding in and out of cartoons playing on the television screen. He wrapped them both in blankets, before striding off to the kitchen to down his pot of coffee.

Stiles tiptoed around the house, picking up toys, starting a load of laundry, and rifling through the mail. He emptied the dishwasher, making a mental bit of blackmail that his father had skipped out on dishes for the third time that week.

In the midst of his chores, several hours later, Stiles jumped as he heard Scott and Isaac come to life, growling at the front door. He ran to their sides, bending down to their level.

“Hey, it’s okay! What’s going on?” Stiles asked, putting an arm on both their shoulders.

A car door, outside the house, slammed shut. The sound of heavy footsteps echoed up the Stilinski driveway.

His father was at work. Derek had another four hours on-duty. They weren’t expecting anyone today.

Stiles shot up, glaring at the two pups. “Stay here. Don’t move, either of you.”

Ignoring the “menacing” growls from the pups, Stiles jogged to the front door, peering out of the peephole.

Stiles did a double take, staggering backwards. Soon after, a booming knock struck the door.

“Mr. Stilinski? Can you open the door? I hear you on the other side.” A dark, striking tone rang.

Gulping, Stiles unlocked the door, pulling it open. On the other side was Alpha Peter, the National Alpha for the North American Continent. A title given to the strongest werewolf in the countries of Canada, Mexico, and the United States.

For a man in his sixties, an overwhelming aura of strength and vitality emanated from him. Striking red eyes, muscles that rippled under a tight muscle shirt, and a peppered-grey brown hair, swept to the side.

“You’re Stiles Stilinski, correct? Alpha Derek Hale’s Second?” Peter asked, matter-of-factly.

“I, uh… Yeah?” Stiles gulped, stepping backwards.

They weren’t publicly announcing Stiles as Derek’s Second. The title was pointless, a placeholder due to the Hale Pack’s low numbers, and required only as a legal nicety. How Alpha Peter knew was beyond Stiles, though he supposed the National Alpha had access to all kinds of filing.

“Is he pissed that a human is a Second? Shit… Have I gotten Derek in trouble?” Stiles thought, heart raging.
“I’m Peter, though I’m sure you’ve already heard of me. May I come in?” He asked, politely. Rather than waiting for an answer, Peter brushed past Stiles, striding inside the Stilinski home, rolling a large piece of luggage behind him.

“Sure! Why not? What, uh… What can I do for you?” Stiles said, laughing nervously.

Scott and Isaac’s growls ceased, watching Peter from behind the couch. Neither seemed too wary of the Alpha, both cocking their heads curiously, and sniffing the air around them.

Stiles eased up, knowing that Scott would have gone for Peter’s head if he’d been a real threat.

“You are Isaac Hale?” Peter asked, stopping in front of the pups. He set the luggage to the side, folding his arms.

Isaac flinched, backing into Scott, hiding his face.

Stiles, against better judgement, rushed in front of Isaac, putting himself between the pup and Alpha Peter. He focused his gaze on Peter, shivering from the gentle red hue that glowed from the Alpha.

“Yes, he is. Is there something I can help you with?” Stiles spat, folding his arms.

Peter cocked an eyebrow, not breaking his gaze with Stiles. He then descended into a dark, hearty bout of laughter.

“Oh? I suppose by that aggressive, protective posturing over the pups, that means he didn’t tell you to expect me?” Peter laughed from the depths of his stomach, shaking his head. “Of course he wouldn’t. Laura never tells anyone, either.”

Thoroughly confused, Stiles backed away from Peter, allowing Isaac to hide in the back of his shirt.

“That little shit.” Peter swore under his breath. “I apologize for frightening any of you. Here… These were going to wait until later, but… Consider it an offering of peace.”

From his suitcase, Peter pulled out a teddy bear the size of a small child, wrapped in a red bow with a bag of colorful candy just as big. He smiled, warmly. “I’m Peter Hale, Derek’s father! I’m so happy to finally meet you!”

Stiles’ body eased instantly. He exhaled, feeling blood return to his extremities. Derek’s family, a sister and an Uncle, were supposed to arrive later this week. Laura and Peter, Derek’s only living relatives.

Isaac came out from Stiles’ shirt, eyes wide, and eager.

“Here! This one is for you, from Poppy.” Peter handed Isaac the stuffed toy, ruffling the pup’s hair. He then turned to Scott, who’d been eyeing Peter, longingly after seeing the stuffed bear and candy. “You must be Scott. Derek told me plenty about you, too.” Peter reached inside his suitcase once more, retrieving a stuffed Lion, just as large as Isaac’s bear, and complete with a furry mane. Like Isaac’s, a dentist trip’s worth of candy came included. “I understand you like animals as much as Isaac does! Here’s a gift from Poppy to you, as well.”

“Thank you!” Scott cried out, hugging his lion. He squealed in delight, showing his toy to Stiles. “Look daddy! I’ve got a Lion!”

“Thank you Poppy!” Isaac exclaimed, hugging his bear and Peter’s side at the same time.
“You’re very welcome, little one!” Peter answered, ruffling the pup’s hair.

Scott and Isaac quickly devolved into giddy laughter, as the pups, their stuffed bear and lion soon went off on a magical adventure to save the candy treasure from an imaginary dragon that flew on the ceiling. Stiles didn’t choose to question their play-games, knowing he’d been just as creative as they’d been.

Peter stepped away from the pups’ adventure, extending his hand to Stiles. “You must be “the” Stiles. A pleasure to meet you, Derek spoke highly of you in the moments the ungrateful snot actually managed to give me a call.”

Stiles hitched his breath, struggling to survive the Alpha’s brutal handshake. “Th.. Thank you, Alpha! Stiles answered, freeing his hand and gently massaging his digits. “I, uh… I’d heard Derek’s “Uncle-Dad” was Peter, he just.. He didn’t think to mention that his father was the National Alpha.”

“Please, call me Peter. If I weren’t currently serving as the National Alpha, we’d be bonded by Pack. In any event, I want you to think of me as family.” Peter bent down to his suitcase, producing a massive bottle of whiskey. He shoved it in Stiles’ arms, winking at the bottle. “We’ll get to know each other later this week, maybe when the pups are asleep. You, me, Laura, and Derek. If you’ve never seen Derek shitfaced, you haven’t lived life.”

Stiles snorted, briefly picturing a drunk Derek. He pondered a frat boy Derek in college, or at the police academy. A thorough investigation with Kira, head of the Gossip Dorks, would be in order.

“Peter! You’re here already!? How did you get a better flight than I did!?” A woman let herself in the Stilinski house, with a bag slung over her shoulder. Tall as a tree, with golden-brown hair that cascaded down to her shoulders, the strange woman (in her later thirties, or early forties, if Stiles had to guess) flashed a pair of red eyes.

Peter rolled his eyes. “I have platinum status from flying all over the damn place. If they don’t fly me first class, I would cut them.” He ran to the woman, wrapping his arms around her and not letting go anytime soon. “Laura, it’s been too long.”

“Missed you too, Dad.” Laura pushed herself away from Peter, huffing. “Anyway! Where’s Derek? I’ve got to shove something up his ass for not bothering to tell me I’m an Aunt! Emotionally constipated twit!”

Stiles cleared his throat, stepping beside the fellow Hales. “Derek’s covering for another deputy today, but he’ll be back by lunch.”

Laura smirked, leaning in and taking a quick sniff in Stiles’ direction. She hummed, quietly, eyeing him from head to toe. “You’re Stiles, right?” A short smirk crossed her face.

“That’d be me. You must be Derek’s older sister?” Stiles answered, chuckling nervously at the mass of Alpha muscle that now encompassed his living room.

“I am! Alpha Laura Hale, I run the County Pack in San Francisco. So nice to meet you, I-” Laura cut herself off, as she caught sight of Scott and Isaac in the background. “Oh my God! There’s Derek’s little cutie!”

Isaac and Scott’s adventures came to a halt, as Laura shoved past Peter and Stiles. She bent down to Isaac, squealing in delight.

Isaac sniffed Laura’s hand, beaming ear to ear at the familiar scent. “Uh-huh! I’m Isaac!”
Beaming, Laura bent down and picked Isaac up, hugging his neck and rubbing her nose in the pup’s hair. “Oh my goodness, you are just the cutest little thing ever! I could eat you up!”

While Isaac and Laura laughed in unison, Stiles spotted Scott in the distance, half-shifted. The pups’ nostrils flared, letting loose a grumbled growl. Peter, too, watched Scott in curious awe.

“Don’t eat my Isaac.” Scott spat, in Laura’s direction.

Laura turned to Scott, with raised eyebrows and an agape jaw. “Oh? Your Isaac?” Her eyes flashed red, having little effect on Scott’s stern expression.

“He’s my brother now! Alpha Derek said so!” Scott pulled down his nightshirt, showing off his pack mark to Laura. “So I say you can’t eat him! Don’t be mean!” Scott asserted, folding his arms. His nose wrinkled, huffing at Laura’s assertion.

“Scott, she’s just prete-” Stiles opened his mouth, immediately covered by Peter’s hand. He brought a finger up to his lips, shushing Stiles.

There was a brief standoff between Laura and Scott, brokered with silence. Isaac blushed, hunkering down in Laura’s arms.

“Well... Too bad!” Laura bent down and scooped Scott up, spinning him around in circles with Isaac in unison, laughing as she faux-gnawed on Scott’s head too. The pups squeaked, attempting (in vain) to fight off Laura’s bear hug. Before long, the trio were a pile of unending energy and laughter, collapsing on the ground.

Peter turned to Stiles, smiling devilishly in his direction. “You might not get either of them back, and I would not be able to stop her.”

“Our Paw-Paw wouldn’t like that.” Stiles rubbed the back of his neck, sighing. “Uh, I was about to make breakfast for everyone. You two hungry?”

“Absolutely starving.” Peter shoved Stiles all the way to the couch, and shoving him down. “However, I’m a guest in your home and territory. I’ll be preparing breakfast. You’ll be resting on that couch, because I can smell your exhaustion from a mile away. Take a break, you’ll have some time while Laura gets acquainted with her new nephews.”

“Uh… Thank you?” Stiles blinked, as Peter shoved the TV remote in his hand, and the Alpha strode off into the kitchen. He chose not to question the loud, violent banging in the kitchen, and instead watched Laura put Scott into a headlock, joining the pups’ magical adventure to save the candy treasure.

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The additions of the Hales brought a low roar to the Stilinski home for dinner time. Smiles abounded, and none more so than Derek, who’d all but wept when he returned home from work, seeing his family for the first time in years. He’d spent most of the evening sharing stories about his childhood with Isaac and Scott, and introducing them to their pack’s heritage.

By dinnertime, the pups had fallen in love with Aunty Laura, refusing to leave her side. Even the Old Man and Melissa had grown attached to her natural, friendly charm that seemed to naturally pull
people in for miles around.

Stiles had, somehow, been paired off with Peter (of all people), and been surprised at how much they had in common. Like Stiles, Peter had been a single father who’d taken in Derek and Laura after Gregory’s death. They’d shared stories of their varying struggles, and Peter offered sage advice for when the pups hit their teenage years. (“Invest in soundproofing and teach them how to do their own laundry. Werewolf teens are horny little bastards.”)

By the end of dinner, the roar of conversation between all parties hadn’t lessened in the slightest. Stiles watched in awe at the end of the dining room table, picking at his half-eaten plate, trying to recall the last time there’d been such joy in their house.

“Probably before Scott was born.” Stiles thought, morbidly. He shook off the thought, turning back to focus on Isaac.

“...and then, Aunty Laura took us outside and we raced ALL the way to the big tree and back! Scott won, but I came in second!” Isaac finished regaling his and Scott’s afternoon activities to the pack, stuffing another meatball into his mouth. He’d already inhaled a full plate of food, working on his second.

Stiles stole a quick glance to Derek’s eyes, which were their typical hue of green.

“Thank God. He’s eating and feels comfortable eating around other people. No defensiveness of his plate. Relaxed stature, with minimal Alpha influence.” Stiles thought, happy to add that to the notes for Isaac’s next session. The pup had come a long way.

Laura nodded, scratching the top of Scott and Isaac’s head, earning a pair of twin giggles. “They were tough competition.” She winked to the group, earning several muffled chuckles from the rest of the pack.

Melissa stood up from the table, shaking her empty mug. “Would anyone else like another cup of coffee? Or another slice of pie?”

“I’d love both.” Sheriff Stilinski shot up, walking side-by-side with Melissa, and intertwining his hand around hers.

Stiles rolled his eyes. The PDA between those two had gotten disgustingly “teenager” in recent days. He didn’t dare imagine what went on between those two when his father “visited” Melissa next door.

“So Laura, who’s watching the County while you’re away?” Derek asked, taking a sip of his coffee.

“My Second, Braeden, is watching over the pack all week. I trust her enough to handle things. It’ll be good practice for her, since she’s my successor when I finally retire.” Laura answered, stretching out into the air and yawning. She shifted her attention to Peter. “How about you? Is North America going to fall into pieces while you’re away?”

Peter chuckled, shaking his head. He poured a hefty amount of whiskey into his coffee mug. “The 7 National Alphas have convened for the next month and a half. I’ve got a few matters to attend to around the country before we make our yearly statement to the United Nation Council.” He sighed, choking back half of his mug in one fell swoop. “A few State Alphas in the US are enforcing laws against humans and werewolves that are counter-productive to my vision of a new North America. Some sort of pro-purity movement, or some such nonsense in the South. I’ll have to politely ask them to step down from their post, and re-appoint a new pack in their place who won’t be quite as…”
“Ignorant.”

“Politely, huh?” Derek shot Peter an incredulous smirk.

“If they don’t, I’ll force their hand.” Peter answered, bluntly. He sighed again, rubbing his forehead.

“Unfortunately, I’m sure at least one is going to fight back, so I’ve got the handful of WERE members in that region on standby. Once they descend, I’m sure the Alpha would surrender immediately.”

“Good God… Is it that serious? You’d bring in your deadliest weapon?” Laura asked, mouth agape.

Peter shook his head. “There won’t be a fight. I only want to make a point to those who think they can undermine my authority, and circumvent our fragile dual legal system. WERE is my biggest gun, one that I’m not afraid to use.”

Stiles turned to Derek, scanning the Alpha’s rugged face. He often forgot that behind that fatherly kindness, goofy smile, and bushy eyebrows, was a one-man army. Rumors told that a single WERE member was an equivalent to the strength of 100 ordinary werewolves, or 1000 humans with military training. Whether or not that rumor was true had never been proven, since a full WERE army had never been mobilized in the history of North America.

The fact that Peter was mobilizing only a handful of them, for any purpose, was likely the cause of the stress lines crossing Derek’s face. Laura, too, seemed to pale at the thought of it. None more so than Peter himself.

Peter cleared his throat. “Enough politics, we’re boring the pups.”

The group turned to focus on Scott and Isaac, who’d leaned back in their chairs, rubbing their eyes and fighting off sleep.

“Hmm… It’s about their bedtime, and they’ve had a really big day with Aunty Laura.” Stiles said, grinning in their direction.

“M’Not sleepy.” Scott stammered over the words, eventually broken by a yawn.

“Me neither!” Isaac asserted, before falling to the left, landing his head on Scott’s shoulder for support.

“That sounds so familiar. I believe I heard those words every day for ten years. Usually followed by pleas for just five more minutes.” Peter muttered, shooting glares at both Laura and Derek. He settled on Derek, raising his mug in a toast. “Payback’s a bitch.”

“Wait till they learn to talk back. Or ask for large sums of money to buy every comic book that ever existed. That’s when it gets really fun…” Sheriff Stilinski added, as he and Melissa rejoined the party.

“Comic books?” Peter cocked an eyebrow. “Good Sir, you got off easy. I had a teenage daughter. Do you have any idea how much of a gap there is in the cost of men’s and women’s clothing? Or the cost of makeup? My God, I still have nightmares about those years.”

Stiles stood, exchanging knowing glances with Laura and Derek. They all sighed in unison, as their parents started their own bonding experience in parenting. “While the old fogies wax poetic about their wasted youth, I think I’ll go take these two up for bed. Maybe read them a couple of bedtime stories.” He turned to Derek. “Isaac can just stay the night since it’s so late.”
While Stiles scooped up the pups, neither fighting Stiles at this point, Derek’s face scrunched.

“Oh, I’ve been dying to ask… Why’d you guys come to the Stilinski house, anyway? You’ve been to my place before.” Derek turned to Peter and Laura.

“This isn’t your home, now?” Peter asked, shooting Derek a genuinely surprised expression.

Derek snorted. “No, my place is about ten minutes away. Same place I’ve lived since I moved back here. Has your nose gotten that bad, you old geezer?”

“No.” Peter and Laura exchanged bland expressions, before both shooting Derek incredulous glares. “This place smelled more like your pack, which is why I came here. The scent overwhelmed the air when I passed by this street. I’d assumed you’d moved in with your pack, and had the cab driver stop.”

“Same here. Actually, I went to your old place first, but when it smelt like nothing, I followed a trail all the way here.” Laura added.

Stiles left in the middle of the conversation between Alphas, bounding up the staircase. He reached Scott’s room, and helped the sleepy pups into their nightclothes, letting Isaac borrow a smaller pair of Scott’s.

Knowing he’d get a “talking to” if he didn’t, Stiles made sure and included their new Lion and Bear stuffed toys into the bedtime circle of friends. Before Stiles could crack open Grimoire, both pups were snoring away, clinging onto each other in a blissful sleep.

Stiles took a moment, resting in the nearby chair, and shutting his eyes. Exhaustion had set in, from the house full of people, the laughter, and the high energy that had consumed his day.

A good kind of exhaustion, for once.

“Stiles?”

Shooting his eyes open, Stiles spotted his father in the doorway.

The Old Man let himself in, clasping a hand on Stiles’ shoulder. “I invited the Hales to stay the week with us. I’m going to crash with Melissa, so Laura can have my room. I gave up your room to Peter, so I’m sure you don’t mind sharing the couch with Derek.”

“Nah, I won’t mind.” Stiles wiped the sleep from his eyes, shooting up out of the chair. “Make sure and wear protection while you “crash” with Melissa, though. I’m too old to be a big brother.”

The Sheriff rolled his eyes. “Melissa’s past that mark, Stiles, and I’m pretty sure I’m all dried up by this point, anyway.”

Choosing to ignore that his father didn’t deny his “relations” with Melissa, Stiles picked up Scott and Isaac’s dirty clothes, tossing them in a hamper. As he bent to grab it, he heard a loud sigh come from his father.

“Don’t be like me and wait twenty years.” Sheriff Stilinski muttered.

Stiles tripped, catching himself at the last minute. He spun around, just in time to catch his father’s emotionally crushed face.

“I regret closing off my heart that long. If I hadn’t, I might have had a lot more time with Melissa,
and enjoyed life. You could have, in theory, had a little brother. I’d always wanted more children, Stiles. Claudia did, too. I know… I know she probably hated seeing me like I was for so long.”

The Old Man glanced to Isaac and Scott, allowing a brief smile to cross his face.

“Dad…” Stiles paused, fumbling to find the words. His father rarely spoke about his mother, or the past, for that matter. A trait Stiles had inherited, naturally.

Sheriff Stilinski shook his head. “Sorry, I didn’t mean to blurt that out, I just..” He took a deep breath, striding his way out of Scott’s bedroom. “It was good seeing you like your old self again. I just wanted you to know that.”

Left by himself, Stiles shook off his father’s words. He picked up the laundry basket, taking a deep breath. “Easy to say, Dad. Hard to do.”

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Author's Comments: Thanks for reading, and comments are always appreciated!

Next week’s update will bring back around Erica, introduce Boyd, more about Alphas and “pack laws” they create, and more interaction with Derek and his family.
Derek recalled the most intense part of his WERE training. The year-long survival test, as he’d been dropped in the middle of a forest, in the dead of winter, with only a combat knife and his threadbare fatigues to aid him. Freezing nights of torrential rain, snow, and the occasional blizzard that chilled him to the bone. The godforsaken days that he lost his fire, and spent hours re-kindling the wet wood. Hunting and tracking the scarce game that littered the land, fighting his fellow WERE trainees for every last morsel. All while vetted WERE Seniors tracked his every move, and sent countless obstacles his way.

Nowhere in those months of hell did he believe he’d waste that training. At 19, he firmly believed he would encounter situations where that training would aid him, and potentially save his life, or the lives of others. Missions of the utmost importance for national security.

As he hobbled down Mrs. Reese’s attic latter, checking on the “hobo serial killer living in her attic, no really, Deputy Hale, I saw him this time”, Derek questioned his life choices, if only briefly. He also mentally slapped his 19-year-old self for being hopelessly naive.

“Did you find him? I know that bugger’s been up there, Deputy Hale! I had a can of raviolis and a can opener go missing! How else would you explain that, huh?” Mrs. Reese, a wrinkled prune of a lady, exclaimed. She hung onto Jackson’s shoulder, pointing her cane at Derek and cackling in victory.

Jackson glanced away, sighing under his breath as he held the woman up.

Derek cleared his throat, wiping the attic dust from his pants. “Ma’am, there’s nothing in your attic. Some droppings from an animal, yes, but nobody’s living up there. You might call an exterminator. I think there’s another racoon scurrying up there, making all that noise.”

Mrs. Reese shook her head, prodding Derek’s abdomen with her cane. “Nah! I know what it is, sonny. That mingy little bastard runs off the second he sees you on the property! A nice, strong werewolf like yourself! I wish Mr. Reeves had looked half as good as you, in his prime! Look at this handsome face!” She cackled again, pinching Derek’s cheek.

“Don’t tease me, Mrs. Reese. I might just fall for you.” Derek took her hand from his face, and politely clasped it in his own. The old bag might not be “all there” anymore, but she was a genuinely nice person, regardless.

“I’m a married woman, Deputy Hale.” Mrs. Reese blushed, stealing her hand back.

After reassuring Mrs. Reese that her home was secure, and a report to the precinct of Mrs. Reese’s latest serial killer claim, Derek and Jackson slid back into their cruiser. Jackson took the wheel, speeding away from the rural section of housing, and back into the heart of Beacon Hills.

“I swear, that woman watches too much Investigative Discovery. What was her claim last month? That someone was living in her basement, because of the missing dryer sheets?” Derek chuckled, shaking his head. He’d have to share this one with Stiles and the pups, later.

Jackson haphazardly nodded. He tapped his free foot repeatedly against the floor panel, eyes glazed over, focused on the road before him.

Derek glanced at his partner, taking a gentle sniff of the air. Even over Jackson’s God-awful cologne, Derek could just barely make out the rotten, saddened undertone.
Since the “Whittemore Mansion” incident, Jackson hadn’t been his usual, snarky self. The Gossip Dorks, and even the Sheriff himself, had laid off the kid, unable to poke fun at the sad, dejected expression that crossed the young man’s face.

Though given the stink that Mrs. Whittemore created after the incident, going so far as to try and have her own son (and Derek) fired from the force, Derek didn’t blame Jackson’s pitiful mood.

Exhaling, Derek crossed his leg as the duo pulled into a nearby gas station. He eased back into the seat as Jackson flipped on the speed radar.

“Wanna talk about it?” Derek muttered, turning down the police scanner to only a dull whisper.

Jackson paused, leaning his head on a hand, focusing outside the driver’s side window? “That my family is full of pathetic, emotionless monsters? What good would it do? I’ve known that since I was five.”

“Why did you have to be born? Why did you ruin everything for me? Pathetic, disgusting, little worm.”

Derek swallowed, forcing the dark memory of his father’s voice out of his mind. He nervously rubbed at his shoulder, where the shoulder blade ever so slightly stuck out at an odd angle. “You listened to my problems with Isaac. I can listen to your problems about your parents. We’re partners, Jackson. This is what partners do. We bitch and moan to each other.”

A bland silence filled the cruiser, as traffic seemed flood in front of them, over half of the drivers tripping the scanner’s alarm. Neither made the effort to clock the scanner, or switch on the sirens to give chase.

“Did you know I’m adopted?” Jackson muttered, out of thin air.

Derek choked on his bottle of water, nearly doing a spit-take on the cruiser’s dashboard.

No, he hadn’t know that. In fact, he was pretty sure nobody in town knew that fact. Otherwise, he’d have heard it from Kira or Parrish. Those two knew everything that went on in the town, and gossiped endlessly about the same 10 scandals every chance they got. (Their new favorite being the “giddy” Derek Hale at the pool, screaming like a little boy around the pups. Ethan would pay dearly, later.)

Jackson chuckled under his breath. “Didn’t think so. My parents kept their mouths shut about that one. I’ve known for a long time, though. Mother never likes for me to forget it. Probably why she hates me.”

“What would she hate you?” Derek stumbled out, wracking his brain.

Because for all the teasing they gave Jackson, he was far from actually “useless”. An inexperienced greenhorn who didn’t know the finer points of law enforcement, yes. Useless? Not so much.

An all-state athlete in high school and college, Salutatorian of his graduating college class, and top 10 of his class in the Police Academy. Jackson was definitely in shape, probably the most athletic of the humans in the force, and knew human law like the back of his hand.
Behind the smug, cocky, spoiled exterior, was the kind of man that constantly stopped by to check up on Isaac, or stick around for a few hours to be used as a personal jungle gym for an over-active pup.

What kind of mother could “hate” a son so successful in life?

Jackson shook his head, taking a deep breath. He pulled down the visor, glancing at himself in the mirror. Derek watched as Jackson fiddled with his contact lenses, a horrible habit of his partner’s that constantly forced Derek to cringe.

“Mrs. Whittemore was in an accident while she was pregnant, and lost her baby. Apparently, she wanted to save face around town, and left for three months until they picked me up from an orphanage. “Vacationing” for mommy/baby time, she called it. In reality, she was just throwing money at anyone who’d give her a baby. Of course, my father went along with it. Didn’t want a scandal to screw up his chances at small-town politics.” Finished wish his lenses, Jackson slammed the visor shut. “Neither really wanted me. I was a convenient replacement, from day one. Just a stand in for the real “Jackson Whittemore” that never was. Though, if I’m being honest, I doubt they wanted the real one either, except for some convenient publicity and image.”

Derek’s ears focused on Jackson’s chest for several minutes. He kept waiting for the extra “thud”, proof that Jackson was lying. Because like hell was that actually the truth.

The thud never came.

Jackson shrugged, leaning back in the driver’s seat. He closed his eyes, using his arms as a makeshift pillow, behind his head. “Some shit happened when I was a kid. Shit that I don’t even like thinking about now, as a grown man. After that, my mother wanted nothing to do with me, and wanted to send me off to a boarding school in Canada. Took my dad until I was an adult to start feeling guilty about never being in my life and for the crap that went down. Now he just throws money at me to solve the problem. Or he gets me a dream job I always wanted. I guess that’s close enough to “love”.”

Yet again, Derek waited, and hoped in his heart to hear an extra thud. One that never came.

“Don’t feel sorry for me. I’m a spoiled shit, and I know it. Boo hoo, the rich snob had a bad childhood. I had it just fine.” Jackson folded his arms, digging nails into his skin. “Though sometimes… I dunno. Sometimes I wonder what it would have been like to grow up in a Pack. One like yours and Stiles’, or like Deucalion’s. Having a real family. Or who my parents really were, and what life would have been like with them, instead of the Whittemores. Here lately, I’ve been wondering that more and more. That’s just really stuck with me.”

“That’s why he’s so down.” Derek thought, briefly.

The duo wallowed into another serenade of silence, watching as several groups of people j-walked in front of them, and watched another vehicle pass through a red light.

“Did you know I’m a bastard pup? Offspring between two Alphas, both who cheated on their mates.” Derek finally spat out.

Jackson took his turn to do a spit-take, coating the steering wheel in his overpriced coffee. He stared blankly at Derek, jaw agape.

Derek nodded. “I don’t think I’ll ever know why Talia and Greg did what they did. I was too little to ask at the time, and everyone that knew them personally couldn’t answer the question, either.”
can’t even fathom a reason. Maybe I don't want to know the real reason.” He shook his head, picturing his mother’s warm smile, and gentle expression. “My mother died from a car accident. A semi truck plowed into her, here in Beacon Hills, and snapped her neck. After that, I became my biological father’s “problem”. A problem he tried to take care of every night, after he hit the bottle. To the Hales, and to him, I was living proof of shame to the Hale name. Nobody tried to stop him, except for my 10 year old half-sister, who shouldn’t have had to. Not a single damn person in a pack of 200 members.”

“Good God…” Jackson muttered, dropping his head.

Derek folded his arms, bringing hands up to his neck. He felt his throat constrict, as his lungs struggled for breath. “I hated them all. Hated every damn member of my pack. I hated everything Packs stood for. First, the Rivieras, then the Hales. The later, a name I was forced into taking, against my will.”

Forgetting to breath temporarily, Derek flared his nostrils, sucking in air. His neck stung, right alongside his shoulder blade. Invisible tendrils crawled around his body, squeezing the life from him.

All which vanished as he flashed his eyes, balling his hand into a fist. He turned to Jackson, shaking his head. “I know what it’s like, not being wanted. We came from different paths, but both paths obviously sucked in their own way. Don’t act like yours doesn’t count because you came from money. In case you didn’t know, I came from money, too. The Hales, as a collective pack across America and Mexico, could put your parent’s wealth to shame.”

Derek and Jackson exchanged a knowing glance. The tense air evaporated, and the disgusting scent emanating from Jackson wavered.

“My real father, Peter, gave me some advice when I was young. After he took Laura and I in, and moved us back to Beacon Hills, away from the Hales.” Derek muttered, turning his attention back to the main highway. “He told me, that if I wanted revenge against my father, against the Hales, and the Riverias, all I had to do was prove them all wrong. Live my life the way I wanted. Be better than them, above them, and not give a damn what they think.” Chuckling, he couldn’t help but smirk at his reflection. “I did what none of my cousins, aunts, uncles, or pack could do since Peter, decades earlier. I passed WERE training at 19, youngest werewolf in the Country to ever do so. Then I prompted said “fuck them” at the "offers" to be a Beta. I got through college on my own, and got through the Police Academy, becoming my own man.”

Derek thumped Jackson on the chest. “Be better than your parents. Which, you already are. I doubt either of them would have spent a small fortune on my son new clothes and toys. Or taken him to play pizza parlor games.”

Jackson smiled, looking out the window, and away from Derek. “You know, we’re terrible cops. At least twelve tickets have rushed by us. The Old Man’s going to be pissed. Again.”

“I don’t believe in speed traps.” Derek countered, glancing out his own window.

“I wish you believed in not getting fired. Or getting me fired with you.” Jackson rolled his eyes.

As quickly as they’d delved into their respective pasts, Jackson and Derek turned back into their usual, friendly bickering. They took Potshots at their respective sports team, idly teasing their coworkers, and argued over lunch places they could go to.

Petty arguments that ended as radio static came to life.
Jackson shit the car into gear, flipping on the siren without waiting. He paled.

Derek relayed their position to dispatch, shoulders tensing in the process. Blue Moon never asked for police intervention, or help from the County Alpha to clean out their “rambunctious” patrons.

Ever.

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Blue Moon, on any regular day, at any regular time, would be full of patrons. Varying work shifts from the packs in and around Beacon County always found someone with the need for food, alcohol, and a werewolf only environment.

Which set Derek on edge immediately, as he watched a flood of people vacate the premises. Many with disgusted, angry glares.

Jackson parked the car, glancing up to Derek. “Where do you want me?”

Sliding out of the police cruiser, Derek bit his lip. Briefly, he considered leaving his partner in the car, as he always did. He could get the job done faster on his own, and not have to worry about Jackson getting in way, or being hurt.

Then, he recalled the receiving end of that mentality, when he’d first started working with Parrish. How emasculated and worthless he felt, under the veteran HellHound Deputy, who always had to do all the work.

“Come in with me. Stay behind me, follow my lead, and don’t do anything stupid.” Derek ordered, mentally swearing as the words left his lips.

“Seriously?” Jackson stammered out of the vehicle, falling in line behind Derek. He reached onto his belt, grabbing bottle of ash from one of his pouches.

“You're going to have to learn someday. Come on,” Derek muttered, jogging up to the entrance of the Blue Moon. He pushed open the door, scanning the area, flinching at the uproar that pierced the area.

While the scene wasn’t all that uncommon for the Blue Moon, the blood spattered across the floor was cause for immediate alarm.

On the ground of the dining area laid a bloody and bruised, younger werewolf, being supported by Erica. A clawed wound began to steam shut on the lanky brunette male, healing quickly as Erica’s hands drew in the pain, creating large, black veins to protrude from her skin.

Vernon “Boyd” Reyes (just Boyd, as he politely reminded anyone otherwise) stood in front of his wife, claws out, and a chef’s apron coated in blood. The gargantuan werewolf, broader than Derek, and almost as tall, was a menacing sight to behold. Sweat glinted off his dark skin, while his nostrils flared.

A pair of older werewolves, in their fifties, stood opposite Boyd, growling at the bar owner. They seemed to have the worse end of the battle, cut and bleeding all over. Bruises dotted their faces and skin, one that covered a prominent rose-patterned park mark.
“Because of course it’s Deucalion’s Pack.” Derek thought, swearing under his breath.

“Why are you protecting the pathetic little halfsie? We were here first, and the bitch was in our spot.” One of the older werewolves snarled at Boyd, spitting on the owner’s shoe.

Boyd shook his head, wiping blood-soaked claws on his apron. “You don’t have a spot here. Not anymore. Get out. Come back, and I won’t go easy.” His tone, curt and bellowing, shot nervous glares to the rest of the patrons in the bar.

Derek cautiously stepped forward. “Beacon Hills Sheriff’s Department. Anyone care to explain what’s going on here?” He flashed his eyes, popping fangs out of his mouth.

All eyes shot simultaneously to Derek. Several patrons backed away, shying from the Alpha’s deadly gaze. Erica and Boyd relaxed, stepping back and leaving Derek to stride into the middle of the situation.

The older wolves spun to meet Derek’s eyes. Both staggered backwards, exchanging nervous expressions.

“The assholes clawed someone, Derek. Then tried to claw my husband, and promptly had their ass kicked across the Blue Moon. Oh, and they stained my floor. Kick their ass, sweetheart.” Erica winked at Derek, helping the injured patron to his feet.

Derek nodded, focusing his attention to the bloodied duo. “You heard the woman. Leave.” He turned to Jackson, nudging him out of the doorway. “Leave and everything will be just fine.”

“We don’t take orders from you, Hale. Thank Christ for that one.” One spat, folding his arms.

“Or the disgusting little Whittemore spawn behind you.” The other said, laughing at the “funny” joke.

Derek shook his head. “This isn’t up for negotiation. We’re not arguing over pack politics. This land belongs to Erica and Boyd Reyes, and you’re not wanted here. Leave.”

“The day I listen to a pathetic, halfie human lover Alpha like you is the day I turn in my balls.” One proclaimed, growling at Derek.

The other reached for a nearby bar stool, chucking it at Derek.

Derek ducked, and quickly realized his error. He watched as the bar stool blew past him, heading straight towards Jackson.

The stool connected, smashing into pieces on impact, and knocking Jackson back against the bar’s wall. Jackson grabbed his head, sliding to the ground in a low groan.

Air rushed past Derek, as the world became a blank, colorless, blur. The pair’s necks were in his hands, in a deathly grip. He slammed the duo onto the ground, breaking the hardwood floor from the impact, splintering the wood in their backs. Both yelped, baring their neck and squirming under the Alpha’s strength. Gasps dotted the bar, and several patrons legged it out of the Blue Moon.

Derek felt his uniform rip to shreds as he shifted. His shoulders, chest, and thighs exploded in size, creating an image more beastly than human. A semi-protruded snout erupted from Derek’s face.

The smell of urine wafted in the air, bringing Derek’s sense back.
“Leave.” Derek ordered, more unintelligible growl than language.

Taking the hint, the duo scrambled, dashing off on all fours, and out of the bar.

Standing, Derek shook off his shift. He pinched the bridge of his nose, breathing thoughtfully as he came back, full circle.

A low groan, from the front of the bar, forced Derek into action. He ran to Jackson’s side, bending down to his partner’s level.

“You okay?” Derek extended his hand, pulling Jackson off the floor.

The Deputy rubbed the back of his neck, rotating it to get the crick out of it. “My head is throbbing, but I think I’m okay. Not any worse than the whiskey bottle I got chunked at me in college.”

Derek sniffed the air, listening carefully to Jackson’s heartbeat. The bastard’s disgusting cologne masked any attempt to sniff out blood, but a steady heartbeat quenched any fear he might have had of internal injury.

“You know… If they weren’t werewolves, I might have pressed charges on those dickbags. Fat lot it’ll do me.” Jackson grumbled, shaking his head.

“You’d be laughed out of Deucalion’s study.” Derek thought, choosing not to voice that bit of depressing knowledge. “I’ll file a complaint with Duke. They’ll probably end up with a slap on the wrist.”

Jackson shrugged. “Better than nothing.”

“Thanks for taking care of those assholes. We really didn’t want to hurt them, but I’m not putting up with that bullshit. Makes for a messy time explaining to Alpha Deucalion, but I think the point was made.” Erica spouted, popping into view. She prodded Jackson’s forhead, where a small bump began to form. “Ooh. Let me get you an ice-pack for that, sweetie. Come on over.”

With little time to protest, Derek and Jackson were brought to the bar area, and slammed onto a pair of stools. Erica’s “ice-pack” (a somewhat clean rag filled with ice from the beer cooler) was pressed on Jackson’s head, while Boyd picked up the overturned furniture, and escorted patrons back to their “normal” Blue Moon activities.

After calling in to both Alpha Deucalion (who would “reprimand” the duo “accordingly”, a threat that sent shivers down Derek’s spine, surprisingly) and the Sheriff, Derek glanced over to his partner.

Jackson removed the ice pack, discarding it across the bar.

“You took that hit better than I thought. No broken bones, right?” Derek eyed his partner from head to toe. Aside from a few nasty bruises, he didn’t think there was any big damage. Amazing, for a human. Stiles tended to bruise if he so much as stubbed a toe.

“I think I’m good.” Jackson shook his head, dropping his gaze. “First time actually doing something, and I took a hit like a bitch.”

“I’d say you took it like a truck. If you’d taken it like a bitch, you would have pissed yourself, like those losers.” Erica corrected, winking in Jackson’s direction.

Flushing, Jackson cleared his throat. “I, uh… Thanks?”
Derek rolled his eyes. “Lesson number one, Jackson. Erica has a silver tongue and will manipulate you into anything. Do not fall for her sexually charged flirtations, it’s the last thing you will do as a free man.”

“Hey!” Erica smacked Derek on the shoulder.

“Just trying to save the guy from heartache and misery.” Derek threw both hands up, earning a smirk from Jackson, and another punch from Erica.

“Anyway!” Erica sighed, signaling around the bar. “You, good sir, have earned yourself a free drink. Pop by sometime!” Erica offered, patting Jackson on the shoulder.

“I, uh… Thanks…” Jackson glanced to Derek, with pleading, uncertain eyes.

“No drink for me?” Derek smiled, scoffing.

Leaning across the bar, Erica pondered thoughtfully. “For you? Mr. Liar, liar, pantalones del fuego?” Erica pinched the bridge of Derek’s nose, yanking the Alpha onto the bar. “Hell no!”

“Liar?” Derek groaned, through his pinched nose.

Erica released him, huffing as she folded her arms. “Rumor mill has it that you’ve got a pack of 4 now. 2 of which aren’t my husband and I. 2 More than you said you were building.

“Oh.” Derek glanced away, turning to Jackson for any kind of support. His partner, unfortunately (and brilliantly), slid to the next seat over, busying himself with just about anything else. “Traitor.”

Derek gulped, rubbing the back of his neck. “I’m sorry, a lot’s happened since you brought that up. Quite a lot.”

Erica hummed, folding her arms. “Understandable. Though I’m sure you’ve got some time to think right now. God knows you never come by, and I feel weird stalking you.”

“We really need to get back to work, Erica. Our shift isn’t over for another few hours.” Derek cleared his throat, starting to raise. A swirl of ice hit his gut.

“Don’t make me play dirty, Hale. You wouldn’t like me when I’m dirty.” Erica winked, with a curved, sly smile. “I have a hole in my floor that is most definitely your fault this time. My insurance agent was pissed enough about the wall. I don’t know if I’m willing to piss him off about a floor so soon.”

Jackson’s jaw dropped, whispering “damn” under his breath. He slid another seat over, bridging the gap between them even further.

“At least he’s getting some real life experience. Never piss off Erica Reyes.” Derek thought, before immediately sitting back down. “Alright, alright… I’ll hear you out. I’ll regret it if I don’t.”

Erica’s flirtatious smile faded. From under the bar, she produced a thick binder, sliding it across the table and into Derek’s hands. “For your review, later.” Taking a deep breath, Erica folded her arms. “Our offer is simple. 20% tithe of our business profits each month to the pack fund, the rest is ours to do whatever we want with. Naturally, we’ll provide loans to the pack as needed, with a low interest rate. In exchange, we become fully vetted members of the Hale Pack, and agree to abide by the Hale Pack laws, assuming Boyd and I agree with them. As my husband probably already proved, he’s stronger than veterans in the County Alpha’s pack, and I’m just as strong as he is. Outside of protection, my husband is a professional chef, and I have a degree in business and
accounting."

Glancing down, Derek opened the thick binder, taken aback. He’s seen professional Pack Contracts before, when Laura began her pack, and took a crash course in them. Though none quite as detailed as Erica’s.

Erica tapped her foot, anxiously. “$100,000 upfront, in your pockets the second you accept us. We would expect a pack house by the end of next year, with our own private living quarters and a nursery, because I plan on having a baby by then. As you can imagine, I would want a place where I can eat my bodyweight in chocolate in peace.”

“Does… Does it cost that much to join a pack? Jesus Christ...” Jackson asked, glancing to Derek with a broken, dejected expression.

“Sometimes more…” Derek thought, recalling some of the pricier offers Laura had garnered with her West Coast branch of the Hale Pack. Being an official “Hale” usually came at a market value of hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Not that Derek particularly cared about money. He and Stiles agreed to exchange services (babysitting and therapy for Scott’s training) and called the pack tithing even between them. The Old Man and Melissa offered to pitch in, but Derek had tabled the conversation for later. Surprisingly enough, Derek felt uncomfortable taking money from his boss.

“It varies. Though being in a Pack isn’t always about money. Money can’t buy trust or respect.” Derek replied to Jackson, before staring directly into Erica’s eyes. “You’re… You’re serious about this? This is a lot of money for an Alpha without any land, and whose werewolf members are half under the age of ten, and the other half, humans, over the age of 40.”

Erica nodded, leaning against the bar. Her usually playful demeanor faded, glancing around the bar. Most were alone, hovering nervously away from the hole in the floor. Many watched Derek in awe at the bar, speaking in hushed tones, and wanton eyes. “Boyd and I talked it out. This is our real, firm, offer, to join the Hale pack. No jokes, no kidding around, no sexual undertones.”

Boyd nodded, joining the group with a fresh chef’s outfit and apron. He washed the blood from his hands, soaping up carefully under his claws. “These are all our cards, out on the table. Blue Moon brings in good money, Alpha Hale. 20% is a fair offer. Lower than average, but we make higher than average income for the area.”

“We can re-negotiate if our income spikes significantly.” Erica added.

“N.. No, that’s not what I mean.” Derek shook his head, slamming the binder full of general ledgers, income statements, and various other contractual documents. “Why the push for me? I don’t understand.”

Boyd reached for a towel, wiping away the water and suds from his hands. “Erica and I were a couple of Isaac’s. We weren’t lucky to have a Derek Hale drop in and save us. We ran. We hid. We scrimped. We scavenged. We survived.” He flashed his eyes at Derek. “We don’t talk about it.”

Derek nodded, flinching away at Boyd’s icy stare. The glare alone told volumes, without a single word being shared.

Erica absentmindedly re-arranged the bar area, shaking her head. “I’d like to feel safe, with an Alpha I trust. One who isn’t going to crack a whip or try to put us “in our place”. Besides, with
Blue Moon getting as successful as it is, I worry about Alphas challenged us, and forcing us into their pack. Basically, old world bullshit I can’t stand.” Erica’s claws expanded, digging into the bar’s hardwood top. “You, Derek Hale, an Alpha WERE who works out in the sticks to keep a small town safe, took in a strange, runty pup, a human, and a mixed species werewolf? That’s a pretty damn good choice, in my opinion.”

“You come highly regarded.” Boyd added, discreetly pointing to his customers. “A lot of our patrons whisper about Alpha Hale. How he shows compassion to all, including a half-breed.” He watched as the injured “halfing” from before rejoined his group of friends, of varying species. Many offered the young man condolences, sharing their drinks with him. “Something a lot of people would like to see these days.”

Jackson nodded, sliding back to the seat closest to Derek. “My dad wishes you were the County Alpha. So does half the city council, actually. Everyone says you’re more level headed than…” He cringed. “I won’t finish his sentence, out of respect, but he’s not the County Alpha Pack’s biggest fan.”

“Nobody is, except the bloated, racist pack of thugs who like to fucking destroy my bar.” Erica spat, under her breath.

A heavy, tense air hung over the group. Accumulation of years’ worth of disgust.

Derek thought back to Stiles. He thought back to Scott, and Isaac. He thought back to everyone in the pool, not a few days earlier, and the fun they’d all had. “Half-blood”, “runt”, “Second”, “Beta”, “Alpha”. None of that mattered in a game of chicken, under the hot sun and in the cool water.

“Why is that so hard?” Derek thought, revisiting his own childhood. In the one instance he’d dared to brave socializing with his cousins and Hale-blood relatives, and the broken shoulder he’d endured once spotted by his father, for playing with Laura.

“I’ll consider it.” Derek took the binder from the bar, and shoving it under his arm as he stood. “It’s something I have to run by Stiles. Naturally, my boys have a say in that as well. Though I’m sure you both know that Isaac won’t have an issue.” He offered both a short smile.

“Really?” Erica asked, exchanging a genuine smile with Boyd, who managed a curt grin himself.

Derek nodded. “You saved Isaac’s life. I can’t promise anything right now, but…” He wondered why he’d been so hung up on Erica and Boyd. While not best friends with the couple, he’d known them both long enough to be on good terms, and a victim of Erica’s teasing flirtations whenever they spotted each other in town. Hell, if not for Erica, he wouldn’t have ever found Isaac. Without Isaac, Scott wouldn’t have come into his life. Without Scott, there wouldn’t have been a Stiles.

Sighing, Derek threw his hands up. “I’m sensing a pattern of fights I’m never going to win, anyway, so I might as well accept fate. I’ll call you later, once we’ve talked it over.”

Jackson slid off the bar stool, joining his partner as the pair made their exit from Blue Moon.

“Ooh… He learns fast.” Erica ribbed Boyd in the elbow.

For the first time that afternoon, Boyd offered a tiny, nonexistent smile.

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After his shift ended, Derek ran home to do a quick laundry run (and to toss yet another shredded uniform), shower, and pack another bag of clothes for his stay with Stiles. Peter and Laura had
extended their trips for a while longer, and Derek couldn’t keep wearing the same three shirts forever.

Arriving back at the Stilinski home, however, Derek was surprised at the insane volume erupting in the backyard. Laughter, squeals, and the sound of splashing. As he walked up to the front door, he spotted Liam, Mason, and several other teenage werewolves that bore Deucalion’s emblem playing in a sprinkler and a slip & slide. Scott and Isaac were right in the middle of the action, sliding down the long blue mat, bowling into a group of pups that caught them at the end.

Derek made his way inside, kicking his work boots off to the side, next to a slew of tennis shoes. He sat his luggage on the living room couch, ears twitching at a heated argument in the kitchen.

“Why are you still putting up with them? Fucking cut the cord already! They can’t stop you from telling the truth! If you’re worried about money, then you’ve got one fucking hell of a lawsuit on your hands!” Stiles yelled, in a seething undertone.

“It’s not that easy Stiles. I’ve lived that lie so long, I… I don’t know how I’d even live as someone else. I’ve never felt anything from that part of me. I… I don’t want the drama of it all.” Jackson muttered, clearly dejected.

Derek stepped just outside the kitchen, watching as Jackson and Stiles mixed several pitchers of punch. Stiles, beet red from the sun in his swimsuit, sapped the back of Jackson’s head as hard as he could. “Have you asked Derek for help? He’s an Alpha! He’s the perfect person to help you! Let him make the fuss for you!”

Jackson paused, folding his arms. A brief (albeit small) smile crossed his face. “I know he would.”

“Then listen to me as your friend, Jackson.” Stiles put a hand on Jackson’s shoulder, clasping it tightly. “We’ll be with you through all of it. The good, the bad, and the ugly. I’ll be here for you if you need to talk. I went to school long enough to deal with this kind of stuff, trust me.”

Sighing exasperatedly, Jackson grabbed both pitches of punch. “Give me more time to think. I need to… I guess, I’d need to make an appointment with Emissary Deaton, first.” He spun around, moving to the back door as he slammed into Derek. His eyes widened, stammering backwards. “H.. Hi, Derek. Stiles and the Old Man invited me over.”

Derek took one of the pitchers, raising an eyebrow. “Is everything alright, Jackson?”

“Everything’s fine.” Jackson brushed past Derek, knowing damn well Derek heard the lie. “Excuse me, I promised Isaac and the small army outside some punch.”

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Derek shot Stiles a curious glance. He nudged his head in Jackson’s direction.

Stiles shook his head, throwing both hands up in the air. “It’s not my story to tell. We pinky swore in the first grade. Can’t break that kind of promise, sorry Alpha.”

“I can respect that. I think.” Derek pictured Jackson as a small child, with Stiles. He didn’t want to fathom the kind of shit those two might have gotten into as a pair. “So what’s with the block party out back?”

Stiles snorted. “Melissa bought a sprinkler slip & slide for Isaac and Scott to run around in. Mason and Liam came over because Scott begged for me to invite them, and some of my other nieces and
nephews came to catch up with me, and they brought along a bunch of the other pack pups I knew. I didn’t expect for a reunion, but that’s sort of what it turned into.”

“You know ALL of them?” Derek glanced out the kitchen window, dropping his jaw at the sheer number of pups and teens, ranging from 10 to 18. There were well over twenty of them.”

Stiles laughed, patting Derek’s shoulder. “Man, when I was in Duke’s pack, I’d become a professional babysitter for a lot of them. Ema and I were both homebodies, so it made sense. Somehow, I ended up being the “cool” kid they all wanted to hang out with. Personally, I think it was my amazing Nintendo skills.”

The duo paused, watching the party outside grow to a fervor as Jackson was attacked by thirsty party-goers. Smiles everywhere, none brighter than Scott’s.

“Goddamnit. I’m such a crybaby. I blame Liam for this.” Stiles sniffled, shaking his head in disbelief. He wiped his face, turning away from Derek while he fiddled with an oven’s worth of pizza bites.

“You okay, Stiles?” Derek asked, setting the punch aside and coming to Stiles’ side.

Stiles sighed, dumping the pizza rolls on a large platter. “Mason told me that Liam rallied the pups and teens, and brought them all here to meet Scott, their blood cousin. Most of them didn’t know Scott had been born, or that Ema had a son.” He peered out the window once more, watching Isaac and Scott slide down the sprinklers, and continue their living bowling game. “I never thought I’d see the day.”

Derek leaned against the kitchen counter, shaking his head. “What happened, exactly? Why would your pack reject you? Was Scott having a half-human father really such a big deal?”

“I-...” Stiles paused, trapping his mouth shut. He thought in silence, before leaning over the kitchen sink. “Scott is not to know this until he’s an appropriate age. Understand?”

“Of course.” Derek nodded, catching the nervous uptick in Stiles’ heart.

After a short eternity, Stiles shut his eyes. “Scott was born prematurely, by nearly a month. A runt of runts. After she gave birth, Ema was triggered by the Biological Imperative. So, naturally, she rejected me as a mate, and we had to keep Scott away from her at all costs. That’s… That’s a big reason why we left Beacon Hills for so long.”

Ice shot through Derek’s veins, making it difficult to catch his breath. He stared in awe at Stiles, and then to Scott, who rode on Liam’s shoulders in the backyard, without a care in the world.

The “Biological Imperative”. A phenomenon that had no genuine explanation, from any scientific community, human or werewolf. In rare instances, a werewolf mated pair who produced a runt could trigger an inner instinct. An instinct that shattered any type of bond between the mated pair, and eliminated any maternal or paternal caring the parents might have towards the runt. A way to ensure propagation of a strong species.

Generally, in the modern world, the mated pair would separate (usually leaving the pack), and the runt would become the pack’s property to raise. Though, usually as an outcast. Better than the primal alternative of centuries earlier to kill the runt, but not by much.

Of course, for a human who didn’t have such an instinct? There was no bond to break, from Stiles’ perspective, to Scott or Ema. Love, for humans, weren’t linked to instinct. Stiles wouldn’t have felt the disconnect.
Derek couldn’t fathom how Stiles must have felt.

“Stiles… I’m so sorry.” Derek muttered, finally coming out of his daze. He shook his head, unable to wrap his head around it all.

Shrugging, Stiles chuckled. “The pack elders never wanted me, so I wasn’t all that surprised. I was a human, who didn’t want the bite, mating with one the Alpha’s granddaughters. So of course, the Elders took whatever excuse they wanted to get rid of me, outvoting Duke and pressing his hand. They’d been waiting years for a chance, and I’m pretty sure Elder Jenkins jizzed himself when Deucalion told everyone what had happened at the hospital.”

Derek growled under his breath, gripping the kitchen counter. How anyone could be horrible to Stiles, a brilliant, kind man, and part of a respectable family, was beyond him. “Why would you stay in a pack like that?”

“My mom was best friends with Ema’s mother. Growing up, all my best friends were werewolves, and most of them in Deucalion’s pack. It wasn’t until I was older that I was a “problem”. A lot of people thought I’d take the bite. Hell, I’d planned on it since I was five.” Stiles shrugged, huffing. “Until I found I had a low success rate. Apparently, not wanting to die a horrible, painful death at 18 made me a bad person. Who knew?”

Derek didn’t buy Stiles’ laughter for a moment. The man’s heart, rapidly buzzing, told all. “Stiles…”

Gathering up the platters of food, Stiles glanced away from Derek. “I loved Ema. I loved my friends. They were my family, when Dad worked longer hours and after Mom died.” He shot his head up, smiling. “Now I’ve got a new one. One without all the bullshit or drama. One that’s apparently about to have a pair of really good cooks, and endless supplies of alcohol. Really, you’re pretty damn good at recruiting Derek. Dad is going to love you even more now.”

Derek’s face warped, walking after Stiles as they made their way into the backyard. The duo were flooded by a wave of pups and teens, devouring anything that even looked remotely edible. “How.. How did you already know about that?”

Stiles laughed, eventually handing off the food to Mason, letting the poor teen be the one ransacked for food. He pulled Derek to safety. “Beacon Hills grape vine. If you need it, I give Catwoman a glowing recommendation. Blue Moon and I were well acquainted before I moved out to New York. Erica was my first therapist, with Dr. Booze assisting, and listened to me bitch for hours.”

“Oh. Well, then.” Derek rubbed the back of his neck, easing into a lawn chair, next to Stiles. “You’re okay with me growing the pack, then?”

“Sure, just no assholes.” Stiles pointed his finger in Derek’s face. “Or pedophiles.”

Derek rolled his eyes. “I think I know to avoid pedophiles, or assholes.”

“I dunno. I’ve been hanging out with your sister all day long. I’ve heard some pretty assholish stories about you. Did you actually beat the snot out of someone when you moved back to Beacon Hills?” Stiles threw a thumbs up in Laura’s direction. Laura waved back, winking at Stiles.

“She’s dead to me, and a chronic liar.” Derek growled in his sister’s direction. If she’d blabbed about the his Junior High drunken party mishap, he would end her.

“Alpha! You’re home!” Isaac screeched. The pup clambered across the backyard, leaping into Derek’s chest and hugging the air out of him. Scott wasn’t far behind, adding just enough weight to
bring the lawn chair down, snapping the iron legs in half. The three fell to the ground, legs flinging in the air.

Stiles snorted, laughing as Scott and Isaac put on the “totally innocent” facade.

Derek ruffled both of their heads, getting soaked by the pups in the process. “Missed you guys, too. Having fun?”

“Yeah! You’ve got to try the slide Melissa got us! It’s really fun!” Scott pulled at Derek, trying to get him out of the ground.

“Come on, come on, come on!” Isaac demanded, tugging on Derek’s other arm.

“Hey, I’m coming! Give me a minute!” Derek hopped to his feet, pulling off his shirt and tossing it to the side. He turned to Stiles, yanking his Second out of the lawn chair. “You too!”

Before long, Derek ran through a sprinkler, and slid down the blue mat with both pups. Stiles “attempted” to join them, but with the human’s coordination, he face planted more than slid. Eventually Laura joined in, guiding Stiles in an upright position, and showing him the proper way to “play”.

Liam and Mason exchanged broken frowns, watching in envy across the yard. Most of Deucalion’s pack watched the touching, fun moment, in a mixed array of emotions. None of which were pleasant.

The older kids turned away, scoffing and pairing off on their own.

“Give it time. No Alpha stays that way for long. Once he gets some Betas, he won’t need a human.”

“Liam’s an idiot, as usual. If he thinks someone that strong will stay nice for long, he’s insane.”

“Stiles’ will get burned again. I thought he was smarter than that, but… I get it. Not like anyone else would take in Scott.”

“Lay off, man. Scott’s nice.”

“I know he’s nice! He’s Stiles’ kid! Of course he’s nice! He’s just… You know.”

“A halfsie.”

“Shut up, Alan.”

“Call him that again, and I’ll fucking cut you.”

The younger kids, under 10, gathered around Liam and Mason, tugging at their swim trunks.
“Hey Li? How come we don’t do stuff like that in our pack?”

“Mason, can Alpha Duke play with us too? Can he come next time?”

“Can Miss Melissa and Stiles come to our house? They’re really fun!”

“What about Scotty? He’s our cousin, right? I want him and Isaac to stay the night! We can play Legos!”

“Li, what’s a halfsie?”

Liam feigned a smile, pushing the younger kids away from the food and back to the slide. “Come on, let’s go play! We have to be back at the house in a few hours.” He shot his older cousins a deadly, golden glare.

“You guys too!” Mason said, pushing forward the other half. He turned to the older members of the group, flipping them off (claw extended) and pointing violently at them to knock it off.

Suntanning in the corner, Peter glanced up from his novel, watching Deucalion’s pack carefully. He slammed the book shut, lips pursed.
Chapter 8

The sky brought a downpour to the town of Beacon Hills, cooling the humid air, and bringing welcome relief to the overheated citizens. Along with the relief came booming thunder and crackling pearls of lightning that shook the town to its roots, as wind whipped the foundation of the Stilinski home.

On the couch’s pull out bed (that he’d shared with Derek since the Hale takeover of the Stilinski household), Stiles shifted in his sleep. His eyes fluttered open from the sound of footsteps padding down the staircase. A pair of whimpers brought Stiles to full alert, wiping the sleep from his eyes.

Derek, too, turned over, grumbling as he rose up.

“...Scott, we’re... We’re supposed to be in bed! I.. I don’t wanna get in trouble! I don’t wanna make Alpha mad!” Isaac hiccuped, in a broken sob.

“Shh! We’re supposed to be asleep! They didn’t say where we had to sleep! If we’re quiet, my Dad will never know!” Scott “whispered”, while slamming into a desk, knocking over a picture frame, and several knick-knacks.

“What are you two...” Stiles mumbled, yelping at the freezing cold hands now clutching around his body. Two large bumps scurried under the bed-sheets, hitting all of his ticklish spots and ensuring sleep would not come anytime soon.

Derek sat upright, pulling the shared covers off of him and Stiles. The pups were hunkered down in Stiles’ chest, with Scott shielding Isaac from the rest of the world.

“What on earth are you two doing up? It’s…” Derek flashed his eyes, illuminating a nearby wall-clock in lieu of a traditional light. “Three in the morning.” The Alpha’s fatigue, after working 6 days of full shifts, shone through with a ragged tone.

Scott curled closer into Isaac, all but shoving his pack-brother into Stiles for safety. “Nothing! We’re sleeping.” He feigned a snore so obviously fake that Stiles’ inner child felt a tad insulted as his son’s ability to lie adequately.

Sighing, Stiles poked his son’s forehead. “Come on, Scotty. What’s going on?”

Derek leaned over, clicking on a nearby lamp that brought a faint light into the pitch black mess of the living room.

With newfound light, Stiles caught a glance at Isaac’s red face, glowing golden eyes, and tears that continued to fall down his face. The pup shook, burying himself in Stiles’ side, with a vacant gaze. A shaking that Scott attempted to soothe, holding on to his pack brother for all he had.

“Isaac? Hey, come on, what’s wrong?” Stiles sat up, pulling Isaac into a sitting position.

Derek scooched to their side, putting a hand on his son’s back, and rubbing it gently. “Isaac? What’s wrong? Is everything okay? Come on, buddy, I’m sorry if I sounded grumpy.”

“The storm’s really scary. I mean, I’m not scared at all, but... It’s pretty scary.” Scott piped in, scooching up beside Derek. As another crash of thunder blasted the region, Scott yelped, grabbing onto Derek for dear life. “We can’t sleep!”
Stiles glanced down to his side, ruffling Isaac’s hair. Even without supernatural senses, Stiles could hear Isaac’s heartbeat buzz rapidly. “It’s going to be okay, Isaac. The storm should be gone by morning, and you can sleep down here with us.”

“If you’re ever scared, come get me right away. Don’t worry about waking us up, it’s what we’re here for.” Derek leaned over, patting Isaac’s back.

Neither act of reassurance, or affection, seemed to ease Isaac’s worries. The pup continued to shiver, tightening his already unbearable grip on Stiles’ chest. For the first time since Stiles had met the pup, Isaac looked genuinely frail.

“...it’s scary.” Isaac hiccuped, choking over the words.

Stiles crossed his chest. He cocked an eyebrow, watching Isaac’s tortured expression closely. “The storm outside? Is that’s what’s scary?” Because, if it were truly just fear of a storm, the pup was bordering into the realm of a genuine phobia.

Isaac nodded, wiping the tears that continued to fall. Unfortunately the admission seemed to only make things worse, as the pup descended into what Stiles could easily tell was a panic attack.

The pup’s breathing hitched, gasping and straining for air. His face paled, shaky and unnatural, forcing Scott to whine anxiously at the side. Stiles felt Isaac’s heart beating wildly, threatening to rip out from his body.

“Isaac, it’s going to be okay. Everything’s just fine, and I’m here for you.” Stiles spoke in a calm, gentle manner. He put his hand on Isaac’s back, rocking the pup back and forth. “Your Alpha’s here, and you are in the safest room in the entire world, right now. He’s going to help you feel safe, and everything will be okay again. Isn’t that right, Derek?”

Clearly dumbfounded by Isaac’s condition, Derek bit at his bottom lip, curling beside Stiles. The Alpha shut his eyes, which twitched under the eyelids. As he re-opened them, a soothing candy-red glow radiated around them. The roots of Derek’s hair, nails, and the scruff of his beard changed, all transmuted into a scarlet red.

Stiles watched Isaac’s trembling stop immediately, bowing his head in Derek’s direction. Even Scott, watching off in the corner and not Derek’s primary target, flopped to his side, with a distant, eased look in his eyes. The pup almost drifted into an immediate sleep.

“The Alpha’s Aura.” Stiles thought, in awe. The power inside all Alphas, manifested in their eyes, of unwavering control over their pack members’ instincts and emotions. The power to ease the panicked, extinguish rage, and inspire joy, for a proper Alpha, like Derek. Or, for the less ethical Alpha (who, unfortunately existed in moderate numbers around the world) a power to control the heart, manipulate the mind, and pacify the unsatisfied.

A terrifyingly beautiful strength that no other species on the planet could claim as their own.

“Isaac? Do you feel any better?” Derek features reverted to normal as both pups began to stir back to life, in a normal state.

After a while, Isaac finally nodded, collapsing into Stiles’ chest. The tears welled once more, and Isaac wiped them away. “Cam would let me sleep with him. When the storms scared me. Now… Now Cam can’t… Cam’s… Cam’s gone.”

Stiles struggled to find air, eyes wide in disbelief.
In their therapy sessions, Isaac talked about a great many things. (Things that would ensure Robert Lahey’s place in the bowels of Hell, as Satan’s personal whore.) Isaac spoke openly about his beatings, the names he’d been called, and sadness about never knowing his mother, or what she looked like.

Yet, no amount of prodding, psychological prods, or promises of safety would get the pup to talk about his older brother. The mere word “Cameron” shoved the pup’s heart a thousand yards away, and could cripple his session on the spot. Many times, the pup withdrew from the world entirely.

Not that Stiles blamed him. From what Stiles could gather from the local grape vine, Cameron Lahey had been the thin strand that held Isaac’s family together after Mrs. Lahey’s death. Dropped out of high school to enroll in the Marines, to support his family after Robert’s spiral into despair, when finances were tight.

“Always was smiling, that Cameron boy. Even when you could tell he wanted to cry his eyes out.” Mrs. Reese had mentioned, on more than one occasion, to Stiles in the grocery store.

“Did Cam make you feel safe?” Stiles asked, brushing the long curls out of Isaac’s eyes. He reached over, grabbing a tissue and letting the pup blow his snotty nose.

Isaac eventually nodded, as he slowly devolved into a sobbing mess.

“Cry it out, pup. You’ve held back too long.” Stiles thought, with a gentle smile.

Derek, stepping in, took Isaac from Stiles, and whispered quiet assurances into his son’s ears. A low purring from his throat, eased Isaac without the need for Derek’s eyes.

“Cam made all the bad things go away.” Isaac stumbled over his words, sniffing and snorting through his nose. “The monsters, the scary storms, Daddy… He… He said… He said when he got home next time… I didn’t have to stay with Daddy anymore. Cam said… Cam said we’d go away! Anywhere we wanted!” Isaac growled, fangs poking out of his mouth. “I want my big brother! I want him! I want him! I want him!”

Isaac descended into hysterics, shifting on the spot. His long ears fell flat against his head, eyes glowing bright gold. Isaac sunk his claws into Derek’s back, holding onto the Alpha as blood trickled down Derek’s back. “I… I want Cam back! I want Cam to be here! I want Cam, and me, and Scott, and Liam, and Mason, and all my friends to be here! Right now! I want… I want us to be a pack! All of us!”

Lightning struck close to the home, shaking the foundation. Thunder ripped through the region, in a crashing boom.

Derek’s face crumbled, jaw agape, and struggling to find words to speak. He barely felt the claws digging deeper into his back.

Stiles glanced away, unable to look the poor pup in the eyes.

“I want Mom! I want mom NOW!”

“Stiles… Stiles, she’s gone. Son, there’s… There’s nothing I can do.”

“Bring her back! She’s not dead! She can’t be! The Doctor said she’d be okay! You promised she’d be okay! You said we were going to the beach next month! ALL OF US!”
“I… I’m sorry.”

“YOU PROMISED, DAD! YOU PROMISED!”

“....”

“YOU’RE A LIAR! YOU AND DR. MCCALL ARE BOTH BIG FAT LIARS! I HATE YOU! I HATE YOU BOTH!”

Stiles felt his heart shred, recalling his shrieking, shrill demands in the hospital after his mother’s death. How nothing anyone said, did, or promised would have ever made him feel the slightest bit better. All he’d wanted was his mother. Nothing less than the reanimation of the dead would have stopped the tears. He knew anything he said, no matter how scholarly or precise, wouldn’t make Isaac feel any better.

“I’m your brother. Does that count?” Scott mumbled.

Stiles and Derek shot out of their respective funks, turning to meet Scott’s gentle gaze. The pup crawled across the bed, coming to Isaac’s side and sitting beside him on Derek’s lap.

Isaac’s lip wavered, surprised by the statement. He calmed, if by only a small margin.

Scott took Isaac’s hand, holding it. He pouted, snuffing through his nose at Isaac’s distressed state. “I don’t think we can call Liam and Mason and everyone from the other pack tonight. It’s really late, and they might yell at us. I could go wake up Peter and Laura, though. They’d come down here and help you out.”

Isaac stopped shivering. The tears continued to flow, but the hysterics began to die down, as he wiped away the tears and focused on Scott completely.

Stiles covered his mouth, gripping at the edges of his chin. He turned to Derek, who seemed to be cracking a gentle smile over both of his boys.

“Paw Paw and Melissa could come over right now, too. Maybe Uncle Jackson? Paw-Paw could MAKE him come over, cuz’ Paw-Paw’s Jackson’s boss. What do you want them all here for, though? We’re gonna train tomorrow in the woods, with everyone! Then we’re going to have a picnic that the Erica lady is making with the Boyd guy!” Scott continued, smiling.

For a few moments, Isaac’s watched Scott’s face blankly. As though he’s completely forgotten himself, and everything he’d been angry about moments earlier.

“Oh.” Isaac muttered, dropping his head.

Scott, oblivious as ever, laughed. “It’s okay! I’m excited, too, and I love it when everyone comes over!” He gasped, turning to Stiles. “Ooh! Ooh! Daddy, can everyone come stay the night here?! Could we have a big kid sleepover party?! With popcorn and all night movies?!”

Isaac laid his head on Scott’s shoulder. From the angle, Stiles could just barely make out a slim, invisible smile.

“You know… I think we could probably work something out.” Stiles answered, laughing as he bent over and kissed his son square on the forehead. He pecked a kiss on Isaac’s head, as well. “Maybe camping in the backyard? Our poor house can’t fit many more without it becoming a fire
hazard."

“That’s even better! I LOVE camping! I saw that on-“ Scott rose his hands up in victory, yawning-mid sentence. His mouth skewed wide open, while Isaac quickly found himself yawning soon after. Even Derek couldn’t fight the urge to yawn, rubbing the sleep from his eyes.

Stiles chuckled, catching sight of the time. “I think everyone’s pretty tired. You two can stay down here with us, tonight.”

Isaac’s face eased, and Scott gleefully leapt into the middle of the bed, tucking his brother safely under a blanket. Stiles turned to the side, clicking off the lamp before being yanked back into bed by the pups. Scott and Isaac fought over Stiles momentarily, before a broad hand, and flash of red eyes dropped over them.

“Settle down, both of you. Just.. Wait, and… Oh, stop it, here!” Derek pulled Isaac into his side, tucked under his chin. He maneuvered Scott inches away from Isaac, before yanking Stiles (unceremoniously) next to Scott. Derek covered their group in a large quilt, bundling them all together in a cluster of limbs, somehow managing to share only a handful of pillows, and an undersized pull-out mattress.

The pups calmed down, each nuzzling into their respective parent, while clasping onto each other. For a brief moment, they all settled, ready to finally fall back into sleep.

Thunder rumbled in the distance, further away from the house, but still as audible as before.

Isaac whined, trembling into Derek.

“Hey.” Derek’s eyes glowed a faint hue, illuminating their faces in the darkness. He pulled Isaac closer, wrapping his arms around the pup, shielding him from the world itself. “I’m your Alpha. Stiles is your Second. Nobody is going to hurt you or Scott while we’re all here. Not a bad storm, not your father, and not another living creature on this planet.”

“…and if we’re not here…” Stiles gulped quietly, reaching over and putting his arm around Scott and Isaac. He thought, morbidly, of the worst. “If we’re not here, then you’ve got a lot of other people who can step in. Paw-Paw, Melissa, Laura, Peter, and even my good friend Jackson would protect you.”

“There’s Erica and Boyd, too.” Derek added, smiling as he reached over, wrapping Scott and Stiles in his spare arms. “They’re going to help you two train tomorrow, and they’re going to be a part of the pack afterwards!”

“Liam, and Mason. I bet Danny and Ethan would step in. I know Lydia and Parrish would.” Stiles muttered.

Derek nodded. “Can’t forget the Sheriff’s department.”

Another roll of thunder echoed in the distance. Isaac flinched, momentarily, before easing his eyes shut.

“Thanks, Stiles. Thanks, Scott. Thanks… Papa.” Isaac whispered the last word, barely audible.

Derek, in that split second, looked to be on the verge of tears, and more vulnerable that Stiles had ever seen the Alpha. Taken aback, he fumbled over his words, before a wild smile overtook his face. He bent down, pressing a kiss on Isaac’s forehead. “You’re welcome, son.”
Isaac poked an eye open, sharing a brief smile with his father.

“Why don’t you shut your eyes? We’ve got a big day tomorrow with yours and Scott’s training.” Derek chuckled, glancing out the nearest window. The moon, just shy of being full, cast a gloomy grey through the stormclouds. “Then we’ll have our first full moon as a pack, not long from now. A lot of big things coming up. You’re going to need your rest.”

“Okay, Papa. Goodnight.” Isaac muffled, before the pup could finally drift away into a blissful sleep.

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Stiles woke up to a sunny morning with birds chirping, and the remnants of the late night storm dripping off the windows. Light shone into the living room, bouncing off the droplets of water, and striking Stiles dead-on in the face.

Grumbling, Stiles shifted, humming happily at the oddly warm morning. As someone who froze constantly in the night, waking up as something other than a popsicle was a welcome change.

“Five more hours, Dad…” Stiles thought, briefly, not wanting to move for the rest of his natural life. He glanced down, as a wiggling body thrashed against his chest.

In the middle of the night, Scott had curled up in Stiles’ arms, snoring like a tiny bear as he held on for dear life. Isaac, meanwhile, had maneuvered himself at the head of the pull-out bed, nestled atop a pillow, covered in a massive blanket, limbs crossing over Derek and Stiles’ heads, not completely unlike a cat. His foot was currently prodded into the back of Stiles’ head, gently smacking it as the pup kicked in his sleep.

Groaning, Stiles eased back into the satisfying warm blanket behind him. He pondered, briefly, if Derek or someone had gotten out the electric blanket from the closet.

A thought that quickly vacated his thoughts, as a warm puff of air hit the nape of his neck. Stiles fully woke, eyes shooting open. He felt a broad object across his chest and legs, like a warm, puffy, safety belt. Something soft, purring, and firm was pressed against his back, which was most definitely NOT an electric blanket.

“Oh my God…”

Stiles reluctantly tilted his head up, flushing the moment he spotted the source of warmth. Which was Derek’s bare-chested muscles, plastered to Stiles, with his thick arms wrapped around Stiles’ waist. The Alpha’s chin rested quietly on the back of Stiles’ head.

Even in his sleep, Derek gripped tightly, holding Stiles (and Scott) in place and shielding him from the cold world. His other arm was curled around Isaac at the top of the bed, keeping the pup anchored with the rest of them.

Gulping, Stiles resumed a “resting” position. He laughed, under his breath, feigning sleep.

Werewolves, to begin with, had no concept of personal space. For the most powerful species on the planet, they also tended to be the most touchy-feely. Bonding, physically and emotionally, was second-nature to them. Especially for Derek that morning, who’d just gone through a stressful night with two frightened pups.

“This is natural. All the wolves I know are just like this. Gigantic murdery fluff bunnies.” Stiles rationalized to himself, reaching down and ruffling Scott’s hair.
Unfortunately, early morning nature was calling, and after a short eternity locked in Derek’s arms, Stiles very much needed to piss. Touching as everything was, he would assume Derek would prefer to wake in a urine-free bed.

“Morning, Derek.”

Derek didn’t so much as budge a muscle.

Stiles gently nudged Derek’s foot. “Morning! How’s it going? Get some good Z’s? Man, crazy storm last night, huh?”

A curt, annoyed, snore was Derek’s only response to Stiles’ consistent blabbering.

Stiles huffed, rubbing his forehead. Waking Derek was often harder than waking Scott. “Umm… Derek? Would you, like… Let me get up? Maybe I’ll put on some coffee? Some of that maple bacon you like so much? Food? Lots of food? Come on, buddy, I’m bribing the good stuff!”

Derek responded with an unintelligible garble, something between a growl and a purr. As if to retaliate at the horrific thought of waking, Derek clung to Stiles more tightly than before.

“Alright, then. That’s a big ol’ no. Not like I can do anything about this. You’re just very lucky I’m a people person. Otherwise, I’d—”

Derek’s nose scented Stiles’ neck, still clearly in a state between sleep and conscious thought. He curled the both of them into a tight ball, throwing the covers over the length of their body, and tucking the pups closer. The Alphas snuffled through his nose, incoherently grumbling something.

Speechless, Stiles felt his face burn, and neck shiver from Derek’s prominent stubble. Yet, the awkwardness seemed to fade in the closer quarters.

Stiles felt oddly… At peace. A long-forgotten sensation billowed from his chest, fluttering into his stomach. He shut his eyes.

“You’re going to have to wake up sometime, sleepyhead!” A sweet, honey-laced voice whispered, in the depths of Stiles’ memory. The phantom touch of manicured fingertips scratched playfully at his stomach, long limbs wrapped around the rest of his body. “When Scott’s born, you’re going to be waking up a lot earlier than this.”

Stiles bit his bottom lip, opening his eyes back up. He remembered, in a soul crushing realization, exactly when he’d last felt someone like that. In that moment, the warmth swirling around him shifted into a frigid cold, devoid of life.

“Oh.” Stiles, lost for words, mindlessly stared into the distance. His heart thumped, in quick succession, while he absentmindedly tucked Scott closer beside him.

“Stiles?” Derek, groggy from sleep, opened his eyes. He yawned, nudging his chin into Stiles’ head. “What’s wrong?”

Gulping, Stiles laughed to himself. “I, uh… I’d like to be let free, so I could pee in peace?”

“What?” Derek, now fully awake, glanced around his surroundings. He quickly took in the
sleeping arrangement, mouth gaping open. Derek scrambled up, breaking the distance between them, and nearly falling off the pull-out bed entirely. The pups, still in sleep-induced stupor, merely growled at the noisy interruption, curled up next to each other, and kicked at their parents menacingly under the blankets.

“I am… I am so sorry! I… I didn’t…” Derek stuttered, rubbing at the back of his neck.

Stiles glanced away, waving off the situation. He pulled up a nearby quilt to cover the sudden chill in the air. “It’s fine, no harm, no foul. I mean, we’re pack, right? That kind of stuff is bound to happen, one way or another.”

“Still, you’re a human.” Derek cleared his throat, turning away with a burning red expression. “I should respect your personal boundaries. I didn’t mean to make you uncomfortable.” Derek dropped his head, glaring incredulously at his hands. He sighed, glancing away, balling his hands into fists.

“I don’t mind it.” Stiles chuckled, shaking his head. “I grew up with wolves, I’m used to this. Danny and Ema constantly used me as a makeshift pillow on movie nights. I just, uh… Wasn’t expecting it, that’s all.”

Clearly taking the hint, Derek nodded, pacing anxiously around the living room. He fumbled through one of his suitcases, retrieving a handful of clothes. “I… Yeah…” A long, awkward pause between the men filled the air. “I’m.. Uh… I’m going to run up and shower before Laura wakes up and hogs it all. Excuse me.” Derek strode out of the room, bounding up the stairs, and off to the restroom.

Stiles leaned back against the head of the couch, glancing to the sleeping pups beside him. He reached over, gently tossing Scott’s hair, and scratching at the scalp. The pup smiled in his sleep.

Turning his attention to Isaac, Stiles gently pet the pup’s curls. Isaac smiled, grabbing at Stiles’ hand, and yanking the human closer to him. He yawned, happily laying against Stiles’ side.

“Thanks….Daddy.” Isaac murmured.

Stiles felt his stomach flip in an instant.

“Shit. Shit shit shit.”

Panic flooded his system as he slowly took in the circumstances of the world around him. Reality hit him in the back of the head, flashing the events of his life since returning to Beacon Hills.

In the last month, he’d spent every waking hour of every waking day with one of the Hales. Stiles never thought of Isaac as a burden, or something he’d gotten lumped with in exchange for Scott's Training. No, he loved the pup just as much as he loved his own son.

Stiles had been sleeping (platonically) with Derek since the Hale visit started. His Alpha, an Alpha that trusted Stiles enough to show his most vulnerable side, for 8 hours every night.

Shivering, Stiles curled up in his quilt. “I told him about Ema. I told him about my life. I’ve told him things about my fucked up life that I never told my therapist.” He rocked back and forth, biting on his bottom lip.

Stiles clutched his chest, which threatened to erupt. Of joy, or sorrow, or fear, he wasn’t quite sure. Perhaps a mix of all three, that took his breath away.
“I love them.”

A particularly loud bird chirped at the nearby window. Alone on the perch, it cried out, before flying away in an angry huff.

“Daddy?”

Stiles jumped, spotting the pups, now fully awake beside him. Each of them watched him, with broken, worried expressions. Scott, especially, looked to be on the verge of crying.

“Daddy? Are you okay?” Scott crawled over, leaning up against Stiles and holding his father’s hand. “You smell bad.”

“Your heart hurts.” Isaac added, whining as he climbed onto Stiles’ lap. He put his ear up against Stiles’ chest, and gasped. “It hurts a lot.”

Not thinking, Stiles plastered on a smile, and laughed them off. “I’m fine, Scotty.”

“You’re lying.” Scott frowned, instantly, glaring at his father.

“He’s right. Your heart did the funny thing. You’re lying.” Isaac tapped Stiles’ chest, frowning just as hard. “Alpha says we’re not supposed to lie!”

Mentally grumbling, Stiles massaged the bridge of his nose. Had he been that obvious? “You caught me.” Stiles pulled the pups into his arms, hugging their necks. He took a deep breath. “I’m a little sad, today. That’s all.”

“How come you’re sad?” Scott hugged his father, not letting go anytime soon. Isaac watched, waiting patiently on Stiles’ lap.

Stiles rubbed Scott’s back with one hand. “I’m thinking about some sad things that happened to me a long time ago. Happy times with someone who isn’t here anymore.”

“Did you tell Alpha?” Isaac countered, cocking his head curiously.

“Excuse me?” Stiles blinked, unsure of what Isaac meant.

Isaac leaned into Stiles’ chest, huddling next to Scott. “When we have our “talks”, just you and me, you tell me me to tell Alpha when I’m feeling sad. That I won’t feel better until I do. Like when I think of… My other Daddy. Or if I miss Cameron…”

Stiles felt his jaw gape, into a short smile. Part pride in his work as a psychiatrist, and part pride in Isaac himself, for being such a smart pup. “Maybe you’re right, Isaac. You’re pretty smart. Though, I might talk to my dad, instead. Because the Old Man is the real Alpha of all of us, you know!”

Beaming pridefully, Isaac blushed. He giggled, leaning over into Stiles’ ear. “Papa says the Old Man is scarier than any of the bad guys he has to arrest!”

“Oh, definitely.” Stiles laughed alongside the pup, while Scott tugged at Stiles’ shirt.

“Could I tell Alpha or Paw-Paw when I’m sad, too?” Scott kept his gaze to the bed, while bangs slung over his eyes.

Stiles paused, leaning down and tilting Scott’s head up. He looked into his son’s eyes, which skirted away from direct contact. “What are you sad about, Scotty? You know you can talk to me too,
“What’s this about? Is he worried about Isaac? Last night wasn’t particularly fun.”

Scott’s eyes bled a gold shimmer, finally focused on Stiles’ gaze. “Yesterday… At the party we had outside... One of Liam’s friends told me about my mommy.”

“No.” Stiles’ heart stopped beating in that moment, praying fervently that the next words out of Scott’s mouth weren’t what he thought they would be. “No, please no. Please, for the love of God, no.”

“Did mommy really have to go away because I wasn’t a good enough werewolf? Cuz’ I’m a Halfie? Is that why I don’t have a mommy?” Scott’s eyes blurred between gold and brown, searching Stiles’ face for the answer.

The world lost color, as the morning sun dimmed overhead.

“What’s a Halfie? Is that bad?” Scott asked, frowning.

“I… They’re…” Stiles stumbled over his words, finding it difficult to breathe.

Scott, hearing his father’s rapid heartbeat, crumbled into a mess of tears. “It… It is! It’s bad!”

“What? No! No, of course not, Scotty. No, never!” Stiles cradled his son, as Scott began wailing into the air. Tears rolled down the pup’s face in droves, clinging onto Stiles.

“Stiles?! What’s wrong?” Derek shot out of the bathroom, soaking wet and just in a pair of boxer shorts, with a towel over his shoulder. He stood over the railing, spotted Scott in tears, and ran down to living room. Sitting on the nearest armchair, Derek glanced at Stiles, searching for an answer.

Stiles shook his head. “One of Liam’s friends called him a Halfie.”

Fangs shot out of Derek’s mouth, and the Alpha flash-shifted into a growling, terrifying bulk of muscle. Stiles could see Derek’s chest expand, on the verge of fully shifting and going on a murderous rampage.

Scott peered out of Stiles’ chest, sniffing as he watched Derek closely. “Alpha, is that really bad?”

Derek bent down, eyes burning a seething red, making direct eye contact with Scott. “I’m your Alpha. Do you trust me? Do you trust your father?”

Sniffling, Scott wiped away the tears from his eyes. He nodded.

Derek shut his eyes, taking a deep breath. “You are not bad. Being a Halfing is not a bad thing. Some people pretend it’s a bad thing, and use it as a bad word.”

The glow in Scott’s eyes faded, the pup hanging on Derek’s every word.

“Bad things happen to people who don’t deserve it, Scott.” Derek grimaced, grabbing onto Scott’s shoulder. “When I was young, people called me all sorts of names. Bad names, that made me feel horrible. They said I was weak, that I shouldn’t have been born, and was nothing but “bad blood”. I was worthless.” He smiled, shaking his head. “There are people who still make fun of me today, as a grown-up. A lot of my family, back East, like to ridicule me as the weakest Hale to ever exist.”

Scott, in genuine shock, practically fell out of Stiles’ lap. “Why? You’re an Alpha! You… You’re the toughest werewolf ever! You beat up bad guys with Paw Paw! They can’t make fun of you!
You’re the best Alpha ever!”

“Exactly. People can say whatever they want, but it doesn’t make it true.” Derek flashed his teeth, growling playfully. “I’m stronger than any of them.”

Scott smiled, nodding in agreement. However, the smile was short-lived, as a prominent pout crossed his face. “But what’s a Halfsie? Why is that a bad word?”

“It means you have parents of two different races. I’m a human, and your mother is a werewolf. That’s all it means.” Stiles added, finally recovering his senses. He gulped, plopping his chin atop Scott’s. “Unfortunately, there are some people who think that’s a bad thing. Some people think only werewolves should marry werewolves, and humans should only marry humans. Those people… Like to make fun of those who don’t.”

Isaac and Scott exchanged conflicting glances. They turned to Stiles, genuine confusion on their faces.

“Why’s that a bad thing? You and Papa are friends, aren’t you?” Isaac asked.

“Of course we are.” Derek smirked, ruffling his son’s hair. “Stiles is my Second. He’s the boss if I’m not around. Do you think I’d give someone else that title if I didn’t think of them as my friend?”

Stiles shrugged. “I went to school for a long time, but nobody knows why people think the way they do. Not perfectly, anyway. All you can do is ignore the bullies.”

With a crumbled expression, Scott glanced away. “What about Mommy? Was she someone who hated Halfsies?”

“Scott….” Stiles avoided Derek’s face. He avoided looking Isaac in the eyes. Yet, as Scott turned around to meet his gaze, Stiles didn’t dare look away. “Your mother… She wanted you more than anything else in the world. We spent years planning on having you, and growing a family. Ema and I wanted at least three or four kids, a big family, and a house all our own.”

Stiles tried not to think of the 10-year-plan. Or how many people had been involved. Ema, Danny, Ethan, Aiden, Parrish, Lydia, Liam and Mason’s parents, the Old Man, and countless others. A good fourth of Deucalion’s pack. A plan that would have been completed by now, much to Stiles’ grim realization.

“We wanted our own pack, just us, our friends, your aunts and uncles, and all your cousins. Once we all started our families, had good jobs, and a stable income, things… Were going to be good. Better than ever.” Stiles held back tears, leaning over and bopping his forehead against Scott’s. He laughed, because he’d cry otherwise. “When your mother became sick, and couldn’t be your mother anymore, it was the worst day of her life. It was… It was the worst day for a lot of people. Mine included.”

Leaning back, Scott’s face eased. In the background, Derek’s expression collapsed, the Alpha’s head dropping to the floor.

Stiles shook his head. “I never saw her after that day in the hospital, but… But your great-grandfather told me that she would have done anything in the world to hold you. Duke tried every resource, and every emissary in the country to make her better. It just… Didn’t work out.” He reached over, thumping Scott’s chest. “Scott, she would have loved you more than the sun, the moon, and everything in between. I want you to believe that, because it’s the truth.”

Scott shut his eyes, putting his ear against Stiles’ chest. He smiled, easily, before he glanced back up
at his father. “You’re not lying.”

Conversation lulled around the four, as an awkward silence filled the room.

Derek, realizing he’d made a puddle in the living room, used his towel to mop up the mess, quickly covering himself in the process. “Why, uh… Why don’t you two pups go get ready for our big day training? We’ve got a lot to do, and need to get an early start.”

The pups, fueled on the excitement of the outdoor picnic and training session, seemed to forget everything else going on in that moment. They ran upstairs, off into Scott’s room to get ready for the day.

“Find out which kid told Scott all of that bullshit.” Derek dried off the rest of his body, tossing the towel off into the corner. He returns to his luggage, tugging on a shirt and pants.

Stiles rolled his eyes. “So you can murder him?”

“Of course not. I’m a man of the law.” Derek scoffed, turning back to grin darkly in Stiles’ direction. “The little bastard is going to get a speeding ticket every day of his life from the moment he turns 16, until the day he dies. I’ll bump his insurance premium into the stratosphere, and drive him into financial ruin.”

Stiles couldn’t help but laugh. After their shitty night, and shittier morning, any kind of joke was welcome. He leaned back, shutting his eyes and hoping he might be able to catch a nap before their day out. “You know, in a sick way, that’s probably worse than death.”

A grunt snorted out of Derek’s nose. “Nobody messes with my Scott and gets away with it. Death is too generous.”

Stiles poked an eye open. “Your Scott?”

Derek caught his wording, and felt his eyes widen. “I…”

“You really care about him, don’t you?” Stiles said, cutting off Derek mid-sentence. He leaned up, crossing his legs. “More than just an Alpha?”

Derek sat on the edge of the bed, at Stiles’ feet. He nodded, unable to hold back a gentle smile. “I care about Scott, of course. I care about you too, Stiles. I feel like… Like I’ve finally found my own family. People I care about, and who care about me in return.” He glanced to Stiles, smiling. “Am I… Overstepping?”

Stiles chuckled, shaking his head. He nudged Derek with his foot, smiling. “For what it’s worth, if anyone tries to mess with my Isaac, I will destroy their mind with a myriad of psychological cruelty that not even the most heartless sociopath would be capable of uttering.”

“Somehow, I get the feeling that’s not an empty threat.” Derek beamed.
Chapter 9

“Not a chance. Do you see the lopsided foundation?”

“Nope. Look at the cracks in the brick, that thing is one sledgehammer away from falling in on some poor sap.”

“Never. In this neighborhood? There’s probably a meth dealer living in the basement, and a hooker in the attic.”

“With that tacky crown molding? Hell to the no.”

Sat in the driver's seat of his car, Derek banged his head repeatedly against the steering wheel. He turned to Stiles, in the passenger seat, who threw a stack of papers into the back of the car, scattering them everywhere.

“Screw all of this! I say we live in a tree and be done with it!” Stiles threw his hands up, roaring into the air.

Derek groaned, nodding in agreement. They’d spent the better part of their day house-shopping. Unfortunately, the only pack-friendly homes they came across were in terrible shape, too small, too big, too expensive, or foreclosed upon by the board of health and safety. By their thirteenth tour, Derek had decided to arrest the local real estate agent community, the lot of them, for fraud.

“This is going nowhere. God, it’s like there’s no place left to develop in Beacon Hills, and buying a legitimate pack house in good condition is impossible. They’re all 200 years old, dilapidated, and utter shit.” Stiles faux-sobbed into the passenger window, smearing his face against the glass.

“I hear there’s a burnt down train depot in the area. Looked promising. Some linens, some flowers, could possibly work for us?” Derek cracked a curt smile.

Stiles slugged Derek in the arm, rolling his eyes. “Should we go check on the Pups? Do you think Peter can handle them all day long? I don’t care if he’s the National Alpha, he's never babysat my son before.”

In an act of surprising charity, Peter offered to train the pups that afternoon. A session that countless werewolves would give their left arm for, to tutor under the National Alpha, and the #1 ranked member of WERE. Despite Derek’s pride to handle Scott and Isaac all on his own, he couldn’t deprive either of them of that honor. They could brag about that for years, and shoot them into popularity for the rest of their lives, in school, college, and beyond.

“My Dad said he’d have them until 5 in the woods, and would take them out to dinner afterwards. We’ve still got plenty of time. I also wouldn't worry about it, he had to raise Laura and I, after all.” Derek ticked his fingertips along the steering wheel.

“I’d say let’s try the next house, but I don’t know where else to go. We could try outside the county, but then we’d have to deal with a different County Alpha, and probably have to pay a Pack Tax to their “honor”. At least Duke’s not a total dick about that stuff.” Stiles beamed, chuckling to himself. “How about we get Duke to sell us his house? It’s pretty nice, you know. I could get my old room back, and everything!”
“Duke…” Derek’s stomach churned. His most recent encounter with the County Alpha ran through his head. At the time, he wouldn't have even considered it, but now...

“Maybe we could build? There’s not much land around here, but there’s some… Expensive as hell, though, I know the owner of the land, and she doesn’t play games. That would destroy our budget.” Stiles murmured, already scrolling through his phone.

Derek shook his head. “There is… One other place.” He threw his car into drive, pulling out of the last home they’d toured, and onto the main road, heading out of town.

“Really? Where’s it at? I’ll pull it up on my phone.”

“It won’t be on there.” Derek veered off the paved road, and into a dirt path that veered through a dense forest.

“Uh… Okay?” Stiles focused on Derek’s sullen expression, rocking an eyebrow.

The drive took well over twenty minutes, out of town, down an off-road, and into the thick of Beacon Forest. Stiles glanced over the map in his phone several times, giving Derek a puzzled look as they made turns into what appeared to be little more than a gap in the trees. For a brief section, they were completely off-road.

“You sure this is the right way? I’ve lived here my whole life, and I don’t think this is even a road.” Stiles glanced all around him, trying to make out any discernible landmark.

“It’s not.”

Stiles dropped his face, reaching across and gripping Derek’s arm. “Uh, you okay there? You look like you’re about to vomit.”

“I’ll be fine…” Derek gulped, making one final turn, and back to a somewhat navigable road. He took a deep breath, as the destination finally came into view.

Fields of endless flowers as far as the eye could see, blooming under the summer heat, surrounded by a dense forest, with a sizable lake far off in the distance. Only a small log cabin took up space in the acres of landscape, in a crumbling state of disrepair.

In a field over, a broken down barn was rusted out beside an overgrown garden, and dilapidated fencing. Wild game pranced away as Derek’s vehicle tossed and tumbled on the rugged pass.

Aside from the dirt road they’d taken, there were no means of accessing the otherwise private acreage.

While Derek grimaced at the sight, Stiles leapt out of his seat, cramming his face at the windshield. “Oh my God! Derek! This place is gorgeous! Look at it!” Stiles beam lit up the already sunny day, and brought a brief smile to Derek’s face.

Parking a short way from the cabin, Derek unbuckled. “This was my-”

Before Derek could even get the sentence out, Stiles bolted from the car. He pulled his phone out, running to the field’s edge. “I’m going to go take some pictures! The pups would LOVE the place! Look at all the space it has for them to run around in! Holy shit, look at it! There’s a lake and a dock, and we don’t even need a pool! I can take Scott and Isaac fishing!”
Derek chuckled, watching as Stiles jetted off to photograph the area, a blur on the horizon in a matter of minutes. He walked opposite from Stiles, towards the log cabin, and down a cobblestone path that led to the front door.

Stepping inside the cabin, Derek felt the door fall off its hinges behind him. He flinched, groaning quietly to himself. The hardwood flooring had rotted, and the entire home was covered in a thick layer of dust. All but one of the windows were broken, with ivy vines twirling into the home and blooming buds running up the walls.

“Worse than I thought.” Derek thought to himself. He stepped to the middle of the cabin, each board squeaking under his weight. He stopped by the first room in the home, and Derek peeked inside. A tiny wooden bed-frame sat off to the side, crushed in the middle by a massive bookshelf that had collapsed on itself.

Derek stepped closer, cringing as he stepped on a mess of glass. He lifted his foot, spotting a broken picture frame on the ground, as broken as all the others that lined the floor of the cabin. Reaching down, he retrieved the weathered photo, bringing it closer to his face.

In the photograph was a young boy, barely five years of age. Short, punked up black hair that stood up at every angle. The boy made a goofy face and flashing a mess of fangs, sitting in the lap of a young woman, who made just as goofy of an expression. A young woman, whose black hair billowed to her waist, and red eyes stood in a sharp contrast to the rest of the photo.

Derek folded the picture into his front pocket, sighing. He quickly toured the rest of the ruined home, before eventually exiting the cabin from the back, breaking that door on the way, as well. “Dammit…” he murmured, tossing the door far to the side.

Taking a deep breath, Derek finally stepped outside.

Behind the cabin, underneath the shade of a thick tree, was a flat, pale gravestone that stuck up out of the ground at an angle. No name emblazoned the memorial, or a date range of the occupant’s life. At its center, a sharp, carved crescent moon emblazoned the cool stone, with waves cascading from its sides. A sea of ivy covered the stone, blooming with purple petals.

Derek brushed away the wilted bouquet sat in front of the the grave.

“Hey, mom.” Derek bent down on one knee, squatting down to sit before the stone. He glanced away, setting the fresh bundle of flowers atop the stone. “Sorry I haven’t been out here in so long. Things have been… Things have been crazy.”

The wind whipped through the field, scattering petals and leaves throughout the expanse.

“I have a son, now. His name is Isaac. I adopted him last month.” Derek traced his fingertip over the carving, smiling. “Isaac loves stuffed animals. All animals, actually. I think once we’re all settled, I’ll get him a dog or a cat. Whatever he’d like. I picture him as a cat person. Scott? Christ, I’ll probably end up getting one of each… Scott’s a dog person, probably just like his father.”

A loud, overjoyed squeal echoed in the preserve. Derek could barely make out Stiles’ “it has a berry patch” before hearing Stiles trip into said berry patches with an audible groan.

Derek laughed, cracking a smile. “Oh. That’s right, I suppose I have two sons, really. Scott, who I was talking about, is Isaac’s age. He’s not really mine, he’s a pup in my Pack, but…” He paused, mouth agape. Derek pulled back his hand from the stone.

“Oh, yeah… I started a Pack, too. We’re small, but… I think I could handle a small one. I’ve been
“doing alright with it.” Derek glanced into the sky, watching the sun shine brightly overhead. “They’re not like the Hales, stuck up with tradition or a warped sense of honor. None of us are after power or a lot of land. We’re not after a County Seat, or want to rule the State. At the end of the day, I think we’re just all sick of being alone, and want a family to call our own.” He looked down, back to the grave, smiling once more. “Like the one you and I had, together.”

“Deeeereeeeeeek! Where’d you go!?” Stiles yelled, jogging across the field and towards the cabin. Derek shot up from the ground, brushing his pants off. Briefly, he bowed, exposing the back of his neck to the gravestone. “You were a great Alpha. A great mother. I hope I can succeed your name, and your memory with pride.” He leaned up, flashing his eyes. “I’m ready. I’m sorry it took me so long to get my head straight.”

“There you are!” Stiles stepped over the broken door, joining Derek’s side. He glanced to the gravestone, cocking an eyebrow at Derek. “Who’s this?”

“Alpha Natalia Marquis Riviera, the second.” Derek shoved his hands into his pockets, turning to face Stiles. “My mom, Talia.”

“Oh.” Stiles, taken aback, stood with his back straight, legs wobbling in the process. In one swift movement, he bowed to the graveside, exposing the back of his neck, much like Derek had done. “An honor to be in your presence, Late Alpha.”

Derek felt his heart skip, genuinely grateful for another person to respectfully present themselves to his mother. Aside from Peter and Laura, no other person (human or werewolf), had done so. Few knew where the last of the Riviera Alphas were laid to rest. “You’re a good man, Stiles Stilinski. One I’m glad to know.”

Leaning up, Stiles turned to Derek, face melting in realization. “If your mother is here, then this land…” He paused, unable to finish the sentence.

Derek nodded. “This place was my home. I grew up here, from the time I was a baby, up until my mother passed. By all rights, this is my land, and it’s already paid for. All I have to do is claim it, and we have half of our Pack House problem fixed.”

Stiles put his hand on Derek’s forearm. “Derek, you don’t have to do this, if you don’t want to. I was being dramatic earlier. We could find another place. Erica and Boyd have some land near the Blue Moon that we could buy! I mean, the drunken passerby would get annoying, but-”

“Stiles…” Derek reached around, pulling Stiles into a side-hug. He took a deep breath, patting his Seconds shoulder. “Mom would have wanted me to use it. I want to use it, because you’re right. It’s big enough for all of us, and the pups would have all of this land to run around in. It really is perfect.”

“You’re… Sure?” Stiles dropped his head. “We could think about this for a few days, or maybe take a look at that one house with the tacky crown molding again? I mean, it wasn’t-”

“I’m sure.” Derek answered, without a moment’s hesitation. He smiled, gazing at the land all around him. “Let’s move the full moon camp out here. Let the boys get familiar to the scents and sounds, and give the rest of the pack a tour. We can talk about the house. I’ll figure out what everyone wants.”

Leaning on Derek’s shoulder, Stiles chuckled. “You realize trying to please everyone is going to be a nightmare, right?”
Derek groaned, rubbing his forehead. “Who on earth are we going to get to build a house this size? I can’t even fathom how much this is going to cost.”

Beaming, Stiles retrieved his phone, waving it in Derek’s face. “Just so happens, I know the best architect slash contractor slash home builder slash interior designer in the entire State of California. Well, if you believe her, she’d say the world, but I think it’s a slight exaggeration.” After a quick dial, Stiles brought the phone to his ear. “Hey Lydia, it’s your absolutely favorite person in the world! How’s your schedule looking the next couple of days?”

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Re-planning the full moon turned into a shopping scramble for suddenly necessary supplies, and Derek eventually had to go rescue some of his Pack from getting lost along the way. The Boss got stuck against some trees, and Erica cursed his name the entire drive up, until she actually saw the land.

Yet, in the end, Derek decided it was far worth it.

Not far from the cabin, Stiles built a sizable bonfire, while Derek chopped a tree or two, and fitted log seating around the fire for the entire pack. Erica and Boyd brought enough food and drink for the party, while the Sheriff and Peter brought their own brand of “drink” for the adults. Jackson brought entertainment in the form of sports equipment, and somehow they’d saddled Liam and Mason along the way. Even Danny and Ethan skipped out on their own pack night, and tagged along, needing some “space” from Duke’s pack.

With the moon just barely peeking over the horizon, and the night’s activities just barely into swing, Derek dropped another pack of sodas into the nearest cooler, and watched the night’s events unfold.

Inches from the bonfire, Erica, Stiles, and Scott were roasting schmores. Or trying, at least.

“No, no, no, no… Oh sweetheart, here, you’ve got to just barely get it on the fire! The way you’ve got it, you’ll eat charcoal!” Erica sat behind Scott, adjusting the pup’s grip on the roasting stick, and helping him aim.

“Okay!” Scott did as he was told, eventually taking a seat on Erica’s lap and letting her show him the art of a perfect marshmallow roast.

Stiles glanced away, pulling his own marshmallow out of the pit of the fire (as he’d shown Scott not a few minutes earlier), and higher in the air. He whistled, innocently.

On the log next to Scott’s group, Isaac and Boyd were passively chatting, both nearly done with cooking their first marshmallow.

“…so Papa burned the pancake really bad, and made the alarm yell at us! Stiles saved breakfast, but his food isn’t as good as yours and Ericas. Don’t tell him though, I think he’d be really sad.” Isaac peered over to Boyd, bringing a finger to his lips, to make his point known.

“I didn’t think they were the cooking type.” Boyd smirked, handing Isaac some graham crackers, and helping the pup prepare his s’more.
Isaac shook his head, giggling as he added three times more chocolate than was probably necessary. “They’re stinky at it.”

“Everyone should learn how to cook. Basic survival skill. Saves money. A hobby you can eat. First thing I learned how to do.” Boyd, following Isaac’s lead, added a monstrosity of marshmallows between his crackers, with only a slight dab of chocolate.

“Could I learn how to cook?” Isaac asked, as globs of melted chocolate began running out of his culinary creation.

Boyd nodded, giving Isaac a thumbs up. They “toasted” their s’mores. “Sure. Do you like cookies?”

“Yes! They’re the best thing EVER!” Isaac exclaimed.

While Boyd and Isaac somehow managed to eat their ways into a sugary coma, Laura and Melissa sat beside them, fresh from the “adult” cooler, with two large cups of wine.

“...so, by the time I got to the Red Wedding, I was already done. Then, when they pulled the bullshit last season, I finally decided it was only appropriate to kill George Martin. A few of the other doctors and I decided Potassium was the way to go.” Melissa sipped her drink, with one hell of a poker face.

“Oh God, some of my Betas were ready to go on a hunt. Braeden was leading the charge, and I was almost inclined to let them go. Made for a wonderful pack bonding experience, though. We all mourn together at that man’s wave of a pen stroke.” Laura sighed, shaking her head.

Melissa rolled her eyes. “Is it so hard to want a good television series that doesn’t have major characters dying every season for the shock value? Walking Dead, Once Upon a Time, -”

Laura growled, fangs popping out of her mouth. “Oh don’t even get me fucking started on Once Upon a Time. I have never wanted to cut a bitch harder in my life!”

“I’ll bring the scalpels.” Melissa spat.

The oldest of the group, Peter and Sheriff Stilinski, stole the unhealthy snacks from the buffet tables while nobody watched them, telling their own brand of “war stories”.

Peter sighed, shooting down a beer. “My staff think I don’t know what they’re doing on the web browsers. Please, as if I’m an idiot. Jacobson has an unnatural obsession with farming simulators. Piet wasted half his work day on reddit. Wilson planned her Disney Trip on company time. Oh, just wait until their next performance evaluation when i show them the printouts of browsing history. They’re lucky I like them, or they’d be fired.”

“At least those are normal things.” Sheriff Stilinski laughed, patting Peter on the shoulder. My deputies and the Internet? Yukimura was buying swords and some kind of rainbow candy. Parrish was researching HellHound sperm, the poor bastard. Aiden and Ethan? Yeah, I definitely know about the kinky shit that goes on in their respective bedrooms, to my ungodly horror.”

(Not far from the buffet, Danny spat out his drink all over Ethan.)
Peter shook his head, raising a bottle to the Sheriff. “To underappreciated and mentally scarred employers.”

“Here’s to you, Google, you unholy bastard of a time sink.” The Sheriff and Peter toasted, throwing back the last of their drinks in unison.

Liam and Mason, surprisingly enough, gravitated to Jackson for most of the night. The surrounded him, on both sides of a log next to the fire, making conversation, mostly revolving around sports, but Liam nervously meandered back around to the incident at the Whittemore estate.

“...I never did say thanks for, you know… Sticking up for us. Not a lot of humans would have done that for us.” Liam muttered, nursing a cola as he fiddled with his thumbs.

“Oh, and we’re sorry about the window. I think we might have stressed your mother out, and made it worse.” Mason dropped his head, focusing on his hands.

Jackson rolled his eyes, setting his drink to the side. He turned to Liam, glaring down the teen. “I’m a Officer, I’m suppose to stick up for everyone, no matter who they are. Human, werewolf, or anything in between.” Jackson faced Mason, forcing the wolf’s head up. “You have nothing to apologize for. My mother hates werewolves, and believe me, I heard enough of that same bullshit every day of my life to know it’s a fact. You could have presented her with a gold plated window made of unicorn tears, and she’d still claim you were trying to murder her.”

The teens’ shoulders eased up, both allowing themselves to smile the first time that night.

“By the way, I heard from Coach that you’re trying to one up my home run record.” Jackson glared at Liam, eyes narrowed, and a mischievous grin on his face. “How’s your form?”

With little hesitation, the trio were up from their seat, and off to grab a bat, ball, and some full moon baseball practice.

Finished restocking the drinks, Derek moved back to the bonfire, easing into an empty seat next to Stiles. He leaned forward, letting the flames flicker over his face.

“It’s... Warm.” Derek clutched his chest, recalling pack nights as a child. He’d never had one with Talia, being just the two of them. With Gregory’s pack, Derek had been confined to a bedroom, or kept as far away from the activities as possible. By the time Peter intervened, Derek never wanted to go anywhere on a full moon, a chill enveloping his chest at the mere thought of being around the others. Not that the Hales back East would have made for good company, anyway.

Tonight, however... Things were different. A night with the pack wasn’t met with fear, dread, or the thought of hiding from people who hated him. No, it was filled with laughter, love, and genuine bonding. This was his family.

Somewhere, deep down, he could recall the last time he’d felt this warm.

“Look, Derek... The moon’s full, and the stars are out! How about we go take a long walk through the forest? I bet we’ll see Mr. and Mrs. Bear again this moon, and maybe they’ll have their little cub with them this time.”
“Okay mom! Can we go swimming in the lake again!? Pretty please?”

“Of course, darling. Bring your swimming trunks, and I’ll get us some towels.”

“Everyone’s having fun.” Stiles said, extending a cooked hot dog to Derek.

Breaking out of his mind, Derek reached over, taking the dog and experiencing drool for the first time in a long time. The perfectly seared dog was covered in a slew of steaming hot toppings and homemade condiments. “Thank you… This looks amazing, Stiles.”

“You’re welcome.” Boyd shouted from nearby, showing Isaac how to properly cook and prepare similarly delicious looking hog dogs.

Stiles stuck his tongue out at the pack’s newest Beta, before turning back to Derek. “I mean, I handed him the bun, so I helped, too.” He joked, cramming one down his throat.

Derek laughed, biting into his own dog. The combination melted into his mouth, and he wasn’t ashamed to let out a tiny moan.

They ate in silence, both fathers watching the rest of the going ons in the Pack’s campout. Neither could hold back their smiles, or in Stiles’ case, a rapid, overjoyed heartbeat.

“Looks like you’re having fun, too.” Derek muttered.

Stiles waved the Alpha off, laughing. “It’s just… This is exactly what I wanted for Scott. Literally, I was picturing something like this moment. Hell, this is what I’ve missed the last five years.” He grinned, turning to Derek. “You made that happen for both of us, Derek. Thank you.”

Derek chuckled, shaking his head. “I didn’t do anything but sign some papers, show the pups the ropes, and agree to some contracts.” His chest raced, staring into Stiles’ eyes. The close quarters, the warmth, the genuine feel of joy that overwhelmed him that night?

A scene flashed back to him. A few mornings earlier, when he’s woken up with Stiles in his arms, and how right it felt. How embarrassed he’d been at first, only to realize he’d finally been able to let his guard down around someone. “You… You’re the one that made us all a family. You bring people together, Stiles. Everything that’s happened since we met in the park, you’re the one who’s put the heart in it all.” Derek reached his hand over, gently palming over Stiles’. He gripped it, intertwining their fingers together. Derek hitched his breath as Stiles’ heart raced, just as quickly as his own.

Neither spoke, both focused on the other’s gaze.

Stiles gripped back. “You’re not fair to yourself, Derek. You didn’t just sign some contracts, and show the pups the ropes.” He edged himself closer to Derek, their shoulders brushing at the tips. “Derek, you took a completely strange child into your life, and showed him compassion that nobody else would. You’re strong, and loyal, and protect those you love. Jackson told me about what you did when he’d gotten hit with a bar-stool. You literally made fully grown werewolves piss themselves in fear. You took in Erica and Boyd, and me, and I know you’d do the same for all of us.”

In unison, they adjusted their grip, holding their hands atop Stiles’ knee. They bridged the gap between them, now resting against each other’s side.
“Derek, you make me feel safe. Like nothing bad is going to ever happen to Scott or I again.” Stiles whispered, hand trembling in Derek’s. “You make us all feel that way.”

Derek’s eyes bloomed red, radiating a soft, gentle light. A purr left his throat, just as quiet as Stiles’ whisper, and just for the two of them.

As an Alpha, everything finally clicked into place. What he was, what he needed to do, and how he needed to do it. Everyone in that field, in that moment, was his. Not property to be herded, or controlled into making his dreams come true, like he’d other Alphas did, but rather...

They were his to protect. They were his to make feel safe and loved, just as much as Stiles felt at that moment.

Because, in turn, they would give back in return just as much as he gave.

None of them ever had to be alone, as long as they were together.

Derek leaned forward, pressing his and Stiles’ noses gently together. He felt Stiles’ heated face, melding against his own. He smiled, tilting his head. “I’ll make sure nothing bad happens to any of you. Ever again, I swear it.”

Both men closed their eyes, pressing ahead by a few inches. Their lips, briefly, brushed against each other.

“DADDY!”

“PAPA”!

Breaking out of the moment, Derek and Stiles spun around, watching their sons scramble on top of them. Scott and Isaac tugged at their hands, dragging them away from the bonfire.

“Come on, come on, come on! We’re playing baseball! You gotta play too!” Scott insisted.

Isaac, mouth covered in a thick chocolate ring, bounced up and down. “You’re on OUR team. Liam and Jackson are on their own team, and they’re REALLY good!”

With little ceremony, Stiles and Derek were dragged to a wild expanse of field, where a good chunk of their Pack had gathered, watching Jackson coach Liam on his foot placement, and proper swing etiquette. An argument regarding teams had broken out.

“We’ll talk later? About… That?” Stiles whispered, signaling sheepishly back to where they’d been sitting moments ago.

“Tonight. After we’ve worn the pups down.” Derek nodded, scooping Scott and Isaac under his arms. He ran ahead, giggling pups underhand, and plastered with a bright red face, and an overwhelming smile.

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After a lively five hour “baseball” game (which quickly devolved into a game of fetch for the wolves, as Jackson and Liam both creamed the balls into the stratosphere, each trying to outdo the other), the Pack dissolved into a tired, worn out mess in the wee hours of the early morning. They descended to the multiple tents arranged off to the side, while a few waded out into the forest for
their own “adventures”.

Derek and Stiles, after tucking their pups into the tent with Liam and Mason, retreated to Derek’s tent. They splayed out on an air mattress, covered with a soft quilt.

Laying in silence, Stiles tucked himself into Derek’s side, arms wrapped around each other. Their legs intertwined, feet gently rubbing up against each other.

After an age of waiting, Derek turned to face Stiles. “Do you want to talk? This could wait, if you want to.”

Stiles chuckled, shaking his head. He curled himself tighter into Derek’s side. “I’ve been trying to think of how to word this, and sort of hoped you’d go first, but…” Huffing, Stiles balled his hand into Derek’s, holding tightly. “I care about you, Derek. Without a doubt, you’ve become a big part of my life in a short period of time. Hell, you’ve become a huge part of Scott’s life, as big as his Paw-Paw. It’s been a long time since I felt this way about anyone, or had a friend this close. This last month has been like finding the shore after being shipwrecked for five years. I’ve got real connections to real people again.”

“Not a lie.” Derek’s chest fell in relief. He clutched back at Stiles’ hand.

“The thing is…” Stiles frowned, dropping his head and bonking it against Derek’s chin. “I’m still messed up on the inside from my last relationship. Emotionally, I’m about as functional as my old man was after my mom died. I can accept what happened, I can move forward, and I know that Ema and I will never be together again, but… That doesn’t erase how I feel about it all. Time doesn’t heal wounds. They just scar over the memories, so the bleeding stops, and it leaves you with an ugly mark to remember the rest of your life.”

“Not a lie.” Derek wrapped his arm tighter around Stiles’ waist, tucking them closer together.

Stiles smiled at the touch, lifting his head up and focusing on Derek’s eyes. “I’ll be honest. The idea of being with someone again terrifies me. I know what it’s like to love and lose, and believe me… It’s better to have never loved and lost. Whoever said it wasn’t, is a goddamn liar.”

“I’m sorry.” Derek finally spat out, unsure of how to respond.

“Thanks…” Stiles reached up, putting both arms around Derek’s neck. “If you’re willing to put up me being a little messed up… Derek, I want to give this a try. If we can do this slowly, I can do this. Because my dad is right… I don’t want to close myself off, and not enjoy life. It wouldn’t be fair to me, or Scotty. That, and… I… I really do care about you.”

Derek brought his arms down, wrapping them around Stiles’ back. He clutched at Stiles’ waistline, glancing away. “I’m just as bad, Stiles. I’ve only just realized what it really means to be an Alpha, and what it means to be head of a Pack. I’ll be honest, I’m winging everything in my life right now. I feel like any day, I’m going to fall, and nobody will be there to catch me. Again.”

They held onto each other for dear life, close enough for their chests to touch. Derek felt Stiles’ heartbeat, in rhythm with his own.

Derek shut his eyes. “Combat, law, and giving out speeding tickets. For a good five years, all I did was weightlifting, training, and learning how to be an efficient killing machine. For the last handful, I worked, slept, and ate. That’s… That’s been my life.” Derek laughed, opening his eyes, and pressing his forehead against Stiles’. “I have no idea how to be a father, an Alpha, or keep us all together. Hell, I don’t know how to love another living being, let alone be a… Mate. I didn’t want
“I can’t go back to that life.”

Shaking his head, Derek laughed, so he’d stop himself from possibly crying. “I never thought I’d have to do any of this, so I never bothered opening my heart. I’m just as bad off as you are, in my own way.”

“We’re both pretty messed up, huh?” Stiles chuckled alongside Derek, smiling as he reached up and pecked a kiss on the Alpha’s cheek.

Derek purred, curling the two of them into a ball, and planting a kiss all his own on Stiles’ neck. “If you’re worried about it, I won’t leave you, Stiles. The biological imperative doesn’t trigger in same-sex mates. If we mate, it’s for life.”

Stiles stopped moving, body frozen in place. His heart practically leapt out of his chest, and Stiles hid in Derek’s chest, keeping his face away from the surface. He reached up, carding his hands through Derek’s thick hair. “You’re not going to fall, because I’m your Second, and I’ll catch you. If the pack screws up, or we screw up, or just you screw up, I’ll be there.”

The two eased into a delicate position, both sets of eyes sleepily falling shut.

“Besides… How badly could either of us screw this up, really?” Stiles mumbled, before the two finally fell into a deep sleep.

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The moon shone over Lake Hale, a mile or two out from the campsite. Having snuck off in night, after everyone had fallen asleep, Jackson stood at the water’s edge.

“... Can do this.” Jackson pulled off his tank top, casually tossing it to the side. On his exposed back, a dark circle overtook half of his muscles, with an inverted triangle taking the center, with sprawling moons dotting the design. Words in an old language, none of which he could read himself, danced around the edges.

After yanking off his socks, shoes, and standing only in a pair of boxers, Jackson stepped forward. He hissed as the cool water touched his skin, burning the flesh as steam billowed over him.

Jackson fled, stepping back out onto the beach. He swore under his breath, flinching as his foot turned a deep shade of red.

“Bathe in the light of a full moon. Drink that which would poison your soul. Shed your own blood, at the hand of an Alpha who would call you their own. Only then will the Eclipse find its end, and the light to shine once more.”

“Fucking Deaton… He didn’t say it’d burn, the cryptic bastard.” Jackson bent down, rubbing at his
foot. Within minutes, the skin shed itself, healing soon after. He groaned, falling back on the sand of the lake’s beachside. “Is this even worth it?”

Jackson rubbed his forehead. “Derek’s offered me to be part of his pack, part of something bigger, like I’ve always wanted. I don’t live with my parents anymore. I’m a free man. Stiles is right… Why am I so scared of this? I’m a grown man, scared of his own damn shadow.”

“I figured this was the case.”

Jackson shot up, spun around and glared at the dense forest. At the edge of the woods, Derek’s father stood, the old man with the muscles that gave Derek a run for his money. “You’re… Peter, right?” He stumbled back, gulping quietly.

“Who did that to you?” Peter stepped forward, flashing his creepily dark eyes.

“I… What do you-” Jackson fumbled over his words, backing towards the water.

Peter shook his head, stopping inches in front of Jackson. He folded his arms, glaring down at Jackson. Like a parent, chastising their misbehaved child. “You know exactly what I’m talking about. I can smell that awful odor from a mile away. The goddamn rot inside of you is overwhelming.”

“Shit. Shit. Shit.” Jackson bit his lip, shaking his head. “It’s my cologne. I know what it smells like, but it’s really my-”

“You realize you’re lying to the National Alpha?” Peter growled, baring his fangs. “Young man, do not take me for a fool. This is a very serious matter.” He grabbed Jackson by the neck, pulling up on both feet. “Now, I want you to tell me, immediately. Who did this to you? I will personally make sure that they are sent to the deepest bowels of hell. I’m not going to let them do this to anyone else, so help me God.”

Jackson couldn’t bare to look Peter in the eyes. “I was a kid. I don’t know who did it. One day, I was in the hospital. The next day, I ended up like this.”

Apparently, it was the wrong thing to say. Peter’s eyes bloomed a darker red, with black veins popping from the sides. He shifted on the spot, a horrible, monstrosity of a werewolf, far scarier than Derek’s shifts had ever been. “A kid. A kid. You were a kid!” He voice shot through the night like a bullet, forcing Jackson to flinch. Horror overtook Peter’s gaze. “How long have you been like this?”

Jackson backed away, breaking contact with Peter. “Listen, I’m dealing with this on my own. I don’t need anyone’s help, this is my demon to fight. I appreciate the sentiment, but back the fuck off.” He scoffed, turning around and stopping at the water’s edge. With a deep breath, Jackson stepped forward, wading into the water.

Fire ripped through his body. Despite the cool temperature of the water, he felt like someone poured a pan of boiling water under his skin, with the added agony of a sunburn ripping at the surface. Jackson bit back the urge to scream, dunking himself under the water. He swam into the middle of the lake, in the moon’s direct reflection.

In the moon’s light, the heat ebbed away, one limb at a time. Jackson waded at the top of the water, breathing in and out slowly. On his back, a good chunk of the words melted away, releasing a horrible, sludge-like ooze of solid black to dribble from his back.

Sucking in air, Jackson’s lungs took as much in as they could. Everything smelt. The world, for the
first time in nearly two decades, had a smell to them. The trees, the water, the air itself.

He could smell, again.

Tearing up, Jackson swam back to the edge of the beach. He stepped from the water, collecting his clothes, and ignoring Peter as he stomped off.

“When it’s over, and you're free, where will you go?” Peter asked, turning to Jackson. His shift had faded, replaced with a sad, crimson toned flash of eyes.

Jackson shrugged. “I don't know, yet. I don't even know how anyone is going to react. I don’t even know how I’m going to react.” He sauntered back into the woods, breaking into a run as he hit the trees.

Peter glanced into the sky, staring at the moon. He shook his head. “Deucalion… What have you been letting monsters get away with in this County? And why?”

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Erica and Boyd, sat upon a limb on the tallest tree in the Hale land, stared off into the full moon. Both of the Hale Betas were in half-shift, eyes glowing a pale gold. While neither had been ordered to do so, they watched over the campsite, guarding their pack.

“We should tell Derek about her, shouldn’t we?” Erica leaned on Boyd’s shoulder, cradling his hand.

“Yes.” Boyd answered, nodding quietly.

Erica shook her head, digging claws into the bark of the tree. “But it’s been ten years since we ran. Surely she’s still not out looking for us! She’s got plenty of other peons to control.”

“Probably.” Boyd glanced down at his neck, where Derek had applied the triskele of the Hale Pack. He touched the smooth, enchanted ink, that would never fade or vanish, unless Boyd, or Derek, chose for it to.

“Still… If she were to find us… We know what she’d do.” Erica whispered, glancing down at the foot that dangled off the edge of a tree. Atop her foot, a bitter red pack mark, in the shape of a sun, remained scarred. The effect of a hot iron brand laced with wolfsbane.

“Yes.” Boyd murmured, shaking his head.

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Author's Note: Thank you all so much for the support, and the comments are greatly appreciated!

We are now at the halfway-ish part of Part 1 of this story (still plenty more chapters to come!), as we start to explore Derek and Stiles’ relationship, see how well the new Hale Pack will handle the struggles of a being fledgling pack, continue to deal with the demons of the past, and as this family struggles to keep their head above water. Deucalion's pack will continue to be ever present and
begin to play a bigger part in the Hale Pack's life, for better and for worse. Oh, and of course, we can't forget our side-cast, who will continue to act as a complimentary additions to the main cast, and we learn more about our favorite Betas!
Chapter 10

Better or for worse, the remainder of July turned into one long, indiscernible blur for Stiles.

The Hale Pack grew closer in those whirlwind weeks, with cookouts, dinner parties, more camping on the Hale Lands, and a long string of debates regarding the building of the Pack House. Day in, and day out, Stiles watched over the pups, and saw their brotherhood grow closer, into an inseparable bond by the time the first weeks of August arrived.

So much had happened in those weeks, yet Stiles wouldn’t say he and Derek had gone on a “date”, per se, since the Full Moon gathering. Though they’d had plenty of time to spend together with their children and get to know each other with each passing day, but hadn't found the time for dinner and a movie. Because, “surprisingly”, being a parent of two energetic pups was a time sink that left neither of them much time to themselves.

Walking alongside Scott and Isaac up and down the park, the three licked away at a dripping mess of an ice cream cone. Sure, he was supposed to be "training" them on tracking, but he only had a few more days with them before school started. So they deserved as much fun and games before that as possible.

Soon enough, however, a start to Stiles’ career, the pups' start into the "wonderful" world of American academia, social interaction with other kids their age, and the dog-eat-dog world of the elementary playground would be upon them. Stiles refused to be one of "those" parents. He was not going to cry about his pride and joy going off to elementary school, and bawl like a baby in his office for 9 hours a day.

"I've already done that in the laundry room." Stiles thought, passively.

Isaac tugged at Stiles' shirt, bringing him out of his stupor. "When's Aunt Laura coming back to visit again? I miss her." He asked, pouting as they all took a seat on the nearest bench, finishing off their ice cream.

Stiles sighed, ruffling the pup's hair. Laura returned to her pack a few weeks earlier, to everyone's dismay, and brought an end to the perpetual sleepover at the Stilinski's. Peter continued to, surprisingly, skulk around Beacon Hills, after checking into a hotel. "Business" he'd claimed, while effectively running the county's werewolf population from shitty hotel wi-fi and a laptop. As a result, they hadn't seen much of him, but the Alpha popped around for dinner every now and again.

"She's coming back the weekend after Thanksgiving. Then we're all going up to San Francisco for Christmas, and get to meet Laura's pack, and you can see your own cousins and family from Papa’s side!" Stiles answered, with a large smile.

Isaac still whined through his nose, leaning onto Stiles for support as he crunched on the last of his cone.

Stiles put his arm around Isaac, tugging him close. "Don't be sad. You're both going to start school soon, in Mrs. Honey's classroom, and you're going to make a million friends! You'll have them all over for playtime on the weekends, destroy Alpha Hale's living room, and eat us all out of house and home!" He turned to Scott, watching his son bounce up and down giddily, as he shoved the last of his cone down his throat.

"My cousins are going to be there, right? Then we've already got a lot of friends!" Scott beamed,
hopping off the bench. He tugged Isaac from Stiles, rushing off to the park's playground, where a group of kids were all playing on the various equipment. "Come on, we'll make even more! Maybe they'll be in Mrs. Honey's class, too!"

Easing into a park bench, Stiles stretched out, watching his boys immediately rush up to a group of kids. After a brief conversation, Scott and Isaac made their way onto the jungle gym, playing some kind of made up game with the other pups, in an attempt to race to the top. "Why was I ever worried?" Stiles thought, with a gentle smile.

"That boy... *The one with curls, in Mrs. Honey's classroom? Did I hear that correctly?"

Stiles glanced to his side, spotting a young woman, perhaps a few years younger than he was, with a long, flowing set of blonde hair that swept down her tiny figure. Beside her stood a wobbling, elderly woman, who could be carbon dated if someone tried hard enough.

"He is. I found out today. We've been trying to get those two in the same classroom, and I finally got the Principal on board." Stiles answered.

"Oh..." The young woman muttered, covering her mouth.

Stiles cocked an eyebrow, glaring at the woman. "Is something wrong with that?"

"Oh, it's... It's nothing. I'd just been..." The young woman bit at her nails. "Well, I'd been told that the feral's son wasn't in that classroom. My daughter is in that classroom. We're humans, so... I was already nervous about her being with other werewolves, they're so aggressive and different, but... What if she sits next to him?"

Rage fumed in Stiles' stomach, billowing out and creating an urge to slap the woman. He spotted Scott and Isaac in the distance, who giggled as hung from the top of the jungle gym, swaying back and forth, beaming brightly. He took a deep breath, digging nails into his skin.

"Heather, you need to call Chris and Victoria. They're not going to want their daughter in a room with that thing. Gerard can fix that very quickly" Muttered the old woman, rolling her eyes, turning to Stiles. "No offense, but you can't trust ferals. I assume you know that boy's father was... Well, he's no better than a wild dog, now."

Resisting every urge in his body to deck the old lady and stick her in an ill-equipped nursing facility, Stiles turned his focus to this "Heather". "What does his father have to do with anything? From what I can see, he's a normal little boy." He signaled to the group of kids on the jungle gym.

One of them accidentally knocked into Isaac, dropping the pup from the tallest heights of the gym, and into the sand below. Isaac shook it off, dusted the sand from his rear-end, and went back to climbing after the rest of them.

"Isaac is just an ordinary pup, no different than a human child. He plays with his pack brother until they pass out from exhaustion, is scared to death of thunder, and wants to be read bedtime stories and get tucked into bed." Stiles spotted Heather's lines of worry slowly relax from her face. "His father is Alpha Hale now, and has a loving home and Pack. Robert Lahey, the real threat, is locked up for God knows how long, and isn't coming out anytime soon. Isaac’s a good boy."

"It's in the blood." The older woman shook her head, laughing quietly to herself. "Bad blood trickles down in wolves, young man. You'd be wise to learn that."

Still ignoring the older woman, Stiles crossed his legs and shot Heather a gentle smile. "Actually, it's not." He extended a hand, shaking Heather's. "Dr. Stiles Stilinski, I'm the new counselor for the
high school. I’m a Doctor of Child Psychology, and I focus in the supernatural.” He shot a sneer the old woman’s way. “Truth be told, becoming feral is a combination of stress, personal choice, and countless environmental factors. To shut off one’s humanity, and become feral, is akin to committing murder or even suicide. None of it is genetic. In all of the cases I researched, only 1% of pups went feral after having a feral parents. Sure, they develop different behavioral problems, but what child, human or otherwise, doesn’t react to losing a parent?”

Heather dropped her gaze, nodding in the older woman’s direction. “I could see that. Grandma, I think Meredith will be fine. If Dr. Stilinski says-” Suddenly, her eyes went wide, and she covered her mouth. “Oh my God… Aren’t you THAT Stiles? The Terror of Beacon Hills?” She beamed, snorting under her nose. “You were a Junior when I was a Freshman! Though, you got me out of a science with that fart bomb of yours, so…” She chuckled, quietly.

“I am never going to be allowed to forget that.” Stiles feigned a smile, laughing alongside Heather’s booming laughter.

“Nonsense.” Heather’s grandmother rolled her eyes. “I’ve lived long enough to know the real story. Those “studies”, who knows how they were run. Or if those dirty mutts rig the results.”

Fifty or dirty glares, from the werewolf parents in the area, flashed the old woman’s direction. One man shifted on the spot, growling through his teeth, and held back by his wife.

“Oh. So that’s how it really is.” Stiles chuckled. He’d figured as much. “That’s a rather rude assumption.”

Heather rubbed her forehead. “Grandma, don’t say that ugly word. You know better.”

“Pretty close to the truth, if you ask me.” The old woman scoffed, pointing around the park. “Those wild dogs are a danger to everyone. Humans, themselves, and my little granddaughter.”

“Ma’am, with all due respect…” Stiles shut his eyes, gently leaning back into the park bench. “I’m human. My kids are werewolves. My boyfriend is a werewolf. My family are mostly werewolves, and have lived around werewolves their entire lives.”

Heather’s jaw gaped, ever so slightly. “How do you manage that?”

Stiles opened his eyes, sighing. From the corner of his eye, he saw half a dozen werewolf parents staring him down in equal awe. Some in surprise, some of disgust, but all hanging on to his every word. “Truth be told, I know that both of my kids stronger than I am. At any given moment, Scott or Isaac could overpower me, rip out my neck, and leave me for dead on the side of the road. I can’t stop them if they get into a temper tantrum. If they were to run away from me, I’d never be able to catch up to them. The first time Scott tells me “no”, I genuinely wonder if I’ll be able to make him listen to me. Because, what can I actually do to him? The punk can climb on the ceiling and not get put in time out.”

“Sounds like you’re not really a father, then. Just an expensive dog sitter with no pay and little reward.” The old woman grinned, smugly, as though she’d won the argument.

“Grandmother!” Heather shouted, glaring at the woman.

Stiles just smiled, waving at his pups from across the playground.

“Daddy! Daddy, look!” Scott asked, hanging upside down on the monkey bars on one leg, to the awe of his peers, who were trying to do the same.
“Stiles, look! Look how high up we are!” Isaac cried out, still on the jungle gym, and balancing one-legged on a bar next to a few other pups. All who waved to Stiles with equal enthusiasm.

Turning to the old bitch, Stiles grinned. “Do I look worried about any of that?” He then promptly ignored her attempts to stammer out a response, turning to Heather. “Because it doesn’t matter what species or race my boys are. At the end of the day, I’m their father, and they’re my sons. That relationship doesn’t change. They love me, and I love them. Sure, it has its logistical challenges, but overall…”

Scott squealed as he, Isaac, and several other kids (some human, a few werewolf, and a couple of varying other species) slid down the slide all at once. They collided at the bottom, most of them landing on Scott, in a groaning pile of limbs.

A pale girl with soft, tan hair, extended her hand, helping Scott up from the ground. Grabbing onto Isaac’s shirt, she yanked him up as well. “Meredith” was emblazoned on the back of her t-shirt in a heart-shaped design, and as soon as Scott screamed “Let’s do it again!”, she ran after him, a giggling mess like the rest of the kids as Scott led them back to the top of the slide.

“…they’re still kids. Just a couple of dorky goobers who want to make friends and have fun all day long.” Stiles finished, watching the last of Heather’s worry melt away.

Heather clutched her chest, smiling at the scene. She grabbed her phone, snapping a picture of the playground group, and her daughter among them. “So is Meredith. Although she’s pretty shy… I’ve never seen her play like this before!”

“Heather, this is nonsense. I think you should-” The old lady muttered, silenced as Heather shot a deadly glare her way.

"Grandma, be quiet, or go home if you don't want to be here.” Heather rolled her eyes, turning back to face Stiles. “So, Stiles… Your boys are in Mrs. Honey’s class, too? Have they bickered about what kind of backpack and supplies they’re going to get?”

“Fun fact. If you ever want to see an Alpha and his Second at their wit’s end, just take their pups into an aisle with five hundred thousand different designs and options, and wait an hour as they inspect each and every one of them.” Stiles let out a faux-sob, rubbing in between his eyes.

“Ouch.” Heather cringed, giggling at Stiles’ pale face.

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"Tony, I'm telling you, if that foundation isn't poured by the time I'm done with my meetings for today, you and I are going to have words. Serious words. Words involving your completion bonus and Martin Enterprises using you on future jobs. Matthew has been giving me a lot of very interesting quotes in that area. I'd hate to give future jobs from my company to your biggest competitor. Would make for bad business, and a lot of questions as to why the Queen of the construction industry has stopped using you.”

There was a certain amount of joy, to Stiles, in watching Derek squirm.

Murderous bad guys? Drunken werewolves? A deadly training program and surviving in the wilderness alone for an entire year, probably wrestling bears for food? No problem, whatsoever, for the Alpha.

The prospect of a hundred-year mortgage and the coming stress of home-building? Apparently, Derek’s Achilles’ heel.
Stiles turned to his boyfriend, watching as the horror registered in the man's eyes as he watched Lydia in action. In the twenty minutes they'd spent in Martin Enterprises plush office, he'd been able to bathe in the joy of someone meeting Lydia Parrish for the first time. Or rather, experience her "effective communication skills" when it came to the world of business.

Of course, Stiles didn't blame Derek in the slightest. Across an expansive, dark cherry desk, sat the short, thin, strawberry-blond woman known only as Lydia Martin, barking orders into her phone. At first glance, the impeccable fashion sense, high-end jewelry and flawless makeup application would certainly paint a certain "stereotype".

Crossing her legs, Lydia smiled, leaning back in her executive's chair. "Good. I'll be by later to check in on things." She hung up the phone, taking a deep breath and sighing. "Stiles, I'm so sorry. That took longer than I thought." With little ceremony, she rushed around the desk, yanked Stiles from his chair, and wrapped her arms around him in a crushing bear hug. "I am the worst friend, ever. You've been back this long, and I haven't had you over for dinner! If it weren't a really important project, I would have left Tony to deal with it, but as you can tell, apparently building a new shopping center for one of our biggest clients in the State of California isn't on his priorities! I've been upstate for a month sorting it out!"

"No problem, Lyd." Stiles hugged back, crushing her with a hug of equal force.

Lydia Martin Parrish. Stiles had met the woman ages earlier, back as a toddler in preschool. Before Ema, before Danny, Stiles always had Lydia. She'd been something of a sister to him, and despite her career, goals, and life diverging dramatically from his own, he'd always know they were friends. In fact, a s a non-practicing banshee, she was the closest thing to a "human" friend that Stiles had in his life.

Releasing Stiles, Lydia turned to Derek, extending her hand. She took his hand, shaking it firmly in place. "Alpha Hale, a genuine pleasure. I've heard only good things about you from my husband, and so many citizens in the county. It's an honor to work on such an important project as your pack's future home, and the home of your pack for decades to come. Here at Martin Enterprises, we strive to accomplish excellence in everything we do. From the tiniest shack, to the palatial mansion that I'm very excited to work on for you and your family. I will be along with you for the entire journey."

Derek paled, nodding appreciatively.

Stiles laughed, patting Lydia on the shoulder. "None of the etiquette bullshit. Talk to us like friends. Derek's a down to earth Alpha. Right?"

Derek nodded, murmuring something to the affirmative.

"Thank Christ, I could puke already. I felt like I was at one Duke’s pack meetings, and an Elder was speaking." Lydia sighed, her plastered smile relaxing into a normal, sincere one. She returned to her desk, taking a seat as she pulled out a thick binder. "Hale" was clearly labeled on the side, filled to the brim with documents. "So, Derek... I took everything you'd talked about into account. Spacing, room count, the absolutely gorgeous land, and came up with what I think would be the appropriate floor plans. An exclusive, one of a kind design, from yours truly, and not like any of my cookie cutter designs." She slid the binder across the desk, flipping to the first twenty or so pages.

Stiles and Derek looked through the pages. Floor plans for each room of the proposed house, on a dark blue paper, and scribbled with dozens of personal notes in white. They exchanged looks, both with a skewed, awkward smile.
"It's... Nice?" Derek fumbled out.

"I don't even know how to read one of these." Stiles whispered, in Derek’s direction.

Lydia laughed, reaching for an extra large tablet to her side. She swiped through several applications. "You're not the only ones. That's why a genius invented 3D modeling and architect software. To which, I made my own modifications to, and came up with… This." She slid the tablet to Stiles and Derek.

Stiles took the tablet, eyes blowing out the moment he took in all of the sights. The 3D model turned out to be a stunning re-creation of the Hale land. Landscaping, which framed the cabin-styled resort home into a dense section of the forest, not that far from the lake. The home was a mere two stories, but wide enough to have several wings of each floor, that left an opportunity for well over thirty rooms in total, and a two-story living area that functioned on both levels. Stiles clicked on the front doors, which led him inside a fully furnished, virtual representation of Lydia's design. Dark and light hardwood, intertwined in a modern, sleek design, with a grand foyer, and a long central staircase. The furnishings, while plain in color and design, looked genuinely comfortable, and styled for a comfortable family living.

"Oh my God..." Derek whispered, taking the tablet from Stiles. He flicked through several rooms, jaw dropping closer and closer to the floor with each passing moment. Virtually every demand of the pack, from a fully stocked industrial kitchen for Boyd, to the expansive entertainment area for pack nights for Erica, had been taken into account.

“HGTW, eat your heart out.” Stiles smirked, giving Lydia a massive thumbs up.

Lydia beamed, pointing to the plans in the binder. "What I've come up with here, if executed properly, would make this home more spacious than the County Alpha’s Pack Home, and far more functional. If I were to take into account the renovation of the garden and barn area, could even be fully self-sufficient with solar panelings. Packs across the country would be jealous for years to come." She clasped her hands together, leaning back into her seat and humming cheerfully. “I call it… A “Return to Nature”. Modern wilderness living for the modern werewolf.”

“This is gorgeous, Lydia.” Stiles smiled, winking in her direction. “I knew I could count on you.”

“Naturally.” Lydia gave a slight bow, beaming. “I haven’t had this much fun designing a place in years! I only wish I’d had more time to really iron out the interior design, but, you know, I only had a few weeks to work on it. I’m sure we can tweak and modify anything. We could make it bigger, if you like, but above three stories, and you’re asking for trouble later in life. Old people do not like to walk three flights of stairs.”

"Which actually leads me to the real fear." Derek put the tablet back onto Lydia's desk. His awe, replaced by a stern disappointment. "Cost. This looks amazing, Lydia, but I'm sure you can appreciate that a police officer and a high school counselor, even with the added income of a semi-successful bar, doesn't bring home the bacon. I doubt we can afford this as it is, let alone any bigger. Our monthly mortgage would devastate us."

Lydia's lips pursed, closing the binder in front of her desk.

Stiles cocked an eyebrow, watching her bright demeanor melt away in a flash. She fiddled with her nails, tapping her heel. That wasn’t like Lydia, to seem so… Unsure.

“I think we need to start talking about downsizing. One story, and less rooms. The boys can share, and we’ll worry about expansion when and if it’s needed. Our Pack is small, and I expect it to stay
that way for a while.” Derek added, glancing away. He gave off an aura of genuine disappointment, upset at the words he’d uttered.

Lydia smiled, clearing her throat. “Actually, this project has already been paid for in full. A benefactor who’d prefer to remain anonymous. I have a budget of a couple million. So, realistically, we could add plenty more to this.” She laughed, turning through the pages of her book, and casually flipping the hair from her forehead. “Which… I think we could upgrade to mahogany, and-”

“A couple… Million?” Stiles said. All color drained from his face, and the world slowly swirled in front of him. “Przepraszam? Er… Excuse me?” He stammered.

“What?!” Derek shot up from his chair, slamming both hands on the desk. “A… A couple million? I make forty thousand a year! Who the hell has that kind of money to just give away!?” He turned to Stiles, bewilderment coloring his face. “Are you… Does your father… Do you…”

Stiles barked laughter, nearly sliding out of his chair. “Yeah, no. Like hell do either of us have that kind of money. Scott’s college fund that Duke set aside isn’t even that much. What about your family? The Hales are stupid rich, right?”

Derek laughed, with a lopsided smile. “No. Laura’s pack is new, barely older than mine, she struggles to pay the bills every month, which is why I brought downsizing up. The East Coast Hales would rather castrate themselves than give me money, and Peter would have told me. My father is not the one for anonymous charity, he’d want me to erect a statue in his honor on the pack land.” He fell back into his seat, paling as he wracked his thoughts. “Jackson?”

“Jackson’s “money” is pretty much his Dad’s credit card, he makes the same as you do. I know for a fact he refused his trust fund at 21 and gave it to charity.” Stiles shook his head, folding both arms. “I doubt the Whittemores wouldn’t notice a couple million missing from their accounts. They’re not THAT well off.”

“Then who?” Derek muttered.

Derek and Stiles turned immediately to Lydia, who smiled, still thumbing through her designs.

“So, is that a yes on the mahogany?” Lydia countered their incredulous stares by lifting a mahogany sample in the air.

Not as nervous anymore, Derek’s eyes glowed a subtle red towards the woman. He leaned over the desk. “Who put up the money?”

Lydia turned away from Derek, playing with the leaves of a desk plant. “As I said, your benefactor wanted to remain anonymous. I’m legally bound to not share that information with anyone.”

Stiles rolled his eyes. “I think you can appreciate that our pack doesn’t want to be in debt to anyone. Especially for millions. Being in debt to a bank is bad enough.”

Reaching into her desk, Lydia retrieved a short contract, not even a page in length, pushing it across the desk. “The benefactor made it clear that the funding for this home was a gift, of which they would also pay the corresponding tax consequences. No goods, services, or repayment is necessary for this gift. You can have it reviewed by a lawyer, if you would like. Though, it’s iron-clad. My own lawyer reviewed it.”

“This is… Insane.” Derek paced around the office, bewilderment covering his face. “Why would someone drop that much money in our laps? Who would know we were even building a house, or who we were using?”
Stiles glared at Lydia, cocking an eyebrow. “Besides Derek and I, nobody would. Except you, Lydia.” He folded his arms. “Who’d you blab to?”

Lydia shut her eyes, focusing down on her feet. Her face warped into a mess of wrinkled worry.

“Come on Lyd, this is serious. We’re not going to take this money unless we know exactly who gave it to us. That screams sketchy as hell, even if I do trust you.” Stiles said.

“Absolutely. Like hell am I taking a stranger’s money.” Derek nodded in agreement, stopping at Stiles’ side.

A belated sigh later, and Lydia brushed her hair out of the way. “I can’t legally tell you who the benefactor is.” Lydia smiled, weakly, raising a pinky finger out to Stiles. She focused her entire attention it Stiles’ eyes. “I pinky swore not to tell. Can’t break that kind of promise, you know that better than anyone, Stiles…”

For that moment, Stiles’ heart stopped. He kept his gaze on Lydia, and watched the guilt wash over her.


Shooting out of the chair, Stiles shook his head. “Derek, I’ll meet you back at the house. I need to talk to someone about this. Lydia, we’ll get back to you on if we’re going to do this or not.”

“Stiles, wait…” Lydia stood up, tearing up.

“I don’t blame you. I’m not mad. We’ll talk later.” Stiles brushed past Derek, exiting Lydia’s office and maneuvering himself out of the Martin Enterprises office.

“Stiles? Stiles?!?” Derek rushed behind Stiles, cutting his boyfriend off by the sidewalk. “Do you know who did this? What’s going on? You look like death.”

Laughing, Stiles leaned up, pressing a kiss on Derek’s cheek. “Listen. I need to make sure I’m right, first, or if I’m just blowing this all out of proportion. Though, based on Lydia’s reaction, I’m pretty sure I know who did this.” He dropped his head, chuckling. “If I am… Then I trust this really is a gift, Derek.”

Derek took Stiles’ hand, clutching it tightly. “Want me to go with you?”

Stiles shook his head. “No… I think this is something I have to deal with. Besides, I don’t think they’d let you in without an appointment.”

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Stiles forced his way inside the County Alpha House, breaking past several Betas, Duke’s personal guard (though Danny was always a pushover), and shot inside the home’s study without so much as knocking.

Sitting at the study, he spotted Peter Hale and Duke conversing next to the fire. They stared at him,
while Peter quickly pushed a set of papers aside.

"Stiles? What are you doing here?" Peter asked.

"I need to speak to him. In private. Now." Stiles ordered, folding his arms. He glared daggers into Duke's bandages. While he knew he wouldn't get the point across that way, he was sure the scent he emanated would bring home the real meaning.

"Stiles, this is an important matter. If this could wait until later, I-"

"With all due respect, Alpha Hale, no, it can’t." Stiles spat, cutting Peter off instantly.

Duke reluctantly nodded, sighing as he waved Peter off. "Peter, please give a moment. We'll finish our discussion later."

"I understand." Peter stood, cradling the stack of papers under his arms. He moved to exit, stopping momentarily at Stiles' side. "If you don't mind, please keep this short. This is very important, for everyone involved." Without waiting for a reply, Peter strode out, shutting and sealing the door behind him.

Easing into his chair, Duke let out a gentle sigh. "I suppose you know. I doubt you'd run the National Alpha out of my office without a good reason. Should I be frightened that you have Peter Hale whipped, too?" He chuckled, quietly.

Stiles stomped in front of Duke, planting himself in the Alpha's personal space. "Funnily enough, there are only a few people that I can think of who have large sums of money lying around. Of those few, I can narrow it down to two people who care about me enough to drop several million in my lap to build a new pack house. Though, the bigger hint is that they knew breaking a pinky swear is the worst crime a person can commit." To bring his point home, he rose a pinky finger.

Dropping his head, Duke's bandages slowly dropped from his face. He opened his eyes, their grey, lifeless hue making contact with Stiles. "So, it appears Lydia committed the worst crime."

"Lydia said nothing. I pieced it together myself. Wasn’t that hard." Tears billowed in Stiles' eyes, shaking his head. "Ema was here, wasn’t she? She put up the money."

The roaring fire crackled, breaking a log in two, as the cinders engulfed them into flames.

"Yes, she was." Duke struggled to stand, wobbling his way towards Stiles. He pulled Stiles into a tight hug, patting him on the back. "Only a few days, before she left again. Her trust fund was cashed, and she gave it to Lydia for your pack’s home."

Stiles hugged Duke back, careful of his grip on the aging man. "For Scott?"

Duke nodded. He released Stiles from the hug, struggling briefly to catch his breath. "For... For Scott, and his brother. I caught Ema up on what’s happened in your life, and she watched your pack from a distance a few days. She was... Happy to see him living such a lovely life, with such a capable Alpha. In her own words, she said you picked "a good one"."

"Why didn’t you tell me?" Stiles shook his head, pacing around the study. He wiped away the tears, staring blankly into a wall. "I told you, months ago, that I want her to see Scott! Even if she can’t be his mother, Scott deserves at least a meet up."

Limping after Stiles, Duke came to the human’s side, pressing a hand on his shoulder. "Ema told me that Scott was better off without her. He has a good life, and for her to come back now would only
confuse things.”

“Not when he’s asking about her! Not when he wants to know her!” Stiles spun around, grabbing both sides of Duke’s shoulders. “Duke, Scott is a naïve five year old right now. When I tell him that his mother loved him, he’s going to believe me, because a five year old isn’t going to think their father is lying. When Scott’s a teenager, cynical and probably not all that trusting anymore, he’s going to really wonder if Ema wanted him at all. My word will mean shit, and he’s going to feel unwanted. You don’t have to be a psychologist to know what kind of affect that would have on someone.”

Duke tensed, as more tears rolled down his face.

Stiles shook his head, gently shaking Duke’s shoulders. “Scott is a werewolf, but to everyone in the world, he’s a halfing. Growing up, he’s going to have challenges that I can do nothing to help him with. There are organizations that still don’t hire halflings, and some werewolf colleges that refuse applications from anything other than a pure-blooded werewolf. I have no doubt that there are going to be people that try to bully him. People are going to ridicule him, and try to make him feel like shit. They already are!” He paused, catching his breath as a brief sob left his lips. “He doesn’t need his own mother to be one of them, especially if she doesn’t actually mean it.”

“Stiles…” Duke took each of Stiles’ hands, balling them together in his own. “I am sorry… I gave Ema your message, but… As I said… She believes Scott is better off without her. I pleaded, but she wouldn’t see you. I smelt the shame on her, and… I know she wants to be a part of his life, but still blames herself for everything that happened. Ema doesn’t want to make things worse.”

“Call her, now. Let me talk to her.” Stiles demanded, gripping Duke’s hands.

“I can’t… She’s already gone, flown to somewhere in Europe. Wouldn’t tell me why, or where she was going. I don’t have a way to contact her anymore, Stiles… Only… Only if “this worked” was she going to ever return again.” Duke shook his head, hitching his breath as he struggled for air once more.

Stiles’ mouth gaped open, while he staggered backwards, shoving Duke away from him. “So then… That’s it, huh?” He laughed, sighing. With his foot, he slammed it into one of Duke’s bookcases, over, and over again. Wood splintered off, cracking the ancient wood.

“Stiles…” Duke strode forward, pulling Stiles away from his bookcase. He hesitated for a short time, before pulling Stiles into another hug. The human laid his head on Duke’s neck.

They stood in Silence, holding tightly onto each other, each crying over the woman they’d both lost in their lives.

“Sorry… Send me the bill for the priceless family heirloom that’s probably older than this house. I’ll pay it off… In at least three lifetimes.” Stiles murmured under his breath.

“It’s fine. That one was my sister’s. I’ll just say it came like that.” Duke joked, attempting a feigned chuckle.

Stiles stepped away, moving to the open window. He stared at the sun slowly setting in the distance. “I’ll… I’ll have to think of something else for Scott, then.”

Duke picked up the broken pieces of wood from the floor, gathering them in a pile. “If there’s anything you need, Stiles, don’t hesitate to ask. Photos, videos… They’re yours. I broke a promise to you, and as an Alpha, I owe you a favor. Anything you want or need, and I’ll provide it.”
All of a moment later, Stiles eyes lit up in joy. He spun around, grabbing Duke’s hand. “You can do me a favor, then. Right now, and you’re not copping out of this one. Tell Peter Hale to go fuck off for a couple of hours, and have a drink on me.”

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Stiles unlocked the front door to his home, watching as Derek and the pups were playing what appeared to be a game of children’s monopoly. By the look of Isaac’s stack of cash, and Scott and Derek’s less than bemused expressions, it was little guess who was winning.

“...so now you gotta pay me… Five hundred dollars!” Isaac exclaimed, extending his hand to Derek in a yanking motion.

“How about I give you an IOU and an extra bedtime story tonight?” Derek asked, smiling ever so sweetly.

“Nuh uh! Paw-Paw said that’s cheating!” Isaac said, pointing to Sheriff Stilinski.

“It is. Get your cash upfront, Isaac, and never taken an IOU.” The Sheriff said, giving a thumbs up from the nearby couch, and grinning at his deputy. “Pull out your wallet, Derek.”

“DADDY!” Scott exclaimed, jumping up from the living room table and rushing to jump into Stiles’ arms.

“Hey there, buddy!” Stiles hugged his son, holding onto him tightly.

Derek shot up, sighing in relief. “There you are! I was worried what had hap-” He stopped next to Stiles, cocking an eyebrow. He glanced towards the front door. “Why is he-

“Can we have a minute alone with Scott? Not long, just… Just a few minutes, okay?” Stiles cut Derek, off, striding inside with Scott still in his arms.

“Is everything alright?” Derek whispered, inches from Stiles’ ear.

Stiles nodded, sitting himself and Scott on the couch. “Everything’s fine Derek. I just want Scott to have some alone time on this one, okay? I’ll explain everything here in a minute.” He glanced to his father, with a weak smile. “You too, Pops. Just for a little bit, alright?”

Wordlessly, the Sheriff stood up, and peeked at the front door. He sighed, and quickly patted his son and grandchild on the heads. “Good luck on this one, kiddo.” The Sheriff strode off to the back door.

“Isaac, let’s go outside and listen to the crickets with Paw Paw.” Derek offered

“Okay, Papa!” Isaac stuffed the monopoly cash in his pocket, before racing off to catch up with the Sheriff, tugging Derek close behind.

Left alone, Stiles took a deep breath, carding his hand through Scott’s mess of hair. “Scott, I wanted you to know that your mother was here recently.”

“She was?!” Scott’s eyes shifted into a golden hue, glancing around the room.
Stiles dropped his head. “She’s already gone. I’m sorry she couldn’t have stopped by to see you, but…”

“Oh…” Scott frowned, the boy’s eyes losing their glow.

“But… There is somebody I’d like for you to meet.” Stiles grabbed both of Scott’s hands, holding them tightly in his own. “Come on in!”

Stepping through the door, Deucalion waddled inside with the assistance of a cane, swiping back and forth as he walked. His bandages were off, ears piquing as he audibly analyzed the layout of the home. After a few missteps, he hovered next to the couch, glancing directly at Scott.

Scott’s nose wrinkled, and his eyes went wide. “You smell like… Me? And Liam?”

Stiles nodded, patting the seat next to him. Deucalion maneuvered next to them, holding out his hand, which Stiles took.

“Scott, this is Deucalion. He’s your great-grandfather. He’s your mother’s grandpa, and a close friend of mine.” Stiles said, connecting Duke and Scott’s hands.

Clearly curious, Scott clambered over into Duke’s lap. He stared the aging Alpha up and down, settling on the man’s face.

“Deucalion is the one who paid for me to live in New York. It’s thanks to him that I was able to go to school, and that we lived in our old home. He’s put money away for your education, so you can go to any school you want to go to, when the time is right.” Stiles explained, waving away Duke’s incredulous glare.

Scott pointed to Duke’s face, with a cocked head. “How come your eyes look so funny?”

“Scott!” Stiles groaned, covering his face as he quietly wept as his son’s non-existent filter.

Duke stopped, gasping quietly to himself. A tear rolled down his cheek, and he smiled. Laughing, he wiped away those tears, and brought Scott’s hands up, allowing to pup to touch his face. “I’m blind, Scott. That means I can’t see anything.”

“How come?” Scott asked, still staring curiously into the grey orbs.

“Alphas aren’t’ meant to lead a pack forever.” Duke chuckled, putting his own hand on Scott’s face, tracing the pup’s features and trying to picture him in his mind. “We’re supposed to pass that on to the next generation, or else we haven’t done our jobs properly. I, unfortunately, haven’t done my job, and don’t have anyone I trust to pass this on to. So, the Aura has taken my sight as punishment. It eats away at Alphas, as insurance to assure we never hold onto its power too long.”

Scott tilted his head, eyeing Duke with a strained expression.

Duke laughed, gently patting Scott on the shoulders. “In a way you can understand… I was an Alpha for about fifty years too long, and my eyes started taking my life away.”

“Oh! Okay. I’m sorry, Grandpa.” Scott frowned, whining as he gave the old man a tight hug.

Choking back a sob, Duke shook his head, patting Scott on the back, and hugging the child just as tightly. “It’s quite alright, little one. I accepted this a long time ago. Thank you for your concern, though. I’m undeserving.”
Scott leaned back, still frowning. “Was my Mommy really here?”

“She was.” Duke answered, curtly.

“How come she didn’t come and visit? Alpha Derek comes and visits all the time! We have the bed that rolls out and everything!” Scott pointed to the nearby closet, eyes wide and pleading. “If she wanted, we even have blankets and an extra pillow!”

Duke shook his head. “Your mother wants you to be happy. So, she decided that the best way to make you happy, was to let Stiles raise you.”

“Huh?” The words flew over Scott’s head.


Scott nodded eagerly. “Uh huh! I LOVE my Daddy, Alpha Derek is the best, Isaac is the most fun ever, Erica is SILLY, Boyd makes really yummy food, and Jax plays all kind of fun games with us! I love my pack!”

“Then… That’s all she wants.” Duke finished, ruffling Scott’s hair. “She loves you so much, that she never wants you to ever have to think about her. All she wants you to do is love your pack, and let them be your family. You’ll be happier.”


Duke and Stiles flinched at the harsh words, exchanging a brief, pained glance with each other.

“I love lots of people! Like Liam, and Mason, and my cousins, and Paw-Paw, and Melissa… I can love her too!” Scott grinned, hugging Deucalion around the chest. “I love you too, Grandpa!”

Stiles looked away. There was something about seeing such a strong Alpha, like Deucalion, immediately turned into a pile of sobbing, apologetic sobs, that broke his heart all over again.

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Well after midnight, and after tucking Scott into bed, and reading him from the family book of fairy tales, Deucalion returned home, courtesy of the Sheriff. Most of his night had been talking to his great-grandson, as charming and well-spoken as his father, and who spoke in the same sweet tones as his mother. They played a game together, some board game about money that went on for far too long, and Duke learned all about Scott and his obsession with stuffed animal toys.

Duke wiped the remnants of tears from his face, utilizing his cane to help him up the short flight of steps leading him into the home.

“Care to explain where you’ve been all night?”

Duke’s expression hardened, instinctively glancing to a side room. Despite the man’s older tone, he still pictured the man as a sandy-haired, wide-eyed pup who used to hang onto his every word. Who followed Duke around like a duckling, never leaving his side, and always followed his every word.

“Brandon Raeken, that is none of your business. Go to bed, it’s late.” Duke ordered, stepping forward. He stopped, as he brushed into the man’s broad chest.

“At the halfling’s place? Really, Deucalion? You don’t think we have people watching you,
making sure our Alpha is okay in another pack’s ridiculous excuse for a home?” Brandon asked, the man’s hot breath hitting Deucalion’s nose.

“As I said, it is none of your business.” Duke brushed past the man, heading off to his study.

“The Elders are pretty damn clear that we’re not supposed to be dealing with that rejected, pathetic runt.” Brandon caught up with Duke, blocking his path with a broad, muscular arm. “You’re sending a mixed message to the young ones by allowing this kind of behavior. My Theo actually asked me if it was okay to play with that… Thing.”

Duke flared his eyes as best he could. A weak, pinkish glow. “The Elders are not the Alpha of the pack. You, Brandon, are not even a Beta of this pack. I suggest you keep your thoughts to yourself and not meddle in my affairs!” He barked.

Brandon stood his ground, grabbing Deucalion by the shoulders and shaking him. “What happened to you, Deucalion?” Panic wavered in and out of Brandon’s tone. From his scent, Duke smelled an overwhelming sense of disappointment. “What happened to the fearsome, powerful Alpha that was going to take control of this State? Who pushed us to be perfect, well-oiled machines that showed our superiority in every way against the humans?! The man who was going to lead our pack into glory, and take control of this country, putting it in the right direction?! Upset the National Throne itself?! YOU PROMISED!”

Duke dropped his head, losing all glow in his eyes.

Brandon laughed, shaking Duke forcefully. “What happened to the man who swore that werewolves would become the dominant race of this world, and gave us all the courage not to fear humans, and to have PRIDE in our race?! To not be afraid that we’re different than humans, and accept that we are, at heart, beasts?! You told us to give up on our humanity, and to live on our instincts!”

Duke broken away from Brandon’s grip, staggering backwards and slamming into a wall. He slid down, finding it hard to catch his breath.

Booming footsteps echoed in the entryway, as Duke felt Brandon’s presence looming over him.

“From the moment Claudia Stilinski came into our lives, you changed. I remember that day, and when your heart went soft.” Brandon jerked Deucalion to his feet, pinning him against the wall. Duke smelt the man’s tears. “It wasn’t a big deal, at first. My father always told me, humans are weak and pathetic, but it doesn’t mean we can’t be amicable. Her and Jackie, playing in the backyard after school? Not a problem.. I had to play on the football team with those worthless sacks of shit too, and I didn’t hate them all, I get it.”

Duke felt his heart slowly freeze over, leaving an uncomfortable pit growing in his stomach.

Brandon’s claws came out, gently gripping on Duke’s neck. “But then you feel sorry for the Hellhound orphan left on your doorstep, and bring him into the pack. You, Alpha Deucalion, actually showing sympathy to a halfling. We tried to understand why you’d let that demon in our home. It helped knowing that Parrish could torch other packs into nothing but ash, and we genuinely thought he would be the cannon we needed to finally move forward! Then you let him skip out on being a Beta, and let that trash go serve under a human. The trash brings in a banshee, who refuses to use her powers. Both actions that you permitted.”

Duke pictured little Jordan’s face, and the joy the young man felt from being raised among their numbers. The Parrish family were good people, among his most trusted. He allowed himself a brief
“But when Ema started dating Stiles, thanks to Claudia and Jackie’s friendship, you changed even more.” Brandon shook, still laughing into Duke’s face. “I couldn’t believe that you’d let one of our own do something so… Disgusting. Even worse, you allowed Ema to MATE with a human, with your blessing. You destroyed our pure bloodline. Thousands of years of perfect blood, tarnished by that pale little shit, too chicken to take the bite.”

Several footsteps surrounded Duke. He smelt and heard several members of his pack racing around him. Yet, not a one of them moved in his defense.

“The pack had enough sense to banish him after Ema popped out a runt early. We thought outvoting you, overruling you was going to bring our Deucalion BACK. Get this nonsense out of your head about trying to make things equal. Because humans aren’t. Just look at the halfing, and that’s pretty damn clear.” Brandon slammed his fist against the wall, creating a hole next to Duke’s face.

“Then… Your strongest Beta, Danny, you not only let mate off with another man, effectively ending the possibility of children, but let him mate off with a HUMAN man. One who brings his twin brother, another useless human, neither of which will take the bite. I still don’t’ know why you didn’t arrange his marriage to another strong female werewolf. Or why you banned that practice in the first place. Apparently, anyone can marry anyone these days, it doesn’t’ matter how pathetically weak they are.”

Off in the distance, Duke heard several shouts. A quick fistfight, and one of his children being pinned to the ground. Scrambling down the stairs.

“Now you’re actually trying to be a part of that disgusting halfling’s life, aren’t you? You actually think that thing is worthy of you as a grandfather.” Brandon smashed another hole into the wall, on the opposite side.

“What on earth are you doing?!”

Duke felt Brandon being torn away from him. Danny’s scent flooded his nose, alongside that of Richard and Annette Dunbar. To his side, he felt two small bodies, Liam and Mason, helping support him in a standing position.

“I’m telling the truth, Danny! It’s what we ALL think, except you weaklings that grew up with the Stilinski brat! You see anyone else sticking up for this coward of an Alpha?!” Brandon bellowed.

Quiet murmurs echoed throughout the home.

“Hey, shut up! You’re the weak one who can’t keep a damn job, and keep getting into fights that make our pack look like idiots! In fact, Alpha Hale showed you who was the real weakling was at the Blue Moon, huh? Heard you pissed yourself!” Liam screeched. Duke felt the young man shift under his arm, and used every ounce of his strength to hold Liam back.

“Hush, Liam! Don’t make this any worse!” Mrs. Dunbar ordered.

The quiet murmurs quickly shifted into a dark uproar. Growls surrounded them.

“Enough, all of you!” Deucalion bellowed, eyes flashing a candy red hue. All around him, he felt bodies tense up, and the scent of submission wafted into his nose.

Duke lifted himself up, using Mason for support. “Brandon… I have committed more sins than any man, woman, or child in this world. Your words right now… They make me realize the gravity of
those sins. One day soon, Hell will have me, and I won’t refuse Satan’s grasp.” He shook his head, gripping onto Mason’s shoulder as he stood upright. “I have failed you all in ways that I cannot begin to apologize for.”

“Failed us? What the hell are you talking about? We’re one of the strongest packs in the West! If you’d man up, we could be the State Alpha Pack! You really think the old biddy up north can stop us? Duke, you've made us what we are today! A powerful, pure-blooded werewolf pack that can take as much power as we want! Give us the order! We'll bring our pack glory again!” Brandon barked.

Shaking his head, Duke merely sighed. “Everyone... Go to sleep, it's very late, and I sense we have several hot heads at the moment. We'll... Discuss this more later.” He turned to Mason, nodding up the staircase. "Can you... Assist me?"

"Yes, Alpha. Liam, help me out here.” Mason asked, as the two cousins helped Duke ascend the staircase, guiding him off to his bedroom. He heard the pack downstairs disperse, save for a few that began their usual late-night bickering over the next successor.

The trio stopped momentarily, as Peter Hale stepped out of the study, glaring at Duke. "An hour, at most? Please tell me Stilinksi didn't pull out one of the board games.”

Duke shook his head, signaling for Liam and Mason to continue walking. "Arrange a meeting with your son, and draft up the paperwork. I fear we don't have as much time left as we'd hoped."

Peter laughed, shaking his head. "Oh, hell no. We still have the matter of Kali and her group of insane Alphas to deal with. You agreed to hold the summit here, she's your niece, after all. This is the only place she agreed to meet with me. That mess down south has to be dealt with first and foremost."

"She can wait. My pack comes first, Peter." Duke spat, as he continue to hobble down the hallway, blood pouring out of his eyes, and dribbling on the floor as he walked.
Chapter 11

Fireworks exploded in the night sky over the town of Beacon Hills. Commemorating the end of the yearly Beacon Festival, the town's one and only carnival, a rainbow of sparks and shapes rained down from the tip of the crescent moon, glimmering in unison with the brilliant stars out in full force. A clear sky only added to the brilliance of it all.

The town's main street was crowded with countless vendors, games, rides, and the entire population out for fun and games. At the very edge of the town, near the town fountain, Derek stood with Isaac on his shoulders, giving his son the best view possible.

Derek glanced up, spotting his son's wide eyes, awestruck by the scene before him. The pup almost dropped his cotton candy and stuffed penguin, trying to take in each and every sight.

"Papa, it's so pretty! It's like a big rainbow, at night!" Isaac exclaimed, hugging his now-prized toy (which Derek had won at the shooting gallery, putting the crooked carnie's fixed game to shame), and hopping giddily on Derek's shoulders.

Derek nodded, gripping onto Isaac's ankles, laughing right alongside his son. "They sure are! They really went all out this year!" He promptly turned to Stiles and Scott, standing right next to him.
"How about you Scott? Do you like the firewor-

A loud snore punctuated his words. Scott, beyond wiped out, laid snoozing on Stiles' shoulder, snuffling in his father's neck. He held on tightly to his stuffed fox (which Stiles had won at the ring toss, after only 20 attempts and $15 dollars later), grumbling angrily at the offending explosions overhead that disrupted his sleep.

Stiles chuckled, patting Scott's back. "I think this one is done. Poor little guy peaked early, I think it was him chasing the chickens at the livestock pen. Ah well, at least he got to eat his weight in snow cones, and ride everything twice." He adjusted Scott's grip on his shoulder, nodding off in the direction of the parking area. "I think I'm heading on home for the night, and get this one into bed. We've got a big day tomorrow with Paw Paw and Grandpa."

Snorting, Derek nodded. "Sounds good. I think Isaac and I will stick around a bit, finish the fireworks. See you Monday." He leaned over, stealing a quick peck on Stiles' cheek, and one on Scott's forehead.

"Have fun, you two. See you guys later!" Stiles grinned, waving farewell as he and Scott took their leave for the evening.

Left on their own, Derek and Isaac settled on the edge of the fountain, spending several minutes watching the fireworks in peace. Isaac oohed and awed at the different shapes and colors, pointing each one out to Derek in great detail. He waved animatedly, trying to re-draw them before they dissipated from the sky. Before long, however, the show began to slow down as the town clock struck midnight.

"I think that's about it for the fireworks, bud. How you hanging on up there? Still with me?" Derek asked, glancing up.

Just as awake as he'd been half an hour earlier, Isaac nodded, wide eyed and focused on the bright night sky. "Papa, can we go look at the stars? Like we did on the full moon after baseball?! I'm not sleepy at all!"
Not willing to see his pup's happiest night come to an end, Derek nodded. "Sure thing, bud." He stood up, with Isaac still on his shoulders, as he walked through the busy festival crowd.

They weaved in and out of the numerous streets, past the parking lot, and into the nearby city park. Derek walked them up a hill, settling on a grassy knoll that looked over main street. Besides the stars above, they could watch the warm amber glow of the city below, and the distant sounds of hundreds of people.

Isaac hopped off Derek's shoulders, rolling onto the soft grass and on his back. He stared up at the night sky, unaware of the rest of the world around him. "Look! That's the big dipper! Boyd showed me! Oh! Oh! That's the north star! Stiles showed me that one!"

Derek flopped down beside Isaac, shoulder-to-shoulder with his son. He stared at Isaac, thrilled to see the pup so genuinely happy as he pointed out more constellations in the sky. Some were wrong, but he didn't feel like correcting.

In their few months together, they'd had ups and downs. Isaac had good days, like this one. Where he seemed like an ordinary pup, no different than anyone else.

Then... There were Isaac's bad days. Thunderstorms still scared Isaac into a near-coma, the pup still flinched at anyone who yelled above a low roar, and would sob uncontrollably if he so much as spilled a glass of juice.

A stain on his shirt, from a slice of pizza. Not even all that noticeable, Derek would have missed it, to be honest. Yet, a tiny stain of sauce, not a few days earlier? That had been the pup's worst day of all.

"I'm sorry! Don't be mad, don't be mad, don't be mad! I'm sorry! Please still love me, Papa! I didn't mean to! I didn't mean to! PLEASE STILL LOVE ME!"

Isaac didn't stop crying for an hour, no matter how many times Derek insisted he'd never stop loving Isaac. The pup shook, as though he'd been frozen for hours, apologizing in his daze of consciousness. He didn't want to know what Robert Lahey had dealt out as punishment for a stained shirt. All he knew is that if the man ever got out of prison, and came anywhere near Isaac, Derek would rip the man's heart out and show it to him. (If the man even had a heart.)

Derek grimaced at the negative thoughts, pulling Isaac closer to his side, and wrapping his arm around the pup. "Did you have fun today at the festival, Isaac?"

Isaac nodded, tracing the stars with his extended finger, trying to draw the constellations. "Yeah! I had a lot of fun! Scott and I had cotton candy, I got to pet a goat, and ride all of the rides that went woosh!" The pup added sound effects, giggling at the fond memory. Isaac hugged his stuffed penguin, giggling wildly. "Then you got me Mr. Penguin! You were all... Pew Pew Pew!" The pup faked a gun firing in his hand.

"Your Papa is the best shot in the Sheriff's office. Don't let Paw Paw or Jax tell you any different. They are dirty liars." Derek smiled, laughing as Isaac saluted him.

They sat in silence, more time ticking away in mutual silence, with only the stars above being their entertainment.

Then, Derek caught the faint scent of sadness. He turned, catching Isaac's confused smile. "What's wrong?"
There was a brief pause, where Isaac took Derek's hand in his own. "Papa? Is that where heaven is, in all those stars?" Isaac pointed up to the night sky.

Derek turned to his son, dropping his gaze. Just as Scott asked questions about his mother's whereabouts, so had Isaac asked more probing questions about his own.

"I knew this conversation was coming..."

Taking a deep breath, and recalling everything Stiles had prepped him for, Derek eventually shrugged. "I'm not sure where heaven is, Isaac. Though, I bet it's somewhere just as pretty and peaceful as that sky."

"I think so too!" Isaac rested his head on Derek's chest, pointing to the brightest, biggest star in the sky. "My big brother told me that's where my mom is."

Derek opened his mouth, ready to go the psychological route he'd spent countless hours over with Stiles, taking the Doctor's advice. Yet, as the words began to slip out, he stopped.

Isaac turned up, eyes directly onto Derek's. "Is my big bro there, too? In heaven, with mom?"

Hesitating for only a moment, Derek sat up, pulling Isaac into his lap. He wrapped his arms around Isaac, blanketing him in warmth as they both gazed into the sky once more. Derek pointed to the moon, smiling. "Your brother was a good man, Isaac. He served his country, and did everything to protect and love you. So, wherever heaven is, I know for sure... Cameron is there." Derek felt a tear run down his cheek. "Knowing my mother, I'm sure she's spoiling him rotten."

Isaac faced Derek, tilting his head. "How come you're crying, Papa?"

Derek laughed away the tears, wiping them away. "I miss my mom, too." He stared down at the Beacon Festival, as the vendors began packing up for the evening. "My mom took me here when I was your age. It was... The last big thing we did together, before she..."

"Next week, it'll be... Too many years I don't want to count."

Reaching up, Isaac hugged his father's neck. The pup's eyes glowed, hiding his face in Derek's neck. "It's okay, Papa. Stiles says it's okay to cry when we're sad. It's not a baby thing at all, and even big, strong Alphas do it!"

Derek chuckled. He hugged Isaac right back, eyes glowing in response. "Thank you, Isaac. That's... That's good to know."

"So... Your mommy is in heaven too? Do you think she's friends with my big brother and my mommy?" Isaac asked, releasing Derek from his hug. He looked oddly excited by the prospect.

"Absolutely." Derek grinned, leaning over and bonking his forehead onto Isaac's. "My mom probably knows how lonely they are without such a good son and little brother, and have them over every night for dinner. She loved bridge, so I'm sure she plays games with them, too. I feel bad for them though, because she always cheated to win go-fish."

They both laughed in unison, talking for what seemed like hours. The moon traveled far across the sky, as the gentle hue of teal began to dot the east, with dawn fast approaching.

Derek carried a sleeping Isaac back to his vehicle, strapping the pup in the backseat. He hopped in, and drove through the town, back to his apartment.
After a quick change into comfortable nightclothes, Derek plopped himself and Isaac on his bed, covering the both of them in a thick quilt they’d stolen from the Stilinskis.

Smiling, Derek took comfort in the scent, his eyes drifting closed. Isaac tucked himself tighter under the blanket, cuddling into Derek’s chest. Stiles, the Sheriff, Melissa, Peter, Laura, and Scott’s scents were mingled in the fabric.

“Goodnight, Papa… I love you.” Isaac mumbled, sleepily. He yawned, eyes struggling to stay open, if only for a few moments longer.

“I love you too, son.” Derek bent over, kissing Isaac on the forehead. “Now go to sleep… I kept you out way too late. Sorry.” He leaned back into his pillow, feeling his own consciousness slowly recede as his heart beat in time with Isaac’s.

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Sleeping well past noon after their all-night father/son bonding, Derek didn’t bother showering or changing into anything other than his boxers. Neither did Isaac, as they two waded through a foggy, sleep-deprived hangover.

Standing over a skillet, Derek yawned, attempting not to burn the bacon and eggs. He’d already been lectured enough from Boyd on a pup’s proper diet not including charcoal. Thankfully, Stiles had gotten the same lecture.

“You’ve gotta flip it! It’s burning!” Isaac said, sat on the kitchen counter, pointing to the skillet. He, too, yawned loudly, wiping sleep from his eyes.

Derek glanced at the bacon, flipping it over as Isaac had instructed. Sure enough, a tiny black spot, barely perceptible to even a werewolf’s eyes, had formed in a hidden crack of the bacon. He laughed, leaning over and ruffling Isaac’s mess of a bed-head. “We’re going to weaponize that nose of yours someday.”

“He could be a top scout in WERE with that nose, and those ears of his. Even Peter was impressed when he trained the two of them. I can see him ranking high in the Scouts. He’s better than me, that’s for sure. Such untapped potential.” Derek beamed, proudly. He pictured him and Isaac training in the woods, honing those skills to a fine point.

“Boyd says I’ve got a chef’s nose and ears! That means, I could be a REALLY good cook! Even better than him and Aunty Erica! So I’m gonna learn how to be a cook, and be the best.” Isaac bragged, with a sheepish grin.

“Or he could be a chef. Whatever he wants. Probably a safer profession. Less violence.” Derek smiled, letting Isaac continue to make him aware of his cooking failures, hitting the perfect moments to prevent a burn, and keep the eggs from getting too dry.

As he began to plate their meals, Derek’s ears twitched as someone fiddled with his front door.

“Derek! I’m here to be a meddling father! Please don’t be in any sort of compromising position that would cause me great disappointment!” Peter announced. He let himself in, tucking away Derek’s spare key into his pockets as he entered. Glancing inside, he spotted Derek and Isaac at the tiny kitchen table. He rose an eyebrow. “You both realize it’s…” He checked his watch. “One in the
afternoon?”

Rolling his eyes, Derek poured Isaac a large glass of juice. He grinned, watching Isaac shovel the food away, and continue to put more and more meat on his skinny bones. “Long story, dad. We were out late.”

“Hi Poppy! Papa and I were watching the stars all night after the carnival! It was fun!” Isaac sputtered food out of his mouth as he talked.

Peter strode into the kitchen, coming to Isaac’s side. He took a seat next to the pup, patting Isaac on the back. “You did?! Well, I have to say I’m jealous. All I did yesterday was listen to a couple of boring Senators complain about everything I do, and threaten to cut my budget! You, my little one, are one lucky little pup!”

“Want some breakfast? Er, lunch?” Derek asked, sitting across from Isaac and Peter.

“No, I’m quite alright. Just popped in for a moment….” Peter glanced to Isaac, still intently working on his plate. “You know, Derek, I haven’t seen your apartment in ages… Why don’t you show me your guest room?”

“I don’t have a guest room…” Derek caught Peter’s glare, which flickered quietly to Isaac. He rose a finger to his lips. “Oh.”

Derek stood up, nodding in Isaac’s direction. “You finish eating up, Isaac. I’m going to show Poppy the apartment.”

Peter and Derek made their way out of the kitchen, and into Derek’s bedroom. They pushed the door shut.

“Speak quietly, that pup has the best ears I’ve seen in my life. I’d prefer to keep this between just us.” Peter muttered, in a low tone.

Derek nodded, reaching into his hamper and throwing on a T-shirt and pajama pants. He glanced around his room, flushing at the outrageous number of stuffed toys Isaac had accumulated. Between Jackson, Erica, Boyd, and Stiles, Derek’s room looked like a five-year-old’s. Not that he minded. Yet. The pack house couldn’t be finished any sooner.

“I thought I would bring you some news before it hits the evening news.” Peter sighed, rubbing his forehead. “There will be a brief summit on Duke’s land next month, the old goat is hosting it for us. I’m working to peacefully resolve some issues with a few Southern Alphas, led by a rather fierce woman named Kali. I’m sure you know of her?”

Who hadn’t heard of Kali Reed would be the better question. Another nutjob despot Alpha that ruled with an iron fist, hated humans, and made life generally miserable in a five-state radius in the south for anyone not in her pack. Including other werewolves. People feared her, in much the same way that people had once feared her uncle, Deucalion, fifty years earlier. She’d beaten 19 other Alphas in her life, taking their power (and packs) for her own. Had she been a certified member of WERE, she’d probably rank in the top 5, easily.

“The woman who claimed halfing werewolves and runts should be put to death, as “an embarrassment” to the species.”

Derek cocked an eyebrow, spinning around and glaring in Peter’s direction. “Should I take the kids out of town that weekend? If that Alpha comes within ten miles of them, I’m not to be held responsible for my actions if she insults them.”
Peter chuckled, waving his nervousness away. “Far from it, Derek. There’s nothing to worry about. If she doesn’t do as I instruct, I’ll be handling her, personally. With my claws.”

“To the point. I like it.” Derek sighed in relief. Since growing a pack, people like Alpha Kali made him nervous. People who might hurt or make life hard for Scott and Isaac.

“I’m not messing around with her. Not any longer.” Peter sighed, shaking his head. “Alpha Kali has a long string of violations filed against her, and I refuse to tolerate her any longer. What brought her to my attention was a Beta and a few children who escaped from her pack. Poor things had been branded a pack mark with wolfsbane, and painted a rather… Grim picture of pack life under her authority, to say the least. Indentured servitude, bordering on slavery, a clear misuse of an Alpha’s Aura. If I had it my way, she’d be dead already. Unfortunately, politics make it difficult to do what I want to do.”

Derek folded his arms. “Alright… Just let me know when she gets into town. I’m keeping my pack close that day, and don’t want her anywhere near me. Understand?”

Peter crossed the room, plopping down on the edge of Derek’s bed. He banded his hands together, dropping his gaze. “Which leads to the other matter, actually.”

“Dad?” Derek zeroed in on his father’s unnatural heartbeat. He focused on the touch of grey that had taken over the front temple, and the lines of age that had began to form under his eyes. All which protruded far more in recent years.

“Alpha Deucalion would like for you to join him and I for dinner this week to discuss an important matter. Just the three of us.” Peter looked away, feigning a smile. “I hear that his personal cook in the pack is quite talented. Did you know they’re originally from Mexico? Deucalion’s Spanish is actually quite good, better than my-”

“Me? Why me?” Derek cut off his father, holding back the urge to whine. He’d had his fair share of “fancy” Alpha dinners with Peter, growing up. They were stuffy, intolerable, and one long conversation of strung together bullshit, while wearing an unbearable suit. The fanciest he ever dressed these days were at the Policeman’s Ball, in jeans, to the Department’s continued horror each winter.

Peter sighed, reaching over and retrieving one of Isaac’s stuffed animals. A little lion, with a furry mane. “Deucalion is stepping down as County Alpha.” He fiddled absentmindedly with the toy.

“What?!” Derek stammered, mind racing. A frigid chill ran down his spine. Of the long list of members in Duke’s pack, the thoughts of who would come to power left a gaping hole in Derek’s chest. Half of them were terrifying prospects, that could mean disaster for the county, and even worse for people like Scott and Isaac. Even the better prospects weren’t all that great. Anyone short of Danny or Parrish would bring untold terror, and he doubted many of them would let Derek’s pack (or more specifically, Stiles) stay in the area.

“I see you’re worried?” Peter grimaced, dropping his head. He squeezed the toy lion tightly, while petting its back. “Please, be quiet. I don’t want Isaac to hear.”

“Of course I am!” Derek slammed a hand on his face, muffling his anger into a lower, hurried tone. “Peter, who is his successor? What moronic mass of muscle did he pick to run that gang of thugs?”

Peter shook his head, chuckling to himself. “You’re only half wrong.” He sat the lion to the side, standing up, and coming face-to-face with Derek. “The old Alpha has nominated you as his
replacement for the County Seat.” Peter put a hand on Derek’s shoulder, squeezing tightly. “I’m unsure of who the successor for his pack will be, and left in charge of that band of idiots but… As far as the running of this territory, you would take over the legal—”

“What?!” Derek shrieked again, not bothering to mute himself.

Flinching, Peter sighed, keeping Derek held firmly in place. “I’ve spoken at length with Deucalion on this matter. Offered dozens of capable Alphas, including Laura. Deucalion will not step down to anyone but you for the County. He knows that you’ll do what’s best for the area, since it’s your home. Nobody else, Derek.”

Staggering backwards, Derek felt his jaw drop a considerable distance. His heart raced, trying to consolidate the sheer gravity of the situation into his head.

“A County Alpha? Me?! No, absolutely not! I am not cut out for this shit! I barely know what I’m going with my own pack! How could I run an entire county?! I can’t even get assholes to stop double parking on main street!”

Derek laughed, shaking his head. “Peter… Tell him he’s a fool. I’ve been an acting Alpha for less than two months. My pack is only a small band of members. I have zero experience in politics. Do you really see ME as doing that seat any good?”

“Not as effectively as others, anyway.” Peter shook his head, ignoring Derek’s countered glare. “Laura’s always been the better of the two of you when it comes to leadership, and you lack the patience for the political arena. You’re a man of action and emotions, not words and bargains. Which is why you made such a strong member of WERE.”

“Exactly.” Derek folded his arms, nodding in agreement with Peter. “Besides, I don’t even have the staff to run a county. If he’s only giving me a county seat, then I don’t have the manpower to run this place. Doesn’t Duke have a city staff of like… Twenty?”

A smirk crossed Peter’s face. “He comes with an offer, actually, assuming that you accept the County Seat. Which is part of the reason why I didn’t tell him to shove this offer back down his throat.” Reaching into his back pocket, Peter pulled out a small notepad. He flipped through several pages. “Let’s see… Ah, in exchange for the County Seat, he offers his strongest Beta, Danny Mahealani, to your service and to become part of your pack. Naturally, the Beta’s husband and brother and law comes along with him, as part of that family, to act as your security force.”

Derek paused, his chest reeling. “Ethan and Aiden. Danny was one of Stiles’ best friends.”

“Liam and Mason. I bet that includes some of Scott’s cousins.” Derek’s stomach flipped over, recalling the pool party that had left Scott and Isaac with a plethora of good friends. The kind of parties that the pups wanted to host again, someday soon.

“Jordan Parrish, the Hellhound. Lydia Parrish, the Queen of Real Estate. They have volunteered to oversee your pack’s finances and defense. I believe Mrs. Parrish would also like to offer a percentage contribution of her business to your pack’s funding. I don’t need to tell you the kind of
income that brings your pack up to.” Peter slammed his notepad shut, tossing it to Derek. “There are others, mostly related to those individuals. In total, Deucalion is offering to grant you a transfer of 30 or so members to aid in this transition of power. Most of them are rather young, but Duke seems to think that you’d be interested in them. You would have final say on who all you wanted.”

Derek dropped to his bed, body slumping over, and in between his knees. He laughed, peeking a quick glance at Peter as he rifled through the list of all too familiar names. “All of Stiles’ friends. My coworkers. People who want to leave that pack.. People my sons and I care about. People my…. Mate cares about.”

Of the many things Derek was, a fool as not one of them. He’d overheard Ethan complaining about his pack virtually every day of his life at work, and claimed that the Elders in the pack were a big part of why he and Danny hadn’t moved forward with having kids, fearing their treatment in the hellish pack environment. Parrish had moved out of the pack house, and to a cabin on the land with Lydia, after a bloody brawl with other members of the pack that left the Hellhound beaten to a pulp. Liam and Mason’s whispers hadn’t escaped his ears, and their desire to live in a more peaceful home, and wanting to be closer to Stiles. Even Stiles, in his brief talks about the past, spoke ill of most members.

“The entire generation of us wanted to escape. I think that about sums up our opinion on the older members of the pack.” Stiles had said, on more than one occasion, talking about his group’s dream. A new pack, free from the mongering shitheads that occupied Duke’s, and where people like Stiles, and Scott would be welcome. All down the drain, after Scott’s birth, and Stiles’ expulsion from the pack.

“Danny and Ethan would feel safer with me. They know I don’t care about birth status of children. Parrish and Lydia could be back with their family. Liam and Mason could have a peaceful childhood, and be with their Uncle Stiles. Stiles… Stiles could have his family back. Scott could know his family. Isaac would have his friends.”

Balling his hand into a fist, Derek laughed. “He planned this.” Derek shot up, pacing the room, running both hands through his hair. “There’s no question about it, Peter, he planned this. Duke KNEW I had no interest in being any kind of Alpha, we’ve had that discussion countless times. I turned down being his successor a ton of times, told him I wanted nothing to do with his pack, but now…”

“He’s offering you a great deal of incentive in the only form of currency that speaks to you.” Peter finished for Derek, taking a deep breath and moving to stand next to Derek. He pat Derek on the pack. “Welcome to politics, Derek. Just be thankful you’re don’t have to lead that entire group of morons he raised. I took inventory of the ones he’s offered you, and they all seem to be capable, kind werewolves that would get along with you and your oddball pack.”

Derek glared at Peter, growling through his teeth. “I haven’t said yes.” He stomped away, stopping briefly to stare at the only decoration that he’d put up in his room.

A framed photo of him and his mother that he’d retrieved from his old house, weeks earlier. One of him and Isaac, on a weekend trip to the beach. Another of him, Stiles, and Jackson, on a picnic with the pups. One of Erica and Boyd at their bar, with Derek at “happy hour” with his co-workers not a week earlier. A recent night out that he’d started with them, at Stiles’ suggestion.

Not one for sentimentality, Derek never collected a lot of things, but recently… He’d come to enjoy collecting pictures of his pack, and keeping them close to home, close to his bed.

Derek picked up the picture of himself and his mother, touching the glass and tracing fingers over the
“You’re going to say yes, though. I know you Derek, and as much as you like to pretend you have a stubborn wall up…” Peter paused, stopping to admire the collection of pictures. He grabbed one from the wall, of himself and the Sheriff getting hammered at Pack Night. The Alpha laughed. “In the end, you’ll always do the right thing. Your mother was the same way. She disbanded the Rivieras, and her position of power in exchange for being able to raise you.”

Derek groaned, sitting the picture down on the desk. “Yeah, I can see the papers now… Bastard offspring makes County Seat. Great for headlines. I always wanted for the news to drag my mother through the mud. Again.”

Neither father or son spoke for a while. Peter merely wrapped his arm around Derek, pulling his son into a side hug.

“What should I do?” Derek asked, digging his claws into the cheap wood of his dresser.

Peter took a deep breath, tugging his son closer to his side. “My advice, as one father to another father?” He turned to Derek, with a short frown on his face. “Reject his offer. Enjoy the peace that your life will bring with a small pack, and don’t be involved with this mess. Be a father, be a cop, and do what you want to do with your life. Be selfish, and don’t worry about the lives of anyone but your pack. If any of Duke’s pack wanted to leave, they could. They’d face public ridicule and be generally disapproved of in any community, but, they could leave.”

Derek nodded. That plan sounded far better to Derek than the one where he took a County Seat. Yet, he sensed a “but” coming from Peter. There were always plenty of “buts” in Peter’s realm of advice.

“My advice, however, as the National Alpha?” Peter added, eyes flashing in tune with Derek’s. His face turned firm, stoic, and… Oddly serious. “Derek, there aren’t many werewolves like you and I at the helm right now. Alphas like Kali are more commonplace, and that creates misery throughout our country. Against humans, against our own kind, and against halflings. The old world mentality has their fangs in so many, and make it difficult to move forward into a modern world. We will never be seen as equals the way things are going.” He glanced away, sighing. “We’ll only be feared, and use our fear to perpetuate a cycle of violence between our race and others, endlessly.”

Derek dropped his gaze, not wanting to face Peter’s truth. Sure, things were “okay” in California. Humans and Werewolves, for the most part, got along, and halflings were “tolerated”. In the East Americas, werewolves were more or less banned from forming packs, and laws were in place to neuter the authority of State and County Alphas. The South was the other way around, where werewolves put their boots consistently up human ass. The Northern States, stretching into Canadian territory, were the only real place of genuine peace, with vampires, yetis, and snow wolves having somehow formed a picture perfect society with humans.

The Country was a mess, just as it was around the rest of the globe. Then again, with separate laws governing separate individuals, Derek was surprised they hadn’t all fallen into anarchy like it had centuries ago.

Peter sighed, shaking his head. “For change, real change, to happen? Someone has to take the first step. Someone with the strength, courage, and ability to make that change happen.” He prodded Derek in the chest. “Someone like you, Derek. Someone brave, and who knows what the true face of this country is like.”

Laughing, Derek scoffed. “Yeah, because I’ve been such a courageous man. Haunted of the
beatings I got as a kid, well into my thirties. Never built a pack, because I was scared of trusting anyone, thanks to the dipsticks in the Hale Pack. I was SCARED of people, Peter! That’s a brave man, of course. That's leadership material.” He snarled, moved away from Peter, keeping his eyes firmly on the ground. “I’m strong, Peter. I’m confident in my abilities as a werewolf, and as a law enforcement officer. I'm one of the best, and I know that. What I’m not? I’m not courageous. I’m not… I’m not brave. I just do my job, and that’s that.”

“I don’t see that much of you anymore. A welcome change, actually.” Peter folded his arms, glaring at Derek. “I see you opening up more, because of Isaac. Because I know, deep down, you won’t want that poor pup going through what you went through. That's why you bonded with him so deeply.” He stepped forward, inches away from Derek’s gaze. “You see yourself as Isaac. You were Isaac, all those years ago, sobbing into Sheriff Stilinski's uniform, just like Isaac did to you.”

Derek mentally cringed. Peter was right. All those years ago, a young Deputy Stilinski had rushed to an emergency call Laura had made to save his life. At the time, Derek was living with the remains of Gregory Hale’s pack that hadn’t run off after the man’s affair with Talia Rivera. One drunken night had left Derek in the man’s grip, threatening to break the pup’s neck, once and for all. He’d never been able to forget the sound of his own neck cracking, and the sensation of having air completely cut off from his body.

One silver bullet, through the side of Gregory Hale’s head, changed all of that.

Derek didn’t remember the blood, or the viscera that covered him. He didn’t recall being picked up and carried out of the house, down to the station. A young, teenage, Laura had apparently stolen Gregory’s aura in the confusion, and banished all of the remaining Hales under Gregory’s command, for letting Derek be abused, destroying the last of the pack in the process. There had been screaming, yelling, and general chaos in Beacon Hills that night. All of that was a blur, and stories that Derek heard secondhand, years later.

What he did remember was Deputy Stilinski never letting him go, and assuring him everything would be alright. It had been Deputy Stilinski that found Peter and the Hales back east, and found a new home for him and Laura. Sheriff Stilinski gave Derek his father, and his new life.

As an adult, Derek realized it was the man’s heartbeat that kept him as a young pup from going completely feral and giving up on life.

Derek nodded, reaching around the nape of his neck. He found it hard to breath for a few moments, but slowly regained his composure. “Isaac… Means a lot to me. I want to be strong for him, and give him the things I never got to have as a pup. So, I had to learn how to stomach a lot of things. It helps that Stiles is… A good man. Jackson’s a good friend. Erica and Boyd are kind people. My boss and Melissa are... Kind.”

A gentle smile crossed Peter’s face. “Which now, you have to ask yourself… What do you want more for your son? A peaceful life in the present, like what you’re describing? Living day to day, without any real control over the future, and ruminating endlessly about the past? Merely walking around the problems that Isaac will face as he grows up, rather than the source?” He pointed to the pictures on Derek’s dresser. “What about Scott? I’m sure you’re aware of the inequality that halflings face in this world. Even in this State, there’s little anyone can do about their abysmal job market or college acceptance rate.”

Derek balled his hand into a fist. A deep shade of red crossed his face, matching the glow of his eyes. He pictured Scott in his head, the kind, sweet pup who only managed to show love in everything he did. Isaac, even being a full blooded werewolf, would never be accepted because of the “feral” blood in his veins. A stupid, moronic old world superstition. Just something else
Robert Lahey had stolen from his son.

Resting his hand on Derek’s fist, Peter shook his head. “As a County Alpha, Derek, you have absolute control over the werewolf population in your territory. Your word is law, and will always remain law until someone defeats you in a challenge, or you pass on your power to another and they make their own laws. That is the current system of law that our world has implemented. Naturally, it has its problems, but… It is what it is. Absolute.”

Derek rose his gaze. Realization struck him, like a bolt that surged through every limb in his body.

Peter nodded. “I see you realize what I’m getting at. So long as you’re on top, people like Isaac and Scott would never have to suffer. Everyone has an equal playing field. That, and with you as WERE’s #2, I doubt any Alpha from around the globe would dare try and defeat you. As you said yourself, you’re a confident, strong Alpha. You’re the best, Derek.”

Derek felt Peter’s tight grip, and he caught their gaze.

“The State Alpha is old, Derek. She’ll be retiring in the next ten or twenty years, and I intend to appoint Laura to that position. When the time comes, Laura will one day take my place on the National Stage, leaving room for you at the State Level.” Peter smiled, wrapping his arms around Derek’s shoulder and hugging the breath from him. He hid his tears. “That only opens more opportunities for Isaac and Scott. It opens opportunities for MANY, Derek. Countless lives could be influenced for the better. My children… My talented and strong children, braver and stronger than I could ever hope to be… They’d be the ones to accomplish what we all dream of.”

Shutting his eyes, Derek hugged Peter back just as fiercely. As they separated, he cocked a curved smile Peter’s way. “Did you have this all planned out, too?”

Peter laughed, shaking his head. “Not quite… You ran off and joined WERE, instead of joining me in politics, like I’d intended. Laura had to fall in love and run across the country, starting up her own pack. You both had your own dreams, and I was happy to let you both live them.” He spun around, wiping the tears when Derek wasn’t looking. “Though… On your own, without your meddling father’s interference, you both still managed to accomplish great things in your life. I’m proud of both of you.”

They stood in silence, both jarred out of it by a pair of tiny feet running through the house. A knock came to Derek’s door.

“Papa? Can I have some more juice and turn on cartoons?” Isaac asked, peeking inside of Derek’s room.

Derek cleared his throat, nodding as he strode across the room, picking up Isaac and carrying the giggling mess over his shoulder. “Of course you can. Isaac, you can have anything you want, whenever you want it. Except for a mate. Not until you’re eighteen.” He joked.

Breaking the seriousness of the conversation earlier, Derek dutifully refilled Isaac’s glass with orange juice, let the pup drink it on the couch, while watching some Isaac’s favorite show about magical gems fusing together into giant women. He’d actually gotten emotionally involved in the show, himself.

Peter and Derek sat on either side of the pup, both watching the show with equal interest.

“I have a lot to think about.” Derek said, turning to Peter. He smiled at Isaac, who rested his head on Derek’s shoulder.
Peter nodded. “Talk with your mate, and your pack. It’s a big decision to make. Though, there is some urgency involved. We’ll need your answer in a month’s time.”

“I’ll get everyone together sometime soon..” Derek said. He put his arm around Isaac, tugging his son closer.

Peter nodded. “I'll let Deucalion know.”

There’s a pause between them, Derek focusing on Peter’s gaze.

“Do you think I could really do it? If I said yes? Like you said, I’m not the brightest bulb in the box… This would be better if Laura was doing it. I know she’d get all of this right.” Derek asked. His father was an honest man, and never coddled either of his children. The truth, to Peter, was everything.

Peter, without hesitation, laughed. “My boy, I think you proved a long time ago that you can do whatever you want in life. Nobody, not even Laura or I, could stop you if we wanted.” He turned and smiled at Isaac, still intently focused on his show. “I have confidence in everything you do. I know that you will succeed.”

Derek smirked. “Thanks, dad.”

“Thank me again after you’re too successful at all of this, and in charge of a pack of 500 or more, and I've drowned your free time with all of this.” Peter countered, winking in Derek’s direction.

“Pfft. Like that would ever happen.” Derek rolled his eyes.

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With Stiles and Scott out to the movies with Deucalion and the Sheriff (for Scott to have a night out with his grandfathers), it was Derek’s duty to bring the rest of the pack together for the last day of the weekend. While not a party expert, or anything of a proper host, Derek had somehow managed to wrangle up Erica, Boyd, and Jackson, for a night with Isaac. Snacks consisted of frozen pizza, pretty good beer from the Blue Moon (punch for Isaac), and enough snacks to feed the US Army. While maybe not the most eloquent gathering in his tiny apartment, and he knew Stiles would have done a million times better, Derek tried.

Though based on the laughter surrounding his coffee table, he hasn't failed entirely.

The pack sat in a circle, each of the adults holding a handful of cards. Jackson and Isaac had formed a team, with the pup sitting in the Deputy’s lap.

Erica shot her hand across the table, pointing in Isaac’s face, with a skewed, crazy face. The snack bowls and drinks shook from her swift movement. “Okay Isaac, I've got you this time, you tiny terror! Do you have any….. Sevens?!” She yelled, in an over-exaggerated, cartoon villain’s tone.

Jackson smirked, resting his chin on Isaac’s head. “Okay, little man, let her have it.”

“Go fish!” Isaac yelled, grinning in Erica’s direction as he pointed right back in her face.

Erica growled, with a skewed, over exaggerated glare at the pup. She drew a card, poking him
gently on the forehead with said card. “Nooo! Foiled again by the great Isaac!”

Boyd’s turn came, and he turned to Erica. “Any Nines?”

“Dammit!” Erica face planted on the coffee table, tossing Boyd one of her cards. “Card counting cheat.”

“Card counting genius. Get it right.” Boyd took his card, putting down yet another pair of cards. He smirked, looking at the great number of points he’d already earned. “You didn’t complain when we were in Vegas.”

Jackson cocked an eyebrow at Boyd. “Vegas, huh? Haven’t been there in years. I went with Stiles and Danny once we hit 21. We all lost our shirts, got wasted, and stuffed ourselves with shrimp.” He grinned, turning to Boyd. “We’ll have to hit the streets again someday. I’d like to earn my money back.”

Boyd gave a quiet thumbs up, nodding at Jackson. “We bring Stilinski, Old Man Stilinski, and Hale. I’d pay to see any of them drunk.”

“What’s drunk?” Isaac asked, looking to his father for an answer.

“Nothing you need to worry about for quite a long time. If you know what’s good for you, that is.” Derek shot Jackson and Boyd an incredulous glare, and the duo both feigned innocence.

They finished the last of the round, with Boyd dominating yet another round. Isaac and Jackson came in close second, with Derek and Erica failing miserably.

Derek stood up, gathering his empty bottle while Jackson shuffled through the deck of cards.


“Sure. Got some soda? I’m getting a little buzzed here.” Jackson offered Derek his own empty bottle, with ease.

Though, as Derek turned to Erica and Boyd, he spotted their uncomfortable, stiff shoulders. He wasn’t sure why, but they always seemed to have their guards up, at all times, taking Derek’s questions like accusations of murder.

Erica took Boyd’s hand, squeezing it tightly. She bit her lip, standing up and gathering their bottles herself. “I can help you out. I’m starving for some more chips, we could use a couple more drinks.”

The two made their way into the kitchen, while Jackson attempted to teach Isaac how to shuffle cards, and Boyd watching on with curious interest.

Derek tossed the empty bottles into the trash, rummaging through his kitchen. Erica did the same, helping herself to the fridge and grabbing a few more bottles of beer she’d brought from work.

“Do I make you and Boyd nervous?” Derek whispered, turning to meet his Beta.

Erica cringed, swinging back around to meet Derek’s gaze.

Blunt, perhaps, but Derek wasn’t one for him-hawing around an issue. Especially after Erica and Boyd made it perfectly clear that they’d both wanted in his pack, he wanted to know if he was screwing something up.
Laughing, Erica used her claws to slice the top off one of her beers. She chugged it back, before slamming it on the counter. “No… You, in particular, don’t make us nervous. Not you, never you.” She glanced away, focusing on anything that wasn’t Derek. “It’s just been a long time since we had an Alpha. Boyd and I have been alone for the last ten years or so, and… It’s hard to remember that there are good people out there.”

“That’s right, you said you were in a pack before.” Derek poured a bag of pretzels into a bowl, shimming over to Erica’s side. He offered her from the bowl.

Erica grabbed a handful, stuffing her face. “One we ran away from. Because of our Alpha. An Alpha who… Wasn’t anything like you. Alpha Reyes would have never offered us a couple of beers. No… If she’d planned this party, she was the kind of Alpha that would demand you bring her a beer every time she ran out, and keep her snack bowl filled at all times. We wouldn’t be playing go-fish, or laughing with a pup as they learned how to play some silly card game. This kind of pack night would be spent demanding why we didn’t have great grades, hadn’t put in for overtime to contribute to the pack fund, or if we’d gone lax in our chores. Or, if we’d been particularly worthless that week, she’d use her Betas to punish us. Usually with fists.”

“Jesus...” Derek dropped his head. Those kind of packs, unfortunately, did exist. The old world values, hard at work. The mentality of the Alpha above everything else, for the sake of the pack as a whole to thrive. Bullshit that might have been necessary when werewolves struggled to survive in caves and in forests, but not in a modern world. That kind of life made Deucalion’s pack look almost tame by comparison.

“I’m sorry.” Derek offered, unsure of what else to say.

Erica managed a small, appreciative smile. “Alpha Serah Reyes, my Aunt. Very traditional Alpha, still went with branding pack marks with fire and wolfsbane. To this day, the mark still hasn’t come off, no matter how hard we try to remove them.” Her socked feet rubbed up against each other, as if to scratch an unbearable itch.

Derek set the bowl of pretzels aside, reaching for the unopened beer at her side. He popped the top, guzzling its contents alongside Erica. “I wouldn’t blame you for running. Sounds like hell.”

“Yeah…” Erica looked through the entryway to Derek’s kitchen and into the living room. Isaac had scrambled into Boyd’s lap at this point, where the Beta gave Isaac several tips on improving his Go Fish game. “Growing up, I was good at math, but not all that great at anything else. Mixed grades, so my GPA wasn’t all that great. Aunt Serah decided I wasn’t worth spending on college, and that I was better off as labor in the Pack Farm. At 16, I was basically told that after graduation, I’d be… Pack labor. Actually, she was wanting to know if I’d just drop out altogether, and get a head start on next year’s crop.”

“What?!” Derek felt a low, primal growl settle in his throat. Even though it was well before Erica came into his life, he still felt... Responsible for her well-being.

Erica shook her head. “To her, I wasn’t worth the investment. Didn’t matter I was already acing calculus, and planning on taking collegiate math my Junior Year for early credits… Nope… Didn’t need a mathematician in the pack.” She pointed into the living room, where Boyd’s pearly whites shone alongside Isaac, laughing as they’d somehow gotten into a lesson regarding poker.

“Same with Boyd. Talented cook, wanted to go to culinary school. Never got the chance. Alpha Serah told Boyd he’d have to go to college, and go into medical school, just like his parents. That the pack needed more money, and he had the smarts to do it, with that 4.1 GPA of his. The pack didn’t need a chef, because that’s what the “labor” was for.” Erica finished, balling her hand over
her bottle, cracking it at the edges.

“That’s insane.” Derek let his growl vocalize, gripping onto the kitchen counter, and cracking the laminate in several places.

Erica laughed again. “Yeah, it was… Actually, we both tried to reason with her. Begged to let us try and live our own lives. We even offered to increase our pack tithe to 50% if we could go our own way. We even offered to work our way through school. Our teenage brains thought it was a pretty good offer. More overall income to the pack, none of the pack fund going to our educations, and… We’d be happy.”

They stood in silence. Derek imagined that Erica’s “offer” hadn’t gone well.

“…and both of us were beaten to a pulp by her Betas, for insubordination and second guessing the Alpha’s authority. I got out with a broken jaw, Boyd just some minor scrapes and bruises. I mean, Boyd was the smart one worth something to the pack, so… They didn’t do much to him.”

Derek watched tears roll down Erica’s face, despite the bright smile covering her face as she watched Isaac and Boyd playing in the living room.

“We decided then and there…” Erica paused, and wiped the tears from her face. “We weren’t going to let someone have that kind of control over us. We didn’t need an Alpha, and we didn’t need a family who let that kind of shit fly.” She finished off the last of her beer, quickly reaching inside the fridge for another one. “My mom and Boyd’s mom… They helped us get away. Filed our pack separation papers, approved our emancipation from them, and legally broke us from Alpha Serah. They knew we weren’t happy. Not that they supported us defying our Alpha, they agreed with her, actually, but… They were still our mothers, and loved us enough to help us get away. Gave us some money, under the table. Boyd’s dad outfitted us as best we could. We left at 3 in the morning, in the dark, so that there wouldn’t be any trouble.”

Derek’s face melted. Leaving a pack without the Alpha’s support was akin to a dishonorable discharge in the military. Sure, it was legally possible, thanks to legislature, but heavily frowned upon. Some places didn’t hire “rogue” werewolves, and few Alphas would want a pack’s “reject”. This was the kind of thing that would paint a scarlet letter on Boyd and Erica for the rest of their lives.

At 16, Erica and Boyd had all but made their future certain. They would be alone.

The tears stopped. Erica’s smile became genuine and she held her beer up for a toast with Derek. “Don’t give me that look. That was the happy part of the story! We got away!” They toasted, both downing a beer in unison. “So, we ran! Had to go this far west, because no pack in the country would take us in, and no Alpha wanted us in their territory. Alpha Serah had blacklisted us. Actually, she claimed we were thieves, running with stolen pack goods, and that we were not to be trusted. Not sure how she managed to get that out so far, but… Serah had her connections.”

“Things got better.” Boyd said.

Derek jumped, unsure how he’d missed Boyd sneaking into the room with them. He fisted a handful of pretzels, popping them into his mouth. In the living room, Jackson and Isaac were in a one on one match-up of go fish.

“We got to Beacon Hills. Deucalion let us stay in the territory for free. No tributes, no background checks, as long as we promised not to make a ruckus. We promised.” Boyd added.

Erica chuckled. “Though his pack was less than welcoming, and I could tell we weren’t actually
Welcome, but... Still, by then we were 18, and could do what we want.”

Derek felt his jaw hit the metaphorical floor. “You spent... Two years running? How did...”

Erica beamed, flexing her muscle. “Crazy, huh? We lived in the woods, and off the land for the most part. Wasn’t that bad, in retrospect. I’m a skilled hunter, Boyd knows how to cook, and neither of us minded sleeping in a tent or two. Got some odd jobs along the way, mostly labor, ironically enough, but... We survived, sometimes had the luxury of a motel, and that was the important part.”

“Worked in a lot of restaurants. Got a lot of good skills that traveled well. Great references. Great bosses. I’m a self-taught chef, getting experience all around the country.” Boyd nodded, with a small grin on his face.

Erica handed Boyd a beer, cracking it open for him. “When we got settled in Beacon Hills, I went to school part time, got my GED, and applied for college for a business degree. Took a little longer than it should ahve, and I had to work my ass off to do it, but... I did it!”

Boyd nodded. “Bought Blue Moon from one of my old bosses. Was originally a barn out on some land. Worked for about year or two for the down payment. Took a loan out, fixed the place up. Was a hit with the local werewolf population. Now we’re the most popular bar in Beacon County, and all around the area. Erica ran the place’s finances, and made us a success. We did it, together.” He fist-bumped with Erica. They both laughed, leaning over and sharing a short kiss.

“That’s... Amazing.” Derek stuttered. Sure, his childhood had been shit, but he’d always had a roof over his shoulder, and someone in his life that cared about him. Talia, Laura, Peter... Not a lot of people, granted, but he couldn’t imagine having... Nothing. Building up from... Nothing.

“Sweetcheeks, I’m fabulous. My husband is fabulous, and everything we do is fabulous.” Erica winked, holding tightly onto Boyd.

“Yeah.” Boyd added, stealing the bowl of snacks and more beer from the fridge. He cocked an eyebrow, staring at Erica. “Isaac’s good with numbers. Gonna teach him more than cooking. We’ll clean house in Vegas when he’s old enough.”

Derek chose not to think too hard on Boyd corrupting his child. He cocked an eyebrow, staring at Erica. “Then... Why did you need me? You said you wanted safety for your family, but... From what I can tell, you’re more than capable of keeping yourselves safe, and survive all on your own.”

Erica’s face cracked into a mixture of emotions Derek couldn’t quite make out. “Being alone sucks, Derek. Simple as that.” She shared a quick glance with Derek, flashing her gentle, golden eyes. Motioning to Isaac, she managed a grin. “We’re not just Erica and Boyd anymore. I’m Aunty Erica to Scott and Isaac, and get to spoil them rotten. Stiles is like the little brother I never had, and Jackson is surprisingly good best friend material. The little shit is pretty funny when he’s at the bar, a little tipsy, and not so self-conscious. One of the better humans I’ve met. Oh, and Boyd adores teaching Isaac how to cook. He never got to be close with his own father, so I think he’s happy to share that kind of bonding with someone.”

Sighing, Erica rubbed in between her eyes. “What I’m saying, Derek... Is that we never thought we’d be part of a pack again. With our record... Nobody would ever take us in. Nobody would ever give us a second chance. Not an ordinary Alpha, anyway. Not that we’d want to be a part of that kind of shitty pack with a shitty Alpha again, but...” She patted Derek’s shoulder. You’re first Alpha we’ve trusted in a very long time. The fact that you noticed Boyd and I were uncomfortable? Well, I think it shows we were right.”
Erica left, following after Boyd and back to the coffee table.

Pausing for a moment, Derek turned to the kitchen window, catching his reflection. His eyes were still glowing a deep, bloody red. Anger still bubbled in his veins on Boyd and Erica’s behalf.

Hell, anger that had built up over the last few months found its way into Derek’s eyes. Black veins popped around his eyes, threatening a full shift as the roots of his hair turned crimson. His eyes swirled darker and darker, bordering between maroon and black. Anger that his own race, and not the humans, had been the one to put so many people he loved though so much pain. Deucalion’s pack destroying Stiles and Scott’s life. The Reyes pack going that far against Erica and Boyd. The Hales, making Derek and Laura’s life difficult, and feel unloved. Then there was the general werewolf population of Beacon Hills, who looked at Isaac like a monster-in-waiting.

That was the real threat to werewolves these days, werewolves themselves, and not the Hunters and Huntresses of old. Not the humans, not the other races, and certainly not the halflings.

Peter’s words echoed in Derek’s head. About change, about the need for someone strong at the helm, who could make that change.

Red faded from Derek’s eyes. He took a deep breath. On instinct, his muscles bulged, tightening against his shirt.

Memories of placement in the national WERE tournament, fighting for his rank, and against some of the strongest werewolves in the country. Declining a match against Peter at the final match, knowing he’d defeat the National Alpha. Not a matter of opinion, or of pride, but simply knowing that Peter’s age and desk job had made him weaker over the years. It wouldn’t have been a fair fight, and Derek had no interested in being #1. Peter needed the title of #1, anyway, to have any credibility.

“For change, real change, to happen? Someone has to take the first step. Someone with the strength, courage, and ability to make that change happen.”

Derek spun around, grabbing another box of juice for Isaac, and a can of soda for Jackson. He rejoined the game, sitting next to his son, back in Jackson’s lap, handing off the cool drinks from the fridge. “Here you go…”

“Thanks, Papa!” Isaac said, uncorking the top.

Reaching over, Derek ruffled Isaac’s hair. He smiled. “Anything for you, son.”

In that moment… Derek made up his mind, so long as Stiles was okay to go along with it.
Three days of studying up on werewolf parliamentary procedure, one day of practicing with the reflection in his mirror, and shaking off the pre-meeting jitters, Stiles was ready to play his first official role as Hale Pack Second. Which ultimately left him as the in between for Derek and the pack, and the head ambassador of their group.

Not that he had any use for the latter. They weren’t big enough to need an ambassador, and no pack would probably want to deal with them, anyway. Which left him as the pack's go between.

In the rented conference room of the local hotel, Stiles stood at the head of a long table. Derek was to his side, with the rest of the Hale Pack gazing interestingly at him. Drinks and snack foods lined the table, which reminded him of a business conference, with a series of boring speeches and all.

“If I ever needed the reality check that I’m an adult, this would be it…” Stiles thought, painfully.

Stiles cleared his throat, bringing up a clipboard with an itemized agenda he’d prepared beforehand. “We, the Hale Pack of Beacon Hills, will begin our first official Pack Assembly. Meeting 0001. Today, August 15th, of the year-”

“Stiles… We can skip the red tape. Just play moderator, and go down the line.” Derek said, smiling at his mate.

Relief flooded Stiles. He nodded, flushing as his friends and family chuckled at him.

“Right, excuse me for trying to be professional!” Stiles playfully slapped Derek on the shoulder.

“So, anyway, we’re legally required to hold a monthly pack assembly, and file the minutes with State Alpha Satomi. We decided to choose the wisest, more responsible person in the pack to handle such an important task as the filing and-”

“You asked me five minutes before the meeting. Don’t start with me, Stiles.” Melissa cut in, waving a pen in the air, as she continued to fill out the required boxes on the form work.

More laughter, and Stiles rolled his eyes.

Erica’s hand shot up. “So, uh… If this is our personal pack assembly, anyone care to explain why they’re here?” Erica signaled behind her, where several members of Duke’s pack sat. Her glare was none too thrilled.

Stiles glanced behind her. He spotted Danny, Lydia, and Jordan sitting just outside their table, away from everyone else. Liam and Mason’s parents were standing in a corner, arms folded, and keeping their heads down. They’d all been invited by Derek, for whatever reason. Which worked nicely, actually, with Liam and Mason babysitting the pups outside at the hotel pool. No kids needed to be too involved in the intricacies of the adult world.

Though Stiles appreciated Erica’s nervous energy. He wasn’t all that sure why anyone in Duke’s pack would want anything to do with them.

Derek took a deep breath. “They’re here for a reason.” He smiled, waving them over to the table. “Come on over, nobody is going to bite.”

There was a brief moment of hesitation. Yet, they followed Derek’s lead, coming to join the long table, sitting around the rest of the Hale Pack.
“Okay… Glad to have everyone closer…” Stiles paused, moving down the list on his clipboard. “So, we’re supposed to start things off with Derek giving a general update of the pack, then onto finances, and then the floor is open for any and all discussions from any member. We’ll discuss the pack house in more detail as well, which I’m sure Lydia can give us an update on the construction.” He turned to Derek, nodding in the alpha’s direction.

Derek stood, clearing his throat. He took a long drink of water, before tucking his hands inside of his pants pockets. “Before we get too deep into anything, I'd like to make a pretty big announcement and have this issue resolved immediately. Duke’s members here are already aware of this, it’s why I invited them, but…” Pausing, Derek let out a deep sigh, tapping his foot incessantly. “I’ve been offered the position as County Alpha.”

Erica spat out her drink, coating Danny in wine. The Beta werewolf wiped it away, glaring daggers. Sheriff Stilinski dropped his drink, where it shattered against the floor. Melissa barely noticed the beverage now coating the bottom half of her skirt. They both stared blankly at the man before them. Lydia, Parrish, the Hewitts, and the Masons all nodded in understanding, exchanging hopeful glances with one and other.

Unphased, Boyd nodded, the only member of the assembly that clapped. “Awesome. Promotion in just a few months. Class act, Derek.”

Stiles set his clipboard to the side, tossing the pen behind him against the wall. His jaw gaped, staring intently at Derek. “Uh… Care to repeat that?”

Derek nodded, taking refilling his glass and taking a second, long, gulp. He finally came up for air. “Deucalion is retiring. He's offered me the county seat, and enough members of his pack to make that a possibility. In essence, I would retain ownership of this county’s werewolf population, and our pack would grow by around 30 members. Most coming from the Hewitt, Mahealani, and Mason families.” Derek folded his arms, managing a weak smile. “Which is why I brought everyone here today.”

“Whoa! Whoa whoa whoa!” Erica exclaimed, on her feet. She wiped the remaining spit take from her face and shirt. “So… What you're saying is that… You’d be in charge? Of everything?! You, our Alpha, the boss!?” There was little hiding of her excitement at the prospect.

Derek shrugged, glancing away. “I’d be required to draft my own set of laws for the supernatural populace, so long as they don’t go against any national amendments, or break any laws themselves. Anyone in my area would be required to follow those laws. Those that don’t, I would be responsible for punishing. Though, as I’ve sat with Duke of late, there’s more to being a County Alpha than just that.” He smiled, chuckling quietly to himself. “A lot more.”

“Supporting the local werewolf population comes first.” Liam’s mother added, chiming in as she rose a hand to informally take lead of the conversation. “A County Alpha is a source of law, yes, but a good County Alpha is also involved in the everyday lives of their people. They’re no different than a Governor or a Mayor, who should be looking out for the best interests of all. They’re the difference between a successful County and State, and one that falls into ruin.”

Mason’s father nodded, standing next to Liam’s mother. “Supporting the youth in school, keeping the homeless population to a minimum, and ensuring that all of the packs and wolf families are keeping the peace and maintaining order. Though nobody is overtly aware of it, Deucalion spends a great deal of his budget with food programs for the poor and unemployed werewolf population in the area, helps them get jobs, or moved to a more appropriate county. A County Alpha, first and
foremost, is an Alpha for the people, and not themselves and their pack.”

“A County Alpha, and his pack, are the means to promote peace.” Lydia added, shaking her head with a solemn expression. “Something that a great deal of our pack had forgotten over the years. A kind of purpose that Deucalion tried to bring back, to little effect. While I don’t like to admit it, I think we all know exactly what kind of message our current County Alpha Pack sends.”

The room went silent.

Erica shook her head, turning away from Duke’s pack. “So, then… This isn’t just something that would affect Derek’s life. This would affect all of us.”

“To a degree, yes.” Derek turned to the Sheriff, cringing. “I’d have to leave my current job, and we’d have to make sure and properly staff the county out. While nobody else would be required to change their jobs, there’d be a certain level of… Expectation”

Danny shot his hand up, taking control of the meeting. “So, like… County Pack Members are supposed to enforce the Alpha’s will. Duke is all about maintaining peace with the regions around our territory, and I’m an ambassador to that effect. I’m an extension of the Alpha’s hand.” He pointed to Lydia. “Lyds is a little different. She doesn’t directly do anything for Duke, but her business is directly tied to Duke’s name, and the County Alpha Pack. If she was a crook, or made bad business practices, then that would make Duke our Country, obviously, look bad.” He turned to Erica and Boyd. “Which means, whatever the rest of you do, reflects on Derek.”

“Which is why Deucalion is universally hated.” Jordan spat, balling his hand into a fist. “Because the bastards in our pack make him look horrible. Duke… Duke changed, but nobody else followed his lead.”

Silence covered the room.

“…but the fact remains is that Derek would be in charge.” Melissa chimed in, smiling meekly at Derek. “Derek, and this pack, would be the ones who directed how the rest of the County should behave.”

Lydia smiled, reaching over and taking her husband’s hand. They squeezed their grips together. “That’s right. All of Duke and the current County Alpha Pack’s set of laws would be gone. Derek gets to start from scratch. After all, he’s the Alpha.”

Conversations went back and forth from the rest of the pack. A lot of talk about expectations, about the wide ranging authority of a County Alpha, and the endless possibilities it meant for Beacon Hills, and Beacon County in general.

Stiles stumbled back into his seat, unsure of what exactly to say. His thoughts and emotions ran rampant, ranging from sheer joy of Derek taking such an important role, to the cold realization that their tiny, close knit pack would triple in size. Glee at the thought of having his friends back, and for Scott to actually get to LIVE with his blood family, yet agony at the thought of how the town (namely, the rest of Duke’s pack that didn’t transfer) would react.

Everything piled into Stiles’ head, until a firm grip to his shoulder brought him back to reality.

Derek cleared his throat, cutting the clusterfuck of conversation that generated a loud roar. “Of course… I haven’t said yes, yet. I wanted to put all of this to a vote, first.”

“A.. Vote?” Erica said, cocking an eyebrow.
Stiles glanced up, catching Derek’s soft gaze. “We’re voting on this?”

Derek nodded, sitting down, and clasping Stiles’ hand in his own. The Alpha smiled, warm and inviting as always. “Well, of course. This affects all of you. It’s not something I can decide on my own.” He signaled to the group from Duke’s pack. “This would affect them, as well. Of the thirty members who would transfer to us, they selected these members to vote for their sake. I wanted both our pack and their pack to agree to this. An all or nothing vote. Either we all agree, or we don’t. Otherwise, some parties wouldn’t be happy, and that would lead to a miserable pack life. I’ve had experience like that.”

There were no objections from the pack. In fact, Mr. and Mrs. Hewitt exchanged an almost bewildered smile, while the Dunbars passively whispered with unparalleled joy. Danny and Lydia’s faces beamed.

“Theyir opinion matters, for once in their life.” Stiles thought, managing a short smile, smiling on behalf of his former packmates.

“If you’d all listen, I’d like to explain why I want to do this. Why I want to accept this.” Derek said, holding onto Stiles’ hand for dear life. He didn’t take his eyes away from his Second. “Three months ago, all I cared about was my paycheck, getting through my work week, hitting the gym, and sleeping.”

Sheriff Stilinski snorted, nodding in agreement. A few others chuckled.

Derek dropped his head, his grip on Stiles’ hand tightening. “Two months ago, everything changed. After a call to the Blue Moon, and finding a bloody, beaten, and starved pup, Isaac Lahey and I bonded as a pack. I chose to adopt him because of that bond, and because I saw a lot of myself in him.” Glancing up, Derek faced his pack, eyes radiating a soft red hue. “At that point, my new goal was to take in Isaac, and give him a good home. Protect him. One like I’d been lucky enough to get with Peter. I wanted to be a father. I wanted… I wanted to protect that pup, no matter what.”

Melissa gulped, hard. Stiles could see tears welling up in the corner of her eye, watching her “future step son in law maybe” (as she called him, lovingly at gatherings) with as much respect as she did anyone else.

A gentle laugh caught in Derek’s throat. “That goal has expanded exponentially.” He stood up, putting both arms on Stiles’ shoulders. “That expansion started with Stiles, and Scott. Scott, who I was just supposed to train, and Stiles, who helped Isaac through his trauma in ways I couldn’t begin to thank for.” He reached down, kissing Stiles on the head. “After a while, we became a pack. A small pack of six members, including Stiles’ father and Melissa. Because I came to love Stiles, and Scott, as a mate and second son. They were my new life.”

Striding over, Derek stopped beside Erica and Boyd. He bent down, putting an arm around each of them, and grinning. “Erica and Boyd came into my life. Erica saved Isaac’s life, and I, in turn, wanted to give them what they wanted. A family. What I never expected to happen, was to find some of the best friends I’d ever want out of life. People who bring all of us a lot of laughs.”

“I also bring the looks.” Erica blew a kiss at Derek.

“…and the food.” Boyd countered, shaking a firm hand with Derek.

Stepping past them, Derek stopped at the quietest member of the table, Jackson. Who’d kept his gaze low, and a stack of papers hidden under his seat. He embraced the man, clinging him in a tight hug. “Jackson, you’re my partner. More than that, though, you’re a good friend, and someone who
I’ve connected with in the last months. We had different pasts, but had a common issue between us. You’ve been a great deal of support to Isaac. You were the first person to be his friend, after everything that went down. I’m proud to have you as pack.”

Jackson reluctantly hugged Derek back, patting each other on the shoulder. When they released, Jackson sputtered for words, but eventually sat back down on the chair. “You’re a good man, Derek.” Was all Jackson could muster.

Walking around the rest of the group, Derek stopped at the head of the table, and back to his seat. “You’re all my family now, one way or another. I want to protect you all. Make a difference, and give my boys, and this pack’s future a chance at a good life.” Derek smiled at Erica and Boyd’s direction. “I want to give you two what you asked for. A pack for your pup, whenever you’re ready for that stage in your life. No matter where you came from, I want you to have all the success in the world.” He turned to Danny, the Dunbars, and the Hewitts, smiling. “Ethan and Aiden might just be my coworkers, but they’re also my friends. The rest of you are Stiles’ friends, and Scott’s relatives. I want to give him the chance to be a part of his birth pack, and give your pups a safe pack to grow up in. I’ve come to know Liam and Mason like they’re little siblings of mine, and I’d be proud to be a part of their life. I want them to be happy. I want everyone in this County to be happy, and to cut all of the bullshit out of this place.”

Danny’s chest swelled. The Hewitts and Dunbars said nothing, but they watched and caught onto Derek’s every word. Lydia and Jordan held each other tightly.

Stiles watched Derek focus back to just the two of them. Despite everyone watching, Stiles could feel the weight of Derek’s sole focus.

“I love you, Stiles. I love Scott. Me becoming the County Alpha would mean a lot of things would change for you two. Good changes. Changes for a lot of people in your situation. Nobody can tell Scott “no” for trying out for sports teams. Everyone in this County, regardless of who they are, or where they came from, could have an equal chance at everything.” Derek said.

Stiles mind, finally wrapped around the weight of everything, caught up with his mouth. He smirked, shaking his head. “Is that what you want, though?”

The pack, struck surprise by the response, went deadly quiet. Even Derek seemed taken aback by the statement.

“That… Came out rude.” Stiles chuckled, rubbing the back of his head. “What I mean, is… Derek, this is a lot of stuff. A lot off amazing, wonderful, stuff, but… You love your job as a Deputy. You hate the idea of politics. As you’d admit yourself, you never wanted to be an Alpha.” Taking a deep breath, Stiles shook his head. “Derek, are you really okay with giving that stuff up? Is this what YOU want, or is this what you’re being bullied into?”

Stiles hoped and prayed for the former. Derek Hale as the County Alpha, nepotism aside for Scott and Isaac, would be the best thing to happen to Beacon County in a long time. Having a neutral party at the helm, someone who wouldn’t put up with bullshit, would be a blessing for every citizen in the County, human AND werewolf.

...But as much as Stiles wanted to see that happen, he didn’t want it if Derek didn’t want it. Maybe it was selfish, but… Stiles didn’t want Derek to change. He wanted to cling onto this man, onto the only ray of hope he’d had in his life since Ema left. Fear enveloped him, wondering if all of this would crumble in on himself again, if Derek felt forced into it.

“If he hated everything… If he hated this new job, running the County, and being responsible for so
many lives… Who would he be, then?” Stiles thought, morbidly.

Leaning forward, Derek palmed Stiles’ hands in his own. He planted it over his chest, for the human to feel his heart’s beat.

“I know you can’t hear a lie, Stiles… Erica, Boyd, Danny, Jordan… You’ll have to help him hear it out if I do.” Derek smiled.

_Thump. Thump. Thump. Thump._

Derek’s heart was steady in Stiles’ palm.

“Stiles…” Derek smiled, nodding his head. “This is what I want, Stiles. I want to be there for all of you. I want to make a change. This is my decision.”

_Thump. Thump. Thump. Thump._

“You’re right, though. Before, I was scared to be in a pack. All that had ever meant for me was pain and misery. Even if I was an Alpha, I never trusted anyone. I only saw the bad in people.” Derek continued, still smiling as he’d done the entire night. “Then… You, Scott, Isaac, and everyone came along. You all showed me what it really means to have and be in a pack. What it means to be an Alpha. What love is…”

_Thump. Thump. Thump. Thump._

“So… I’m not afraid anymore. I’m not afraid of people, or opening my heart. I’m not afraid to be an Alpha. I want to be the Alpha, and I want to have this kind of life, with all of us, happy, and unafraid of the future. I want this, Stiles.” Derek said.

_Thump. Thump. Thump. Thump._

Stiles squeezed Derek’s chest, not bothering to check with the other wolves in the pack. Even without feeling the man’s heart, or having supernatural hearing, Stiles knew Derek wasn’t lying.

“I, for one, vote hell yes.” Sheriff Stilinski exclaimed, clearing the silence of the room in an awkward jolt.

Everyone turned to meet the human’s gaze.

The Sheriff shrugged, glaring at them as though they were all idiots. “What? Derek’s a good man. For a long time, I’ve been scared for the human population of Beacon Hills. Truth be told, we’re outnumbered. Any day, we could end up like humans living under an Alpha’s footprint.” He cracked open a can of beer from the center of the table, raising it up in a toast. “With Derek? Nah. I see him not putting up with anyone’s bullshit, human, werewolf, or otherwise. He’ll run a tight shift.”

“Same here.” Melissa said, nodding in agreement with Sheriff Stilinski. “I’m not blood family to Stiles and Scott. But he’s always treated me like one, and allowed me to be a part of Stiles and Scott’s life. Two very important people in my life.”

“I vote yes, too.” Danny said, standing up. He flashed a winning smile. “Ethan and Aiden might not be voting tonight, but they both claimed Derek’s the cleanest cop they ever met in their lives. Not counting that I’ve been around Derek on the full moon, at the pool, and just from hearing all the little ones talking. Derek’s the kind of man that I believe in. Someone who I’d be comfortable starting a family under. He’s not going to let this county rot away, like our Pack has let happen.”
Stiles watched the room shift, almost instantaneously. Whereas at the start of Derek’s news, there had been uncertainty, fear, and more than a little anxiety, Stiles could see a flood of confidence, strength, and unwavering support.

“Derek did that.” Stiles glanced to his mate, and the Alpha’s confident demeanor. He pulled his hand away from Derek’s chest, unable to help himself from smirking. “Derek’s… A different man than the one I met at the park. Different than the man dad said he used to be. He’s stronger, somehow. Not as mopey. Open.”

“I vote yes.” Erica shot up, yanking Boyd with her. She blew a kiss Derek’s way, before turning to the rest of the pack. “The world needs more County Alphas like Derek. Someone who’s not power hungry. Derek was a loner for AGES before he even started his tiny pack. Turned down Duke’s offer of succession. This is the kind of man who’s not going to end up being a politician. He’ll be a real Alpha first, and foremost.”

Boyd nodded in agreement with his wife. “Yeah, I say yes. Derek’s better than any Alpha that Erica and I have had. He took us in, without worrying about our pasts. Derek accepted us for who we are. He’ll let us live our life.” For a brief moment, Boyd flushed, unable to contain a giant, beaming smile. “He’ll let my future son or daughter… Live their own lives.”

Lydia stood, smiling sweetly in Stiles’ direction. “I vote yes. Not only because I believe that Derek is a capable Alpha, from what everyone else says, but…” She paused. “We all know what Stiles went through with our pack. For him to trust someone enough to be in another pack, and start another relationship with?” She turned to Derek, bowing her head, ever so slightly. “Well, that Alpha must be pretty special to gain that kind of trust.”

Gripping Derek’s hand, Stiles nodded in agreement. “I swore all those years ago, I’d never date another werewolf as long as I lived. I’d never subject myself or Scott to pack politics. Even when I first met Derek, all I wanted was someone to train Scott. I never imagined I’d… I’d be standing here. In the middle of another pack assembly. Watching as people vote on my future.” Yet, instead of the cold spikes he’d experienced five years ago, listening as each elder voted to evict him from the pack, Stiles felt the warmth radiating from Derek’s hand. He knew the future was going to be brighter, this time around. Like Lydia said… He trusted Derek. He trusted his boyfriend, his… Mate.

Jackson shrugged. “Derek in charge? The City Council will be thrilled to have someone easy to work with. Not that their opinion matters, but… Dereks always had my back. I think he’d have anyone’s back. So, yeah… I vote yes.”

Parrish nodded in agreement with Jackson. “I vote yes, without a doubt in my mind. From day one on the force, Derek never looked down on me as a HellHound, even when my own people in Duke’s pack did. I was his superior for a while, and he gave me the kind of respect my position deserved. He doesn’t think better of himself for being a pure blooded werewolf” He turned to the rest of his pack, the Hewitts and the Masons. “Derek doesn’t look down on his pup for being a runt, or for being the pup of a feral. He’s part of Scott’s life, a father figure to a halfing. That’s the kind of man I want leading our County, and leading my Pack.”

Everyone turned to the last two members of Deucalion’s pack. There was a brief session of whispering, followed by chuckles.

“Our sons informed us that we were disowned if we voted no. In addition, they threatened to run off and join the Hale pack, anyway.” Liam’s mother rolled her eyes, while Mr. Dunbar and Mrs. Mason laughed in unison. “So it’s in our best interests to vote, yes, though we all would have voted that anyway. We’re eager to be with a more modern, free thinking Alpha. One who will hopefully be
Liam’s mentor, as he grows into adulthood.”

“I look forward to it.” Derek said, already grinning in anticipation.

While the pack as a whole began to celebrate prematurely, Melissa cleared her throat, silencing the jovial celebration. “There’s still one vote left.”

Stiles cringed, watching as every pair of eyes shot immediately to him. He knew what a lot of them were probably thinking. Most of them negative thoughts.

Standing up, Stiles reached out to his clipboard. He flipped through several pages, before stopping at an item he’d wanted to discuss later in the meeting. “Before I vote, I have… One request to make.”

Silence coated the room in a thick, anxiety ridden goop, that Stiles could smell, despite not having any sort of supernatural smelling.

Stiles shook it off, clearing his throat. “In all basic Pack Structures, there exists the system of “Elder Pack Members”, whose authority can supersede that of the Alpha. A two thirds vote from senior pack members can remove an Alpha’s Authority, or change an Alpha’s law.”

Stiles turned to Derek, then to the pack. He gripped the clipboard, threatening to crack its edges. “Before I vote yes, and put Derek into a position of power over our entire county, I want there to be an agreement in place that the Elder Pack Member structure be disbanded for the Hale Pack. In its place, I would suggest a majority vote be made of the entire pack, in any cases where the Alpha’s Authority be challenged.” He held back his tears, trying not to picture the exact moment when his idyllic life, all those years ago, came to an end. “Because… A select, elite group of people shouldn’t have a voice for the majority. This is our pack, and our lives. I don’t want it thrown away.”

While not sure what to expect from the pack in response, Stiles’ heavy shoulders eased as he heard half a dozen members sigh in relief.

“Holy shit, Stiles is right. Yeah, no, I don’t even care if I’m a founding member, or a big contributor to the pack fund, that kind of bullshit has to go.” Erica pursed her lips, shaking her head.

“Absolutely not.” Lydia shook her head, vehemently. “That kind of governing is wrong. It’s the reason Duke’s pack has fallen so low. That’s the reason Stiles was abandoned, and why Ema fled the country. I lost both of my best friends because of that stupid vote.”

“I think that’s a very wise choice, and an excellent alternative. I would be in agreement to a majority vote overriding the Alpha. Not that I believe it will be necessary, but… An excellent safety measure.” Mrs. Mason said, nodding in agreement.

The rest of the group (especially Stiles’ father and Melissa) were adamant regarding Stiles’ suggestion. Another unanimous vote from all parties, accepting Stiles’ alternate plan.

Derek threw an arm around Stiles’ shoulder, pulling him in tight, and pecking a kiss on his cheek. “You make a great Second, Stiles. I’m keeping you in this seat, as long as I’m the Alpha.”

Blushing, Stiles cleared his throat, finally nodding in agreement. His fears washed away, as he brought Derek’s hand to his lips, kissing the top of it. “I vote yes. To a brighter future for us all.”

Derek nodded, taking a deep breath as he embraced Stiles tighter. With a nervous gulp that only Stiles felt, Derek flashed his eyes, covering his pack in a blaze of red. “Then… Our first vote as the Hale pack comes to a unanimous end. Let it be said that I’ll accept the role as Beacon County
Insanity. That was about the only word Stiles could think of to describe his last week of summer vacation, before he’d start work at school.

While nobody else in the County knew, except those directly involved, the preparations to exchange the County Alpha Seat to Derek had been an all consuming maw of a time suck. Paperwork, licensing, official membership clearances, background checks, State Alpha Satomi’s approval, Duke’s involvement and transfer of pack members to Derek, just to name a few, wiped out everyone’s time and energy.

So when Jackson offered to babysit the pups for Saturday night, to give Stiles and Derek “alone time”, Stiles had all but forced Derek out the door and to the nicest steakhouse in town. He needed to unwind from all the stress, and knew that Derek needed it just as badly.

Unfortunately, Stiles couldn’t take his eyes away from Derek’s strained, pouty face. The Alpha hadn’t touched his dinner.

Sighing, Stiles put his silverware down. “Der, what’s up? You look terrible.”

Derek fidgeted in place, glancing down at his phone, which he’d had out for most of the dinner. “Do you think think Jackson can really handle the pups? He’s human. I worry they might… Get out of hand? You know how they are, especially with sleepovers…”

“Tiny Terrors of Beacon Hills. I’m almost proud.” Stiles chuckled, rolling his eyes. He shrugged, slicing into his steak. “If not, I’ll pay for the damages. Or the medical bills.”

Derek glared, kicking Stiles under the table. “Hey, I’m being serious. You’ve known Jax longer than I have. Can he handle a couple of pups?”

“He can take care of a lot more than that.” Stiles kicked Derek right back under the table. “Quit worrying, Papa Derek. Jax can handle those two, and you know our kids are going to listen and respect Jackson, you made sure they understood that.”

“But…” Derek paused, dropping his head. The dark circles revealed under his eyes, illuminated by the restaurant’s lightening, and made worse by his drawn out, sparse face. Derek Hale, the proud, strong Alpha, looked exhausted beyond words.

Stiles reached out, taking Derek’s hand in his own. He yanked the phone out of Derek’s hands, stuffing it down his shirt pocket. “Derek, Isaac and Scott are going to be fine. Jackson can handle them. If he can’t, he knows to call us. Erica and Boyd only live a little way from Jackson’s place. My dad is on duty tonight.”

Worry eased from Derek’s face, if by only a little.

“You’ve got to take it easy, Derek.” Stiles grabbed Derek’s hand tighter, leaning over and pressing a gentle kiss to his boyfriend’s hand. “You’ve got to take a break every now and then, and do stuff just for yourself, or you’ll burn out. Let Isaac and Scott have a fun night with Jax that you know they’re going to be overjoyed about, and let’s you and I have our own fun. Things have been nuts
since the Pack Assembly, and you accepting you know who’s offer.”

Not bothering to ask permission, Stiles moved his seat next to Derek, rearranging their table into a much more compact version. They intertwined their legs, keeping constant contact.

Derek started to finally eat, popping several bits of steak in his mouth. Though, he turned to Stiles, face drawn out. “Have you ever gotten burnt out? Being a parent, that is…” The Alpha paused, cringing as the words left his lips.

“Oh my God, Derek…” Stiles smiled, snorting at his mate. He couldn’t help but laugh at the question, which brought a cocked eye to Derek’s expression. “Scott is the light of my life, and my everything. I love my son more than myself, but… I’m still my own person, too. I’m a parent first, of course, but I’m still Stiles Stilinski, and I deserve my own happiness now and again. One cannot hear cartoon theme songs on an endless loop without wanting a good hour of their own adult shows now and again. Of course I’ve gotten burnt out at times, what parent hasn’t?”

Genuine surprise covered Derek’s expression. He shook his head, leaning close to Stiles, speaking barely over a whisper. “So, it’s okay to feel… It’s okay to want alone time?”

Stiles spat out his food, almost choking on it. “Yes, Derek! Oh my God, you poor thing. Come on, single parent to single parent serious talk time.” He grabbed Derek’s face, forcing their gaze to meet. Maybe he mashed Derek’s cheeks for good measure, to bring the point home. “Living in New York, with Scott as a newborn and it just being me, there were times when the 4 AM feedings, screaming and crying, the teething with fangs, diaper blowouts, and rocking him to sleep on top of all my school work completely drained me. Some days, I fell asleep in class. Other times, I fell asleep feeding Scott, and we both passed out in a recliner. There were days I cried as much as Scott did, from stress, from exhaustion, and everything in between.”

Derek’s expression softened. He took Stiles’ hands from his face, taking them in his own.

Chuckling, Stiles signaled to the restaurant around them. “Which is why, every now and again, I shelled out fifty bucks for a babysitter, for a couple of Stiles only quality hours. A movie. A trip to the gym. A bar, a club, anything. Didn’t matter what, but I needed to unwind. Not long, not a weekend in Paris, not in a way that neglected my parenting duties, but… Long enough to charge my batteries. Nobody can last forever.”

Relief flooded Derek’s face. He let his head rest on Stiles’ shoulder, hiding his face. “I… I felt… Guilty. Isaac went through all he went through, and… I already work so much, away from him, so… I pushed through it. I just wanted to be a good father.”

“You already are are a good father.” Stiles wrapped his arms around Derek’ patting him on the back, and digging his fingers into his boyfriend’s back. A short, reassuring massage. “If you try to do everything on your own, you’ll be a bitter old man, and a bad parent. Same thing with being an Alpha. Nobody wants to follow an exhausted, grumpy Alpha.”

Derek smiled, leaning back as Stiles released him. “I guess you’re right…”

The mood lightened. Both Stiles and Derek were all smiled, returning to their meals.

Stiles grinned, deviously. “So, honesty time, Derek. Every mom and dad in the country longs for their own “me” time. What the biggest thing you’ve wanted to do since adopting Isaac that you can’t do with him around?”

A flushed red coated Derek’s face, alongside a cute set of pinkish ears. “I uh… I mean…”
Stiles poked Derek in the side, earning a playful chuckle from his boyfriend. “Come on Der, this is a no judgement zone. I’m your boyfriend, and this is a safe place. The kids aren’t around, and what happens between us, stays between us.”

After a few minutes of prodding, Derek finally leaned over, inches from Stiles’ ear. “I haven’t… I haven’t had any “me” time in two months. Time with me and… “Myself”.” Catching Stiles’ confused gaze, Derek cleared his throat, forcing his hand into a fist, and making a brief… Pumping motion.

Stiles spat his drink all over the table (and Derek), choking for air as realization hit him. He sputtered in laughter, holding onto Derek as he stifled the loud laughter into the Alpha’s shoulder.

“What?!” Derek shoved Stiles, glaring incredulously with a bright red face and pink tipped ears. “Isaac’s a pup that follows me around EVERYWHERE I go when we’re together, like a little duck. Not about to do it at work, with other wolves on the force, that’s just… Rude.” He folded his arms, faux growling at Stiles’ continued laughter. “It doesn’t help that the boy has a nose like fifty blood hounds, and I’m not eager to explain THAT scent to him, just yet. Between that, and the County Shit, I’m… Jesus, I’m wound up.”

Wiping away the tears of laughter, Stiles cracked out the last few moments of broken laughter. “Oh, you poor man… Pro tip. Make shower time after Isaac goes to bed. Lock the door. Turn up the water so that it steams up the room, and water makes it impossible for them to hear any “noises”… Do the deed before getting under the water, then wash up afterwards. Steam “melts” the scent in the air.” He patted Derek on the shoulder, with one last snort.

“That… Works? That really works?!” Derek looked oddly desperate, clinging onto Stiles’ every word.

“Der, I lived in the County Alpha house, with very nosy noses. Trust me on this one, it was a long time of trial and error on how to let lil’ Stiles have his “alone” time without getting dirty looks. Plus, Danny was a werewolf and a horny bastard growing up, he taught me that one.” A horrifying realization struck Stiles, forcing the human to pale. He covered his face. “We’re going to have teenage werewolves one day. Oh, my God… Derek, we’re going to eventually have the awkward sex talk. A GOOD sex talk, because I know you wolves don’t have sexuality, so they’ve got to have a good lesson on hetero and homosexual relationships!”

Derek flinched, glancing away as he cleared his throat. “Peter was… Very clinical. A powerpoint, with pictures. I was a tad… Scarred.”

They both sat in a stunned silence, until light bulbs shot off in both their heads. In unison, they turned to each other. “Erica can do it.” They voiced together, slowly descending into another fit of laughter.

Both grinned, earning the annoyance of nearby customers. They tried to go back to a quieter set of conversations, still giggling as they stuffed their faces. By the time dessert came around, Stiles took his turn to glance down, fiddling absentmindedly with his meal.

“Derek, I’m serious though… You’ve got to have some “you” time. Especially you becoming the County Alpha.” “That’s a big job, Derek, and I don’t want you to be unhappy. What scared me most about you taking this on wasn’t the idea of extra work for us, but… You changing. You not being… My Derek. Is that Selfish? Maybe so, but… I think we both deserve to be happy, too, right?” Stiles mashed his dessert into a fine mush.

“Tonight has been… Exactly what I needed. Exactly what we both needed. I don’t think that’s
selfish.” Derek smiled, taking in a deep breath. “I think… We should make sure and have our own “us” time, like this. I know I’ve put a lot of things in front of our relationship, and I’m adding more to it, but… You really are special to me, Stiles. I love you, I love us.” Derek didn’t look quite as tired anymore, with his dark circles not quite as drawn out. “I want to make this work. From all angles.”

Nodding, Stiles flashed a playful grin. “Then it’s decided. You and me, baby, every Saturday night, just the two of us. We can spend the mornings and afternoons with the pups, but the evenings are our time. With our pack, I’m sure we’ll have someone to watch the pups.” Mischievously, Stiles stole a scoop of Derek’s dessert, popping it in his mouth. “Then, maybe… Once a month, we could talk someone into babysitting them overnight. So you and I could… Have ALL night to do our own stuff? Sleep in on Sunday morning when we’re all worn out?”

What Stiles’ mouth said, and what he meant were two different things. By “worn out”, he’d meant from the week’s activities. What he’d probably insinuated, and based on Derek’s sly, albeit shy response, was something a little more… Seductive.

“Oh, yeah?” Derek smirked, eyes flashing a candy red at the prospect. His fangs popped out, in a sharp grin. “Jax has the pups until tomorrow morning, Stiles…”

Stiles took his turn to flush red. “He uh… He sure does…”

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Stiles and Derek had initially planned for a movie to go with dinner, but the most recent “developments” had them back at Derek’s apartment. On the couch. With Derek on top of Stiles, mashing their mouths together, still fully dressed, but “working out” their feelings onto each other.

Coming up for air, Derek focused his lips elsewhere, atop Stiles’ neck. The Alpha spent plenty of time peppering kisses up and down Stiles’ shoulders.

Stiles, too, panted for air as he kneaded his hands into Derek’s ass. Because hell if Derek was the only one who gets the explore his favorite parts.

Derek separated them, as the Alpha yanked off his shirt. He tossed it to the side, quickly mounting back atop Stiles, and kissing his mate fervently on the lips once more.

“This is happening. This is happening…” Stiles chest ached, and his lips did little more than sit in place atop Derek’s. His grip on Derek’s butt wasn’t quite as tight as it’d been. Fear enveloped him. Like when he’d been in Derek’s arms all those weeks ago, he pictured all of this…

Gone. Again.

“Stiles?” Derek stopped his assault, hopping off of Stiles. He pulled his mate close, sniffing Stiles’ nervous energy. The Alpha had already partially shifted, his animalistic face crunched in worry.

“Sorry, sorry… I, uh… I got lost in my head.” Stiles shook it off, kneading his hands into Derek’s side.

Derek shook his head. “Stiles, we don’t have to do… That.” He leaned over, nibbling his fangs on Stiles’ neck, gently scenting Stiles. Derek wrapped his arms, protectively, around Stiles’ body. “I
know you want to go slow with this relationship, and I respect that. You’ve been through a lot.”

“I want to. Of course I want to!” Stiles spat out, instantly. He laughed, shaking his head, and mashing his lips against Derek’s face. The fangs made it a bit hard to really make a proper kiss, but Stiles learned ages ago how to fit a pair of fangs in his mouth, without either of them being uncomfortable.

Stopping him, Derek broke their kiss. “Stiles, come on.”

Stiles slammed his eyes shut. He buried himself in Derek’s bare chest. “Derek, you are… A good man.” He refused to cry, wrapping his arms around Derek, and using the Alpha for support. “Hell, you’re an answered prayer. I found an Alpha for Scott in you, a friend, a confidante, and… Someone I love. Someone I could actually love, again.” He laughed. “Never thought that would happen again. Ever. Again. Never thought I could feel… Love again.”

Silently, Derek rubbed gentle circles into Stiles’ back, as Stiles had done for Derek earlier that night.

“...and that scares me.” Stiles finally finished. He reached up, cupping Derek’s face, not afraid for the Alpha to see him tear up. He smiled. “I don’t want the rug pulled out from underneath me twice in one lifetime. I couldn’t… I couldn’t handle that again, Derek. The first time nearly broke me as a person, and it changed me. I wasn’t… I wasn’t always so serious, or so put together. I was going to be a coach for Beacon High, because I wanted to have a fun life! I was… I was the Terror of Beacon Hills, for God’s sake! I never… I never worried like this.”

Derek pulled Stiles close, running his hands through Stiles’ hair. He let Stiles’ tears stain his body.

“I wanted to die. If I didn’t have Scott, or Dad… If I didn’t have the smarts to get a therapist, or have Duke’s private support, or… Move across the country to start everything over, I…” Stiles admitted, still laughing. “Like I told you before, Derek… I’m a mess.”

“Sounds like I’m not the only one who needs to let loose sometimes.” Derek’s face melted back into that of his human half. He wiped the tears from Stiles’ face with his thumb. “Don’t hold this back, Stiles. I’m here for you, just like you’re here for me.”

Stiles felt the nervous pit in his stomach slowly evaporating. He chuckled, nodding at Derek’s insistence.

“More importantly, though... I won’t leave you, Stiles. Ever. You don’t have to worry about that.” Derek leaned over, rekindling the warmth they’d started earlier. He leaned up, bopping their foreheads together. “I’m not pushing you for anything, Stiles. We can stay on this couch and make out, or just collapse in each other’s arms from exhaustion and sleep in tomorrow morning. That would be wonderful for me, Stiles. Because…. Just having you around is enough.”

Stiles grinned, happy to stay tucked in Derek’s arms.

“But… If you’re ready to mate… Then this is forever. For me, at least.” Derek shook his head, scratching through the back of Stiles’ hair. “I meant what I said back on the full moon. There’s nothing that can rip me from you once we mate. We won’t ever be able to have a child together, so there’s no biological imperative that’s going to tell me what to do.” A cocky grin covered Derek’s face, winking at Stiles. “Besides… I’m the Alpha. The Alpha can overcome any barriers. That’s just who we are. Instinct bows to us.”

“Really?” Stiles muttered, cracking a genuine smile.

“Really.” Derek kissed Stiles on the cheek, settling his head on Stiles’ shoulder. “...and there’s
nobody I’d rather have as Isaac’s second parent. He thinks the world of you, Stiles.”

Stiles nodded, resting his head on Derek’s opposite shoulder. They stayed in each other’s arms, supporting each other as they sat on the edge of the couch. “Scott thinks you’re the coolest person in the world, and respects you as an Alpha. I know he’d love to have you as a dad. I’d… I’d love for you to be his dad.”

They stayed still, each resting on the other. Both men were all smiles, the nervous energy from before slowly melting away.

Taking the initiative, Stiles reached into his pants, untucked his shirt and tossing it to the side. Hsin lean, tight build, while not as bulky as Derek’s muscular form, set the Alpha into a half shift, with a greedy, wolfish grin.

Stiles stood up from the couch, tugging Derek with him. “Let’s go to your bedroom, and… Turn on the TV, and not watch it? Maybe… Maybe just kind of see where this goes tonight?” He yanked Derek towards the bedroom, winking at the Alpha. Somewhere from the living room to Derek’s bed, they’d both lost their shorts. “Sound good… Mate?”

Derek climbed on top of Stiles, grinning.

They never managed to find the TV remote. Neither of them minded all that much.

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As Sunday morning’s sun shone off in the distance, Jackson sat in the windowsill of his small country home. Cup of coffee in hand, Jackson had nursed the warm drink, sunning in the morning light. He smiled, content to shut his eyes, and take in deep, relaxing breaths.

“Everything smells like honey this morning. The book said that’s… Happy, right? Or was it contented? I forget… I need to study more. I’m shit at this.”

Since regaining his ability to discern smell, Jackson had spent most of his free time trying to figure out the assault of odors now engulfing him on a daily basis. He’d been around werewolves enough to know that smell was tied to emotions, and a common means of communication. If Jackson was really going to go through with everything, he had to prepare. Especially when he regained his ears and eyes, and would be overwhelmed by everything.

Jackson beamed, leaning over and grabbing a earmarked book from his side. “Raising a Werewolf: How to Explain Scents, Sights, and Senses.” He cracked it open, turning to to pages about scenes. Dozens of familiar smells were highlighted, some checkmarked, some circled in red, and most of them dotted with a question mark. He cocked an eyebrow, striding his finger down to “honey”.

“Honey. A sense of peaceful contentment. Commonly exuded after a particularly long period of stress, anxiety, or depression. Happy relief.” Jackson cocked his head, jaw askew. He hadn’t read the second part of the entry.

Before he could adequately question that line of thought, Jax felt a set of tiny hands tugging at his shirt.

“Jaaaaaaxx…..” Scott yawned, crawled into the windowsill and into Jackson’s lap, faceplanting into
Jackson smirked, setting his book and coffee to the side. He scratched both of their heads, taking in the sleepy scent. “Oh really, now? Looks like you’re both still sleepy. Stayed up too late, didn’t you?” He glanced around his living room, where a set of three sleeping bags were laid out in front on Jackson’s high tech entertainment center, where they’d spent the night playing video games and eating the entire snack aisle from the grocery store.

Scott pouted, snuffling in Jax’s shoulder. “Sleepy AND hungry, Jax. Can we get some breakfast?”

“Bacon.” Isaac added, mid-yawn.

“You’d have to let me stand up, first. I can’t cook from here, you know.” Jackson smirked, watching them both growl “menacingly” at the thought. Isaac, especially, dug his arms around Jackson, keeping himself firmly in place.

With neither pup eager to let Jackson move anytime soon, he stayed in place, as both pups absently scented him. Which set something off in Jackson, making the scent of honey all the more potent in the air around him. “Pack. I have a pack… No… No, I’ve got a family now. People who want me. Who want ME.” He smiled, content to nap with the pups through the rest of the morning.

They were, however, woken up by a loud knocking at the front door. Jackson’s eyes shot open, glaring angrily at the door. That is, until Scott and Isaac woke from the dead, eyes wide and bright.

“Daddy!” “Papa!”

The pups were out of Jackson’s lap, and shooting for the front door.

Jackson stretched out, watching as Derek let himself inside the house, grabbing up both pups in his arms and carrying them up on his shoulders. He sighed, glancing away from the sight.

“They’re lucky to have dads like Stiles and Derek. Scott and Isaac will grow up right, and not be a colossal mess like I am… I’m… I’m glad.” Jackson thought, barely registering Stiles walking up to him.

“They look worn out, and your house isn’t even a little bit demolished! Wow… I’m actually impressed Jax.” Stiles playfully slugged Jackson on the shoulder.

Jackson nodded, shaking off his inner thoughts. He folded his arms, nodding to the setup in the living room. “They had fun last night, and we stayed plenty busy. We went to the pizza place, played games until they closed, and I took them to the ball field until dark. Liam came over and we batted around a bit with Mason and some of the other kids coming to our pack.” He folded his arms, smirking. “Little punk teen wolf is going to one up me on the homerun record. Not that I mind. Liam’s a damn good athlete.”

“So…. Did you have fun being pack babysitter? Being the cool uncle for all the little pups, and making Derek and I look like boring saps?” Stiles looked back, watching as Derek listened intently on every exciting thing the pups did with Uncle Jax.

“Yeah…” Jackson stuffed his hands into his pajama pants. A little grin crossed the curve of his mouth. “Yesh, it was… Good. I’ve never done anything like that before. You know how my
mother was with me staying over with anyone.” His smile faded, hands balling into tight fists.

Stiles’ demeanor dropped in tandem. “Jax?” He stepped closer, putting a hand on the man’s shoulder. “You’re pack. You know that, right? You don’t have to be a Whittemore anymore. They don’t deserve you, and the Hale pack wants you. We want YOU, our friend, our family.”

“Since I voted at the assembly, I assumed I was…” Jackson nodded, rubbing the back of his neck. “Then… Being around everyone lately, having stuff come back to me, it’s like… Like I’m not starving anymore. Like I’m not empty…” He shook his head. “No, that sounds stupid… It’s just…”

“Hey!” Stiles grabbed Jackson’s ear, tugging on it while he glared at his friend. “Nothing you feel is stupid.” He released Jackson’s ear, putting a hand on each of the man’s shoulders. “You’ve broken two of the seals, right? That just leaves the third one, so… Whenever you’re ready, just… Come tell us, okay? Trust in Derek, and let him put an end to…” Stiles motioned up and down Jackson’s body. “This. You deserve to be happy.”

Jackson nodded, confidently. He looked over to the pups, who were showing Derek the video game they’d played that night. He grinned, watching Derek struggle to get control of the video game. “I want it. Being with the pups made me realize what I missed out all these years. The bonding, the kinship… I’d like to get a little of that back.”

Yet, Jackson shook his head, leaning over to Stiles’ side, whispering. “Let’s let the County Alpha shit settle, first. Once the drama dies down, then… I’ll ask Derek to do it.”

“Or you could ask right now, and we get it all over with.” Stiles winked, heavily nudging Jackson in the side.

It was then that Jackson spotted the obnoxiously large hickey, hidden just barely under Stiles’ neck. While Jackson didn’t know exactly what “sex” smelled like, he realized quickly that Stiles’ neck was covered in it. He cocked an eyebrow. “You got laid last night, didn’t you?”

Stiles slammed a hand over Jackson’s mouth, laughing innocently as the pups (and a beet red Derek) glared his way. “Oh, Uncle Jax, you’re so funny!” He threw his arms around Jackson’s neck, glaring at his friend. He spoke barely above a whisper “Derek and I had a good time last night, and we’re going to have the talk with the pups later about us being mated. So… Can we keep this just between us?”

Jackson grinned, firmly shaking Stiles’ hand. “Got it. Well, can’t say I’m surprised about this. Hell, I’m happy for you.”

“Me too.” Stiles grinned, covering up the large hickey with his hand. He cleared his throat, flashing his pearly whites, while chuckling nervously. The human bobbed up and down on the balls of his heels.

For a brief moment, Jackson saw an image of the Terror of Beacon Hills. Teenage Stiles Stilinski, a ball of endless energy and life. All smiles, and endless insane planes that got them all in more detention than Jackson cared to remember.

Jackson said his farewells to the Hale family (who were off to have an important breakfast discussion), picked up around the house, and continued thumbing through his book. He stopped at a chapter he hadn’t gotten to yet.

“Scent and Bonding: The Crucial Need of Touch as a Pup”
Just as Jackson finished preparing breakfast, a loud banging at his front door tore him out of his state. He lifted his nose, taking in a deep breath. An overabundance of perfume caught his attention, forcing a snide frown to cross his face. “Are you serious?”

He ran to the front door, swinging it open. Standing on his front porch was none other than his mother, in her finest suit. She wasted little time and shoving herself inside of Jackson’s house, and slamming the door behind them.

“I ran into Mrs. Helgerson at the market today, Jackson. Told me how impressed she was that my son had become a member of the Hale Pack. That it was so “Adorable” the way you were teaching those dogs how to play baseball last night.” Mrs. Whittemore pointed her long, manicured nails in Jackson’s nose. The smell of toxic paint forced Jackson to cringe at the offending odor. “Hanging out with these… Beasts. Being a part of their disgusting, animalistic, putrid group?! It’s beneath you!”

A powerful vibration echoed in Jackson’s throat, forming a weak growl. “Not really. I mean, I’m one of them, after all. You’d know that better than anyone… Mother.” He spat, slapping her hand out of his nose. “I’m a born wolf. Until you robbed me of it.”

Hitching her breath, Mrs. Whittemore’s eyes went wide. A mixture of fear, anger, and disgust. “...no, you’re not.” She jabbed her bony finger into Jackson’s chest. “I raised you into something better than those disgusting mutts. I raised you to be a Whittemore. A proud human. A good person. Someone of culture. I brought you out of the sewers you would have ended up in.”

“Looking back… I wonder if the sewers would be preferable.” Jackson smirked, taking joy in his mother’s frothing lips. “I’ve already broken two of the seals on the curse.”

“You what!!?” Mrs. Whittemore staggered backwards, dropping her heavy purse onto his floor with a thud.

Jackson nodded, glancing at his book. So much of himself was coming back in spurts. Smells, instincts, sensations… Being with Scott and Isaac the night before had triggered something in him, something lost and forgotten. A real, genuine bond. “Swam in a full moon’s light. Drank the nasty-ass wolfsbane concoction that Deaton threw together a week or two ago. Vomited for three days straight, this disgusting, rotten, black goop. Had to kill the curse from the inside out, with the strongest weapon against our kind.”

Mrs. Whittemore shook her head in disbelief. “No… No, you didn’t. You’re not that stupid…”

Jackson laughed, shaking his head. He saw his mother shivering, watching as her greatest fear in life, the “truth” about the Whittemores. “The Curse of the Eclipse. Turns a werewolf into a human, by locking the “wolf” in werewolf away. Sealing my soul. Legally a form or torture that not even the Hunters and Huntresses use anymore. Alphas used to use it as a punishment worse than death, for the most violent of crimes.” He continued to laugh, right in his mother’s face.

Until Mrs. Whittemore shot her hand out, choking Jackson’s neck with all the strength she could muster. “Jackson Whittemore, I will tell you this once, and once only.” She dug her nails into Jackson’s neck, drawing blood. “I swear to God, if you tell a soul, if you go through with this foolish endeavor, I will cut you off, completely. You will lose your job, and any jobs you apply for. I. Will. Ruin. You.”

Glancing down, Jackson realized he didn’t even register the pain around his neck. His muscles in the area tightened, attempting (but failing) to heal the wounds. Instead, no pain registered. He turned his gaze back to his mother, whose eyes resembled that of a madwoman.
“I made you what you are.” Mrs. Whittemore’s grip lessened, tiring out from the force she exerted. “You should be grateful that I gave you a life worth living, and didn’t have you put down like the disgusting little mutt you used to be. I raised you to be my son that never had a chance to be born. Jackson Whittemore. He was the one who should have been my son.” Angry tears billowed down her face. “A son that your kind took from me. Those monsters… They… What they did to me…” The tears ceased, as her grip tightened once more around Jackson’s neck. “Defy me, boy, and you will have nothing. You will be nothing. Not even your father, that fool of a man he is, will be able to protect you.”

They shared a brief moment of silence between them. Broken by laughter.

Jackson laughed. He laughed in his mother’s face, as tears rolled down his cheeks. Dark, pitiful, insane laughter. Showing his teeth, it was clear as day to see a tiny, almost babyish set of fangs popping from the top of his mouth. Smaller than Scott or Isaac’s.

Mrs. Whittemore backed away, eyeing her crazed son in mortification. “W… What is wrong with you?!” She screeched. Looking down at her hands, she saw the blood coating the tips of her nails. Shaking his head, Jackson wiped the tears rolling down his face. “It’s funny, because nothing is what I’ve had since I was a baby. No love, no attention, no respect… You didn’t even ASK me if I wanted to be human. It was forced on me.” He stepped forward, face wrinkling as he attempted (and failed) to shift. A dark, haunting black glow erupted from his back. “Told me I was going in for my tonsils. I wake up with a bloody, scarred back. Where some hack mage carved that curse into me.” He shook, slamming his hand against the wall of his home, creating a sizable crater beside his mother’s head. Tears rolled down his face. “I WAS BARELY FIVE! I DIDN’T KNOW WHAT WAS GOING ON! I’D SHIFTED ONCE, WATCHED YOU AND DAD CRY AT THE SIGHT OF ME, AND THEN YOU SHIPPED ME OFF TO BE CARVED INTO!” He shook, still laughing as the tears continued to fall. “After that day, you never touched me again. Never said you loved me… I heard you and dad talking at night… About the monster in your son’s bed.”

Jackson stopped, watching, scouring his mother’s face for any sign of remorse. Any sign of sadness for what she’d done. Because he remembered the woman she used to be. The love she’d shown him, all until the first time he’d shifted as a werewolf.

Instead, Mrs. Whittemore glared at him. “You are a monster. All of you are. I see that trying to raise you as a proper human was wasted, now.”

Taking his turn, Jackson resisted the urge to choke the woman. Instead, he yanked her by the wrist, pulling her to the front door of his home. “Then I’ll consider myself disowned. I don’t need you, your money, or your help in anything.” He pulled his front door open, and “politely” shoved his mother out to his front lawn. “I’m not a replacement. I. Am. Me.” He ripped out his contacts, smashing them in his hands. He tossed the debris into the shrubs next to his house. As he lifted his head, a tiny ring of gold glowed around his otherwise human eyes. He cracked his neck, fangs popping out. “Now… GET OUT!” He roared, loud enough for everyone in the neighborhood to see.

All eyes were on him, and his mother. By end of day, he knew the gossip dorks would have this news all around town. Maybe not how he wanted to reveal it, but the look on his mother’s face, and the feeling of “right” swelling in his chest was well worth it.
Chapter 13

After a short breakfast (where the pups shared all the amazing things they'd done at Uncle Jax's house), Derek and Stiles took both of the pups to the local park. Because despite staying up far past their bedtimes (Derek would kill Jackson for that later, at a more convenient time), they were the lively balls of energy as ever.

Derek and Stiles split the duo up. While Stiles took Isaac to go feed the ducks, Derek and Scott made their way through the winding woodland trail, for a more active experience. They each had something to say to the other's child, and ask the most important question of their lives.

"Look, Alpha! Look, there's a squirrel!" Scott screamed, all smiles as he hunched down, ready to give chase and hug the poor creature into submission. Or worse, beg to take it home as a pet, as he'd done every other woodland creature he came into contact with.

Chuckling, Derek held the "savage" pup back, sparing the animal's dignity. "Leave the poor thing alone, Scott. If he wants to come play with you, he'll come play with you." He ignored Scott's disappointed whine, rubbing the back of his neck as they continued down the trail.

"Just talk to him, Derek. Stiles has probably already spilled the story to Isaac, written a dissertation, and walked back home by now." Derek sighed, trying to ignore the knot in his stomach. The one that had gathered since last night's activities with Stiles, and the morning after talk. Their first one as mates. Actual mates. He, Derek Hale, and Stiles Stilinski... Mated.

"Alpha, what's wrong? You look sick." Scott muttered, halting at the edge of the trail. His head cocked, genuine worry coating his face.

Derek shook off his fears, taking a deep breath. He bent down to Scott's level, plopping down against the trunk of a tree. "Scott, do you know what a mate is?" He asked, glancing down to catch the pup's gaze.

Nodding, Scott grinned as he sat cross legged in front of Derek. "Yeah! That's when two wolves love each other forever and ever! Dad said it's like when humans get married, but a lot longer!"

"That's right." Derek smiled, taking in all of Scott's eager expressions.

Scott was the living embodiment of "good". One of the most innocent, happy souls he'd ever met in his life. Stiles had raised such a loving, stable child, despite their horrific circumstances of their life. Someone who cared so much, and who Derek wanted to protect with everything he had.

"Scott..." Derek paused, reaching out and taking both of the pup's hands in his own. "Your dad and I... You know we've been dating, right? That I love your dad, and I love you."

"Uh huh! We're a pack! The best pack in the whole wide world, and you're the best Alpha in the whole wide world! My Dad and Paw Paw say so!" Scott answered, puffing his chest out proudly.

A low blush crept over Derek's face. "Well, I don't know about the whole world." He chuckled, gripping Scott's hand tighter. "Scott, I'd like to be something more than just your Alpha. I want to be something more than just your dad's boyfriend."

"Like what?" Scott cocked his head to the side, searching Derek's face.

Derek gulped. "Scott... Last night, your dad and I... We became mates."
Light struck Scott's face. Genuine awe, mixed with glee. "So... That means you and my Dad are gonna love each other forever and ever?" He gasped for air, on both feet and beaming wildly. "Does that mean you and Isaac can live on the couch again!? Can you stay every night!? Please?! Pretty pretty please?! I want my pack brother back home! Can Aunty Laura come live with us too!? What about Poppy Peter!?!"

Derek felt the heat of tears forming behind his eyes, but willed them away. He smiled, just as overjoyed as Scott was. "Actually, Scott... What that means is...." Stepping forward, on both knees, Derek looked up, with Scott standing overhead. "Scott, if you'd have me... I'd like... I'd like to adopt you. Just like Stiles would like to adopt Isaac. We'd all be together, as one family. Living together, being together... Forever."

The cheer in Scott's face melted away into disbelief. He stared at Derek, as though he'd told some incredible, fanciful story. Something too good to be true.

"I'd be honored if you took my name. Not that... You'd have to. I'd never force that on anyone." Derek said, glancing away.

Derek hated the name "Hale" for plenty of years, and hated it being thrust upon him without question. Its ties to Gregory, and the pack he hated, made his blood boil as a teenager. Though, over time, he'd taken pride in the name. Pride in Peter, and Laura, and what the new generation of Hales had turned the name into. What he'd made the name into.

"...you'd be my Papa?" Scott mumbled, dropping his head.

Brought back to reality, Derek nodded. "That's right. Stiles would be Isaac's daddy."

"...would Dad be a Hale?" Scott asked.

A curved smirk crossed Derek's face. "Your dad said he's wanted to get rid of that atrocity of a last name for years. So, yes... If you and Isaac are okay with Stiles and I being your fathers, then we'd all take the same last name."

"...I'd be Scott Hale? Dad would be Stiles Hale? Then... That means Isaac and I would be...." Derek nodded, connecting the boy's lines. "That's right. You and Isaac would be stepbrothers. Not that it matters. You're already brothers, aren't you?"

"Yeah." Scott leaned his head up, finally showing Derek his cheery smile again. The boy's eyes flashed a wild gold, excitement building in Scott's expression once more. "But... Then I'd have TWO dads?! I'd have two dads! That's like having a mom again! I'd have two like everyone else! I won't be weird anymore!"

Pushing aside the soul crushing pit of ice that the pup's sentence ushered in Derek's stomach, he tried to nod through it, letting the pup have his moment of joy.

Leaping on top of Derek, Scott wrapped his tiny arms around the man's neck, and shaking in uncontrollable, squealing joy. "That's so cool! You're gonna be my Papa, and I get two dads! Yes! I can't wait! Can Isaac come stay the night tonight!? Can you come stay up late with us! Can we play cards with Paw Paw and Melissa!? Can Grandpa Duke come over!? I've GOT to tell Grandpa and Paw Paw this!" The verbal onslaught came to a brief end, as Scott grabbed Derek's hand and yanked him off the ground and back on the trail. "Come on, come on, I've got to go see Isaac! We're gonna be brothers! We've gotta go do more brother stuff!"

Derek just smiled through it all, letting Scott rush him through the rest of the trail. He chuckled.
"What's brother stuff?"

"I dunno! We'll figure it out!" Was all Scott managed to get out before Derek scooped Scott up, running with the pup on his shoulders, blasting through the trail. The pup squealed in laughter, as they flew through the forest in a blur of speed.

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At the city park's pond, Stiles watched in bemusement as Isaac walked up to as many ducks as his tiny legs could carry them to.

"Eat up duck! You too, duck! Same with you, duck! I'm not gonna forget you either, duck!" Isaac said, as he'd place a tiny pile of pellets by their feet.

Oddly enough, the ducks didn't fly away in terror from the apex predator, and started following behind Isaac, like a mother duck. As if they could sense the gentle soul inside of Isaac, and didn't fear him in any way.

"Are all their names duck?" Stiles asked, handing Isaac another handful of feed pellets.

Isaac shrugged. "I don't know. What's a good duck name?"


Giggling, Isaac tossed some pellets in front of "Donald", waggling his finger at the rude duck. "Be nice to my Stiles, or no more food!"

"Aww, my hero!" Stiles ruffled Isaac's curls, earning a slow blush from the pup. He mentally groaned, unable to handle Isaac's playful smile.

"Come on Stiles, man up. Derek's probably already said some moving speech to Scott, saved twenty old people from a burning building, and bench pressed a fire truck." Stiles shook his head, trying to find his inner courage.

Isaac drug Stiles to the nearest park bench, where he spread out the pellets for the ducks to have a small buffet. Once all the pellets were gone, however, the ducks fluttered away, off to swim in their pond.

Just as Stiles opened his mouth to speak, Isaac turned to face Stiles, nose sniffing the air around Stiles.

"How come you smell like Papa? Like, all over?" Isaac asked.

Stiles face burned red. He took a quick sniff of himself, knowing damn well that he'd washed all over, hoping to avoid such a reaction.

"Papa smelled like you, too. Kind of like how Aunty Erica and Uncle Boyd smell like each other. Or like Paw Paw and Grammy Melissa. Uncle Peter said that smell was real love." Isaac kicked his feet back and forth, where they dangled in the air. His smile couldn't be contained. "Does that mean you and Papa are gonna get married?"
"Oh, well, uh..." Stiles stammered, nibbling on the edge of his lip. He glanced down at Isaac, spotting his all too inquisitive eyes, and mischievous grin. Stiles saw the gears turning in the pup's head.

"He's already figuring this out in his head. Hell, he might already know. He's like this in therapy too, always trying to guess what I'm going to say." Stiles smirked, reaching over and prodding Isaac on the nose. "You know what? Isaac, you're a sharp kid. I'll just lay it all out."

Isaac nodded, hopping up to sit crossed legged on the bench, listening intently to Stiles' every word. Stiles leaned back on the bench, glancing off into the afternoon sky. "Your Papa and I became mates last night. We talked through a lot of it before, during, and after, and... You're right. We are a lot like Erica and Boyd." He smiled, shutting his eyes. For the first time in a long time, stiles felt confident in his words. "We're mated, and we're going to spend the rest of our lives together."

"I knew it! I knew I smelled it!" Isaac pursed his lips together, with a smug look of satisfaction plastered over his face. Stiles smirked right back, grabbing the pup's nose and playfully tweaking it. There was something endearing, and wholly amazing about Isaac finally coming out of his shell. Seeing the pup showing a little confidence in himself, and having pride at who he was? The kid had come a very long way from where he'd started. "Of course you did, our little blood hound. You could probably sniff out Jimmy Hoffa with that honker. Maybe I should lend you out!"

"Who?" Isaac asked, with a cocked eyebrow. "Never mind." Stiles shook his head. "I got off subject... Anyway..." He paused, taking a deep breath. "Your Papa and I want to be together. That means that I'm going to be a daily part of your life, too. Even more than I already am."

Maybe it was Isaac smelling Stiles' anxiety of the situation, or perhaps he was just as nervous as Stiles was, but Isaac crawled into Stiles' lap. He watched Stiles' every facial movement, tiny eyes trying to find an answer. Stiles leaned forward, taking the pups' hands in his own. "Isaac... I'd like to be your Dad, if you'd have me. I love you like I love Scott, and... Knowing you has been one of the best things to happen in my life."

Isaac's face paled. He looked at Stiles, mouth slowly gaping. "Don't look so surprised..." Stiles tried to choke out a laugh, holding back tears. "I mean, we've spent every day this summer together. Laughing, playing, doing all kinds of silly stuff... We've talked about a lot of personal things, too, but... In the end... I felt like we've bonded, haven't you?"

Stiles hadn't been sure what to expect Isaac's reaction to the news to be. Or if he'd even accept Stiles. The poor pup had plenty of dad related issues, and Stiles wasn't going to be surprised if Isaac reacted negatively, wanting Stiles to just stay "Stiles". That nobody could have the title of "dad" without being linked to Robert.

Countless scenarios, mostly horrific, angry rejections, had ran through Stiles' head since the night before. He wouldn't blame Isaac for rejecting him, if he did. Maybe just being his "Stiles" was good enough.

Yet, in that moment, they all flew out of Stiles' mind as little dribbles of tears fell down Isaac's cheeks. Accompanied by a bright, wide smile. Isaac wrapped his arms around Stiles, burying his
Stiles reciprocated the affection, wrapping himself protectively around the pup. He let his own tears flow. Stiles didn't care who saw, or if they were making a scene. "I'm holding my son. They can fuck off." He grinned, as the words "my son" really resonated within him.

In the midst of his sobs, Isaac finally managed to break away, vibrating in a cold chill, unable to stand still. "I... I want you... I want you..." He stumbled over the words, wiping the tears away as his eyes melted into a swirling gold. "I want you to be my Dad, too! Please! Pretty please?! You'd... You'd be a good Dad! I promise I'll be good! I'll be really good!"

Stiles cupped Isaac's face, shaking his head. "Hey, hey, hey... You don't have to beg... Come on, you know me... When do I ever say "no" to you? Especially with those puppy eyes of yours. Seriously, you're going to be beating off the girls or guys with a stick when you grow up." He bonked his forehead against Isaac's. He chuckled.

"...but... I..." Isaac wiped more tears from his face, face askew and wracked with indecision.

"No buts." Stiles kissed Isaac's forehead, helping wipe the tears from the pup's face. "You're my son. That's that. You don't have to beg for something like that. You get it, free of charge! I also come along with Scotty, Paw Paw, and Grammy Melissa. Act now, and I might be able to talk Papa into a dog by Christmas."

A meek, shattered smile crossed Isaac's face. He nodded, sniffing back snot and tears. His tiny hands shook, engulfed by Stiles' hands as they linked their fingertips. Golden eyes shimmered in Isaac, and he managed a short, affirmative giggle.

"Thanks... Daddy." Isaac whispered, almost fearful to let the words slip out again. He flinched at the word, but stared intently into Stiles' eyes.

"Thanks, son." Stiles grinned mischievously, yanking the pup into his arms, and hoisting him up on his shoulders. While not as graceful as Derek, he managed to prop Isaac up on his shoulders, and do his best to give just as fun a ride as Derek did.

They ran by the pond, chased by the ducks, and around to the exit of the hiking trail. Stiles could hear two sets of loud howls echoing from the trails, recognizing the both of them, recognizing both with ease.

"Papa!" Isaac shrieked in glee, rearing back and letting his own tiny howl accompany his brother and Papa's.

Before long, Stiles' legs gave out, as he huffed and puffed at the bare end of the trail's exit. Not that he needed to go any further, as he spotted Derek sprinting at full force towards them, Scott on his shoulders.

"ISAAC!" Scott screamed, leaping off of Derek's shoulders and running the last gap himself.

Following suit, Isaac clambered down Stiles, chasing after Scott.

They slammed into each other, laughing, crying, and hugging out the wave of emotions that came over them.

"Guess what, guess what, guess what?! Derek said he's gonna be my Papa, and Stiles is gonna be your Daddy!" Scott screamed, bouncing up and down on his feet.
"I know! Stiles told me!" Isaac screeched right back.

Both sets of eyes glowed in tandem, as the two boys spoke at a million words a minute, rehashing what either parent had told them.

Derek joined Stiles' side, putting an arm around his mate. "I'm guessing Isaac took it about as well as Scott did?"

Nodding, Stiles reached around Derek's waist, resting a hand on Derek's hip. "Yeah..." He grinned, squeezing Derek into a side hug. "I've got another son... A bigger family."

"Me too." Derek said, leaning over and stealing a brief kiss from Stiles. "After everyone joins us... We're going to have to feed an army. Two growing pups, all of Scott's cousins, Liam and Mason? Good God, our grocery bill is going to be outrageous."

"Somehow..." Stiles paused, chuckling as he watched Scott and Isaac already planning to do "official brother stuff". "If that's the worst we've got to worry about, I think I'll be okay with that."

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By the time the news about Jackson's heritage spread across Beacon Hills, it was already the wee hours of the morning when Derek received a frantic call from Erica, who'd heard it from a patron at her bar, who'd seen it on the news, who'd been leaked the story by some unknown source.

Gathering up his family, Derek took the final days of his liberties as a Deputy, using his siren to speed his way across town and right at Jackson's front door. He shoved away the gawking masses that lined around Jackson's property, let inside by Ethan and Aiden, while Kira guarded the front lawn, lighting sparking around the property line and shocking anyone that dared try to cross it.

Derek shoved the door open, as he and his family swarmed inside. "Jax?"

In the living area, Erica and Boyd were already on either side of Jackson on the couch. They each had one of his hands, eyes glowing brightly in tandem with Jackson's puny, ringed glow. Erica's face was bright red, a mixture of tears, anger, and homicidal instincts. Surprising enough, Boyd's fangs were out, snarling at Mr. Whittemore's ashen figure across the room.

Liam, Mason, and their parents stood around Mr. Whittemore, guarding his place in the corner. Liam bubbled in and out of partial shift constantly, using his claws to keep himself under control. Even Mason, the level headed youth that he usually was, had his fangs out, and bared them at Mr. Whittemore's slightest twitch, snarling him into a petty submission.

Unsurprising, Peter and Deucalion were seated quietly off in a corner of the room. Peter seemed embroiled in a phone call, Derek barely able to make out words from his father's vicious words. From all accounts, however, it appeared as though he were on a manhunt of some kind.

Yet, the moment Derek shut the door behind his family, they all turned to meet Derek's burning red gaze.

"Have you heard what those assholes did to him, Derek?!" Erica was off the couch and in Derek's business like a bullet. She pointed at Mr. Whittemore, snarling in his direction. "They cursed their child and tried to force him to be a human! Give me the goddamn word, and I'll track that cowardly
bitch down and rip out her throat! Then I'll take the old piece of shit over there, and throw him off a cliff! Then, I'll find a necromancer, have them brought back as zombies, and burn them to ashes!" Her rage bubbled, spreading throughout the house in a chorus of reciprocating growls.

Derek put a reassuring arm on Erica, turning to look at his sons. Both were cowering behind Stiles, shaking from Erica's murderous scent. Erica caught their frightened expressions, and reeled it back in, biting down on her lip.

"Is what I've heard from Erica, on the radio, and what Stiles told me, right? Your parents turned you into... A Human?" Derek asked, brushing past Erica and moving straight to Jackson's side. He slid down next to Jackson, looking directly into his partner's gaze.

A brief pause later, and Jackson nodded. "Yeah. The news exaggerated a bit from what I could hear, they don't even know the full story, but... Yeah."

Derek bit back a growl, as Scott and Isaac timidly approached Jackson. They could each smell the plethora of vile emotions, and both whined as they instinctively hugged Jackson's legs. Neither probably had any idea what was going on, but felt and smelt that one of their own was in pain. They were doing what any pack member would do for another.

"Hey, come on little guys... There's nothing to be sad about." Jackson plastered on a smile, yanking them both up and into his lap. The pups buried themselves in Jackson's chest, still whining on Jax's behalf. "Today's a happy day."

"I'm proud of you, Jackson." Stiles stepped forward, off to the side of the couch, and leaning up against the wall. "So... Are you going to let Derek help you? He can end all of this once and for all."

"Me?" Derek shot Stiles an inquisitive look. He then turned immediately back to Jackson.

The rest of the pack, too, looked immediately to Jackson for answers.

Still in the midst of calming down Scott and Isaac, Jackson took a moment before glancing up to face the rest of his pack. "I've done a lot of the prep work, but... Breaking the curse, once and for all, requires an Alpha to..." He shook his head. "Listen, you've got enough stuff on your plate right now. I'm not going anywhere, so let's not worry about this right now. We can deal with the curse later. I didn't even mean for all of this get out immediately, but my mother came over and I couldn't-"

"You're insane." Derek flashed his eyes, cutting Jackson off mid sentence. He grasped Jackson's shoulder. "If I can fix this, today, then I'm doing it, today. Jax, you've been tortured for over twenty years! Robbed of a basic right. I'm not letting that go on for a minute longer."

Murmurs of agreement spread throughout the home. Liam, especially, gave a resounding roar of support.

Dropping his head, Jackson kept his eyes focused on the pups in his lap. He put his arms around them, slowly relaxing at their reassuring scent, and the chorus of support around him. "I've only shifted once, Derek, and I was a little kid. There's no guarantee that I'll have any control. Do you really want a wild member of your pack out in public? My whole family is in politics, Derek, and I know all it takes is one scandal to-"

"I don't care about image. If I cared about image, I would have never made it to WERE, because all anyone told me my entire life is that the bastard offspring of an unmated couple could never amount
to anything." Derek let his claws peek out from his nails, gently scraping against Jackson's shoulder, attempting to show his support.

Jackson reacted, as a baby pair of fangs popped from his mouth. His ears, more elf-like than wolf-like, began to take shape. Claws smaller than Scott and Isaac appeared. The wolf struggled to shift in reaction to his Alpha, but strained at crossing the final threshold.

The pups, too, shifted, without fully realizing.

"You're a wolf!" Scott said, eyes wide as he reached up and planted his hands on Jackson's face.

Isaac, too, reached up, and felt the side of Jackson's ears. His glare became dark, as the pup's lips pouted. He turned around, spotting Mr. Whittemore in the corner. For the first time since Derek had adopted his son, Isaac growled. The pup flashed menacing fangs and a deadly glare at the man's way, reading and waiting to pounce and rip the Mayor to shreds.

Jackson put his hand on their heads, ruffling their hair and gaining their attention once more. Isaac stopped growling, and Scott giggled. Jackson tried to grin, showing off his malformed wolf teeth. "Yeah... Sorry I never told you guys, but... It's a long story."

Pulling away from Jackson's shoulder, Derek stood up. He held his hand out to Jackson. "Come on, you and I are going to do whatever has to be done."

Pausing, Jackson gave each of the pups one final hug, before handing them over to Boyd. He glanced around the pack, before taking Derek’s hand. “Let’s do this elsewhere. I’d rather nobody else see, if you’re okay with that.”

“Why? What’s going to happen?” Erica folded her arms, staring intently at Jackson.

Deucalion stood from his seat, crossing the room and stopping beside Derek and Jackson. “A powerful curse requires a great deal of power to remove it. I’m sure Jackson would prefer you all not witness him in pain. Or… Derek being the one to put Jackson in such pain.”

The Pack didn’t argue Deucalion’s point. A few faces dropped, and Derek felt his heart skip a beat.

“Pain? What kind of pain?”

Wordlessly, Derek followed along behind Jackson, off into the farthest room in the back of the home.

Jackson shut his bedroom door, rummaging around his sparse, sleek furnishings. He closed the curtains to his windows, and took a deep breath as he stripped his bed of its sheets, laying them out like a tarp on the fluffy white carpeting.

“Jax, why didn’t you tell me about this? I could have helped you, ages ago!” Derek asked, standing off to the side as Jackson continued to to drape his carpeting with as much material as he could manage.

Shaking his head, Jackson sighed, the man’s gaze far off into space. “I was scared. Breaking the curse requires an Alpha that accepts me, and for me to trust the Alpha in turn. When we first met… I was a greenhorn that nobody wanted on the force. Up until you adopted Isaac… I didn’t even really know what kind of man you were, let alone what kind of Alpha you were. You said it yourself at the Pack Assembly… You were pretty much a lone wolf.”
Derek flinched, glancing away. What would he have done if Jackson had approached him with all of this, before they’d created a pack? Given his old ways… He’d probably have dumped Jackson in Laura’s lap, letting his older sister deal with the problem, rather than take any responsibility himself.

“Don’t beat yourself up. I wasn’t ready to come out until just recently. Hell… Even now, I wonder if I made the right choice. I mean, my mother’s running from the National Alpha, my father’s being held in custody, and… Now I’ve pretty much made your transition to County Alpha that much harder.” Jackson dropped his head, standing in the middle of his plethora of blankets, quilts, and comforters.

“You made the right choice.” Derek stepped forward, stopping at Jackson’s side. “You want to be a werewolf again, right?”

Jackson chuckled. “That’s… What I asked Santa for every year, up until I stopped believing. Then it became a wish when I blew out birthday candles. Then shooting stars, and… Here recently… It’s all I think about.” He gulped, huddling his arms together for warmth. “I just… I just want to be me.”

“Then let’s do it.” Derek’s eyes shone red, glaring right into Jackson’s gaze. “What needs to be done?”

Falling to his knees, Jackson sat in the middle of his circle of blankets. “I need you to… Shed my blood.” He yanked off his shirt, showing Derek his pale, frail skin. “Claw through the cursed mark, all the way through, breaking the lines. The claws of an Alpha that claims me as their own are the only thing that can pierce it.”

Derek felt ice rush through his veins. He looked down at his hands, where massive claws began to protrude from them. The one and only weapon he’d never used in his life as a means of violence. More deadly than a gun, and more powerful than anything else in his arsenal. "Jackson, the wounds you’d suffer from an Alpha..."

“Yeah, it’s gonna scar for life, and hurt like hell. Werewolves can barely survive an Alpha’s attack, so… I guess that’s the curse’s point.” Jackson chuckled, worry clouding through his eyes, as a cold sweat dripped down his body. “Though, once you cleave off the mark, Deaton says I’ll be a full werewolf again, instantly. I won’t die, because it’ll heal... Very slowly.”

“Good God… He’s asking me to…” Derek wavered, hands shaking at the prospect of having to cleave into Jackson. The poor man had been through enough, was this actually necessary? What if it didn’t work? What if Jackson bled out? Derek knew his own strength, intimately, and what kind of pain he could deal out.

Sensing his Alpha’s fear, Jackson spun around, attempting a brief smile. "Derek, I trust you. I… I trust that you’re an Alpha who accepts me. I know this is going to work. I know… I know it will.”

“I don’t want to hurt you.” Derek said, glancing away. He brought his hands up, feeling his neck, where the airways had begun to tighten. As if a massive hand were choking the air out of him. He recalled the pain of his childhood, and his promise to never inflict that kind of hell on another living creature.

“It’ll hurt a lot worse if I have to stay like this the rest of my life.” Jackson muttered, slamming his eyes shut. “What you do to me today, is nothing compared to what I felt when I was a kid. When I woke up and felt every single cut… Burning into me.” He turned back around, bending over once more to expose his entire back to Derek. “One last time, and this hell is over with. Please, Derek,
They sat in mutual silence. For what seemed like an eternity, Derek stood, frozen in a mixture of fear and uncertainty. He eventually stepped forward, bringing his hand down on Jackson’s.

Without his shirt on, Derek could see that the curse had once taken up almost all of Jackson’s back. Deep indentations that had scarred ridges into the man’s skin, deep enough to fill. Now, however, only a few black markings remained, no larger than a dinner plate.

"How deep do I have to go?" Derek asked, placing his hand over the cursed marking. His hand barely fit into it, meaning a single swipe would be all that was necessary.

Jackson gulped, shivering in place under Derek’s touch. "Into the muscle. The ink goes down that deep. Try not to hit bone."

As a trained member of WERE, Derek knew exactly how deep to go. How deep for a passing swipe to injury, a deeper swipe to incapacitate entirely, and the deepest depth, to ensure a kill. Into the muscle would hurt like hell, and would likely end in a kill against a human.

Ages seemed to pass, with Derek holding his hand in place on Jackson’s back. He planned each and every aspect of the “attack”: Jackson’s heartbeat, the length of Derek’s claws, the thickness of Jackson’s skin, the temperature of the room, everything.

Finally, Derek nodded, bringing back his hand. “Jackson, I’m going to count to three. On three, I’m going to claw you. Take in some deep breaths, and try not to flinch.”

“Got it.” Jackson immediately tensed up, sucking in air and shivering under Derek’s touch.

“One… Two…” Not waiting for “Three”, Derek caught the moment when Jackson eased, if only for a second. Derek brought his claws down, digging deep into Jackson's back in a single, swift movement. Blood and a mixture of disgusting black goop splattered throughout the room, covering Derek's face, and all over the walls of the room.

The accompanying scream rang through Derek's head, and he paled, watching Jackson collapse to the ground, writhing in agony. The Deputy continued to scream in pain, as blood and the disgusting black goop ran down his back in droves, pooling around him on the stripped sheets.

Derek bent down to Jackson’s level, planting his hand on the man’s back, above the wound. He drew as much pain as he could, watching more blobs of black leak out of Jackson’s back. The final dark markings faded from Jackson, washed away by the blood. An overwhelming stench slowly evaporated into the air, replaced by a gentler, sweet scent of wilderness.

Tears rolled down Jackson’s face, the young man forcing back sobs, screaming into the sheets beneath him, and holding onto Derek. He wasn’t able to form a proper sentence, sputtering in agony, and shivering from the blood loss. The man paled, white as snow.

“Jackson? Talk to me… Come on, Jax, I need to hear you!” Derek gently slapped at Jackson’s face, watching the man’s gaze go vacant.

“Der… Something’s…” Jackson managed to say, barely above a whisper.

It was after Jackson’s words that Derek saw the steam begin to billow out of the wounds. Little by little, the deep gashes were attempting to mend themselves.

The flow of blood came to little more than a trickle, and the intricate curves and lines that had made
up the curse’s markings began to melt away, replaced by fresh skin. Jackson’s body tightened all over, pale skin regaining its former luster, and thicker than his human skin had been before.

Relief flooded Derek, and he dug his hands deeper into Jackson’s muscle. Black veins grew larger in Derek’s arm, being able to draw more paint out of someone of his own species.

“D… Der…. Derek….” Jackson sputtered out, glancing up and sucking in as much air as his lungs could muster. The wolf’s eyes broke through the curse, shimmering a soft gold all around his iris. His ears, fangs, and claws came out once more, no longer bound by the curse. Long, lithe claws. Sharp, pointed ears. Full, pearly white fangs.

The screams were replaced by a deep, vibrating roar that shook the foundation of Jackson’s home.

Smiling, Derek continued to draw away the pain from Jackson, speeding up the slow process of healing from an Alpha’s attack. He pulled Jackson closer, so the Beta could rest on Derek’s lap. The blood had stopped altogether, and Derek watched the deep marks slowly patch themselves together. Yet, the skin where Derek had attacked was far paler than they should have been, already failing to heal the scar.

Jackson’s roars ceased, to a soft, low growl. He collapsed into Derek’s chest, eyes wide and chest expanding in an easy rhythm.

“Jax? You back with me?” Derek asked, watching his pack member’s every movement. He waited for any sign of violence, a loss of control, anything. If it came to it, he could knock the wolf out.

Yet, no such sign ever came.

Jackson raised his hands up, staring at them intently, and dropping his jaw in awe. His ears twitched, and a slow laugh left his throat. “I can hear everything, Derek. Holy shit, like… I can hear EVERYTHING. The pack in my living room… Your heartbeat, I… I can hear….” The laughter increased, the man’s smile beaming as bright as the sun itself. “God… God damn, I can… I can see. I can fucking see my own hands!”

“See?” Derek asked, smiling for Jackson’s happiness, but cocking an eyebrow in confusion.

Chuckling, Jackson shifted off of Derek’s lap, stumbling forward to stand on his own (clawed) feet. He looked over his claws, down to his feet, and rushed to the nearest mirror. He almost melted at the sight of his glowing, golden eyes, soon accompanied by a set of warm tears. “The contacts weren’t just for show. My vision was absolute shit. Even with them on, everything was a blur. Hell, I was deaf, too. I probably should not have ever been issued a driver’s license.”

Derek wiped his face of the blood, using Jackson’s now ruined sheets. He moved to Jackson’s side, still watching every twitch and turn of the wolf’s body. “How are you feeling?”

The wolf patted around his body. Ears, fangs, claws, arms, legs, stopping at his stomach. “There’s something here, now…” Jackson’s hands hovered over his abdomen, squeezing the defined abs that continued to tighten, amplifying his already lean build into something stronger. “Like… Like another heart? Does that make sense? Like… Like something… Alive.”

Derek chuckled. He put a hand on Jackson’s shoulder, squeezing. “That would be your instinct. Like they say, trust your “gut”.”

“Instinct?” Jackson wracked his brain, as something finally hit him. “Oh! So that’s what the book meant…” He turned to Derek, flushing. “So… That’s the thing that’s gonna hurt like hell if I ignore it.”
“Not so much “hurt”’’ Derek corrected, hovering over his own stomach. “It’ll just riddle you with anxiety until you answer it, or overcome it. Don’t worry about it so much. The Pack will help you deal with it.”

Nodding, Jackson licked his lips, still staring at his new form in the mirror. He took a deep breath, shutting his eyes. Little by little, he returned to his human form. Aside from the new set of pale scars still healing on his back, not much had changed for the deputy. He opened his eyes again, shaking his head in disbelief. “How can I have control like this? Deaton said it would take weeks to get it under wraps.”

Derek chuckled. Emissaries, bless their hearts, were an all encompassing base of incredible knowledge. Yet, the knew next to nothing about the strength of one’s will. “Jax, the difference between our human selves, and our inner beast in an anchor. Something that keeps us from losing our minds and giving in to our baser instincts and becoming feral.”

“Yeah… Deaton said that, too…” Jackson shook his head, flickering his head, and attempting to force his eyes to glow. He succeeded, with ease, turning to Derek, who flashed his own red eyes to answer. “What’s mine?”

“What are you thinking about, right now?” Derek moved the two of them to the edge of Jackson’s bed. They sat next to each other, and Derek allowed Jackson to rub his shoulder up against him and scent his Alpha unknowingly.

Jackson brought his hands together, dropping his head. His eyes fell, against a gentle smile. “I’m thinking about… How everyone came for me, today. I… I never even called anyone.” Jackson shook his head, in disbelief. “Erica and Boyd just let themselves in. I think Boyd picked the lock. Anyway, after I told them everything… They were crying. For me. I don’t think Erica let me go for a good half hour…” Gentle tears rolled down his face, illuminated by the gold glow of his eyes.

Derek felt Jackson’s scent shift. Gone was the putrid stench of bad cologne, and the soft smell of honey permeated the region. The sweetest honey that Derek had ever smelt, fragrant and wild.

Laughing, Jackson practically lit up the room with his smile. “Then Liam and Mason’s family got here. Their parents assured me everything would be alright, that Deucalion was on his way with Alpha Peter, and that everything would be squared away. Liam and Mason, they… They kept trying to tell me, over and over again, that everything would be alright. That they’d help me get better. They’d make all this right. Liam offered to break every window in my mom’s house.”

“You’re Liam’s favorite, you know that, right?” Derek said, chuckling as he recalled how Liam followed Jackson around everywhere since the pack merger was announced. All the two talked about was baseball, and Jackson spent pretty much all of his free time helping the teen with his batting skill. He knew their bond would only grow stronger with Jackson’s curse gone.

“I love that little dork… He and Mason are the little brothers I never got to have.” Jackson answered, grinning right back at Derek. He stood up, striding across the room and peering outside his side window. A reporter found themselves surged with electricity as they tried to cross Kira’s barrier, smoke billowing from their ruined shoes. “Then, the Department… They got here right before the circus outside formed around my house. They roped everything off, and Kira electrified my front lawn. The Sheriff came in, gave me a big hug, and told me not to worry about work, because he’d have me covered until this all blew over. Said that… Nobody was coming in here unless I wanted them in. Nobody fucked with his Deputies.”

Derek laughed. “Looks like you finally got the Old Man on your side.”
“Well, this week anyway.” Jackson smirked, shutting the blinds behind him. “Anyway, after that fiasco, Peter came in, dragging my father in by his ears. He shoved him in a corner, and told me that my mom had already ran out of the County. The National Alpha swore to find her, and… Make her pay for everything she did to me.” His smile faded, replaced by a solemn grimace. “My dad… apologized. He’s already stepped down as mayor, you know. Said that he didn’t deserve to run this town, when he couldn’t even stand up and protect his own son. Dad gave Peter everything he needed to track down my mom, and… Accepts whatever punishment he’s going to get.”

Derek growled. He hadn’t even thought about Mr. and Mrs. Whittemore yet. Since they were humans, Derek wouldn’t have any authority over them. Peter had more sway, as the National Alpha, but Derek’s influence was minimal. He’d get with Peter on a suitable punishment later, consulting with Deucalion on his options. Hopefully, it could involve bulldozers, and their overpriced mansion being retrofitted into a public building.

Jackson strolled back to Derek, plopping beside the man once more. “Then you got here. The pups were trying to soothe me, and you… Despite everything going on in your life, you… You broke the curse. You stayed and healed me through it. Helped me through my first shift in twenty years, and now you’re listening to me blabber on like I’m one of the Gossip Dorks bitching about the Soap Operas.” He laughed, shaking his head. “I’m thinking… That I’ve got a family. For the first time in my life, I actually have people that love me and want me to be happy.”

“We do.” Derek wrapped his arm around Jackson’s shoulder, bringing the man closer to his side. He flashed his eyes, attempting to radiate a calm, confident aura. “I’m your Alpha, and we’re your pack. That’s what we do for each other. All of us.”

Eyes glowing in response to his Alpha’s aura, Jackson nodded confidently.

Derek grinned. “We’re your anchor, and we’ll always have your back. Forever.”

Jackson smirked, nodding in agreement. “I’ve got all your backs, too. After everything that you’ve all done for me…” Falling off the bed, Jackson bent down on one knee, bowing before Derek. “…if you’d have me, I’d like… I’d like to be your Beta. I read in a book that Betas are the Pack’s protectors, and dedicate their life to protecting the pack, and serve as the Alpha’s guard. I’m not useful right now, but… I’ll do whatever I have to do to be useful.” He bared his neck to Derek.

Pausing, Derek watched in awe. All those months ago, he would have never imagined the mayor’s spoiled brat of a son… Would have ever bent his knee to anyone. Yet, Derek heard Jackson’s word, and his heart. Neither lied.

“I accept.” Derek reached down, clamping his claws onto Jackson’s neck. His Beta dropped his head again, smiling eagerly. “I’ll run you through the ringer. Teach you how to be my replacement on the force. You already went through the police force, so I’m sure you can handle anything.”

Jackson smirked, standing up to face Derek head-on once more. “I’ve got big shoes to fill. I’ll have to ass kiss the old man to get him to look at me like he looks at you.”

Derek rolled his eyes, slugging Jackson on the shoulder as he drug his Beta behind him. “Come on, the pack is waiting up front to see you. While I don’t think you’re going to care much anymore, say goodbye to your personal space.”

They stopped in unison, at the mirror just before the door to Jackson’s bedroom. It was readily apparent that they were both covered in blood. Derek, looking like a serial killer, and Jackson looking like a stabbing victim. Jackson’s back continued to slowly heal, minor holes still protruded in the cleaved marks.
“How about I shower off and change first? Don’t want to scar the pups and the teens for life. Stiles would probably pass out too, the baby.” Jackson didn’t bother waiting for approval, face dropping as he saw the blood coating his walls, and bleeding through his sheets. “I… I didn’t think this through very well.”

Derek snorted. “Can I borrow a washrag? You bled all over me.”

“Well, excuse me! Next time I’ll aim!” Jackson faux-fumed, stomping off to his bathroom. Before slamming the door shut, he threw a soaking wet rag at Derek’s head.

Stopping next to a mirror, Derek wiped off as much blood from his face and shirt as he could manage. “Like hell am I doing this shit again! You get ONE near death experience from me, thank you very much.” Realizing his shirt was a lost cause, he rummaged through Jackson’s closet, grabbing the largest size he could find. “I’m stealing your clothes, by the way! You owe me a shirt!”

The fabric ripped before Derek even had the shirt over his chest.

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Deucalion excused himself from the Hale Pack festivities, once he was sure that Jackson had properly removed the remains of his curse. As an outsider, he didn’t belong in the crowd of happy tears, as the pack scented and welcomed Jackson back into their fold, as a full fledged werewolf. He dismissed the press, and left the matter of Mr. and Mrs. Whittemore to Alpha Peter.

Striding through his home, Deucalion hobbled to his study, opening the door and recoiling at the vile, horrific scent. Like ash, gunpowder, and spice, hitting his nose all at once.

“Busy day, Uncle? I hear some human scum used the curse of the eclipse. Honestly, is there anything those scum won’t do to us?”

The woman’s words shot through the air, like ice. Harsh, and unrelenting.

In his mind, Deucalion pictured a small girl, barely 5, with cascading black hair, a playful set of green eyes, and her precious pink bunny rabbit that she took everywhere with her. The rambunctious little girl that followed Jackie and Claudia around, like they were her big sisters, and cried for a month after Claudia’s death.

“The matter has been taken care of, Kali.” Duke stepped forward, shutting the door behind him. “Peter Hale has the situation under control. Celia Whittemore was taken into custody just east of the Nevada border. Peter will be working directly with the State Attorneys, and ensuring the case is handled properly.” Duke crossed the room, taking a seat across from Kali Reed, the Tyrant of the South. Slayer of Alphas, and conqueror of humans. A force powerful enough to generate fear in the National Alpha. Yet, despite his niece’s many sins, Deucalion still pictured her in pigtails, the sweet and adorable little pup she’d been. He thanked the heavens above that he’d lost his sight before he could see what she’d turned herself into.

“Hmm… Good.” Duke heard her legs crossing themselves, while she swirled a drink in her hand. “You know, violence against werewolves is met with the death penalty in my territory. A shame the old bag Satomi did away with that. Nothing stops a human from trying to get uppity than imagining my claws ripping into their throats.”
A chill ran down Duke’s spine. He took a deep breath, attempting to ease back into his seat. “You’re early, Kali. The summit isn’t for another week.”

Kali chuckled. A soulless, painful laugh. “Oh, I thought I’d get here early. Cousin Brandon gave me a ring and let me know that you’ve completely lost your mind and balls. Thought I’d come and make for certain that the Tyrant of the West was completely dead.”

Duke allowed a gentle smile cross his face. “I knew they’d betray me, eventually. I was right to neuter their power early.” He chuckled, shaking his head. “Oh? So I suppose you know, already, then.”

“Giving up the County Seat… To an outsider.” Kali clicked her tongue, setting her glass to the side. He heard his niece standing up, clopping a pair of heavy heels to his side. “A werewolf who’s mated to a human, and is raising a runt and Stilinski’s halfling. An Alpha who would bend over for a human.”

“I wasn’t aware you cared for small town politics.” Duke countered, folding his arms. He glanced up, where he could hear Kali’s ragged breath.

“I don’t give a fuck about the County Alpha. You can let whoever you want run this shitstain of a town.” Kali slammed her hand onto Duke’s face, digging her claws into him. Blood dripped down Duke’s face from the cuts. “What I care about… Is our family’s legacy dying out. Like hell am I could to let Grandpa’s Aura go to anyone YOU would pick.”

Duke felt Kali’s Aura ripping through him, digging into his eyes and trying to overwhelm him. The pressure around his eyeballs shot pain through his body.

“I’m taking your Aura, and I’m going to run this pack. I’ll take them with me, and let them know what it’s like to have a REAL Alpha! With the Aura’s you’ve taken in your youth, added to mine, not even the National Alpha can stop me. I’m going to do what you failed to do! I’m-” Kali hitched her breath. She removed her claws from Duke, ripping away his bandages.

Duke smiled, opening his eyes. The grey, lifeless orbs would never glow red again, as long as he lived. “Looking for something?”

Kali’s hand wrapped around Duke’s neck. “Where is it?! Who’d you choose!? Who has your power?!”

“I can say with absolute honesty…” Duke paused, shutting his eyes again. He pictured another little girl, with dark black hair, a winning smile, that loved everything about life, and shared Scott’s lovely eyes. “I have no idea where she is.”

Releasing her uncle, Kali scoffed, whipping her hair away. “Her, huh? I’d heard she’d turned tail and ran off.” She spat on Duke's face. "Then you’re nothing to me but a waste of time. Doddering old fool.” She stomped away, taking the last swig of her drink, before smashing it into the floor. “I hope you’re happy that you’ve destroyed your pack, leaving it in that bitch's hands. Good luck telling the elders about this, and the rest of your family that you’ve left them nothing.”

Duke sighed, falling back against the head of his chair. He took a deep breath, clutching a hand over his chest. Air came easier to him, and his heart, for what it was worth, seemed to function far better than it had before. Without his Aura, Duke felt his body begin to finally heal. “Claudia and Jackie would hate to see you like this.”

Kali stopped at the edge of his door. “Claudia’s dead. Jackie's dead. They can’t see anything
anymore, so why the fuck do I care?” She slammed the door, leaving it hanging barely off its hinges.
"No, ma'am, Greg cannot take AP Biology... Because he's a Freshman... No, Ma'am, him being "sharp" isn't enough to have me ignore the prerequisite courses... Neither will tears... Or calling me that..."

"Sorry, but I'm afraid that Beacon Hills doesn't offer Latin. We've got French and Spanish. Why? Well, it's a dead language, sir. No, we haven't offered that course for a very long time. I'm a what? Sir, I'm not a communist puppet."

"Registration was last Spring. Jimmy should have signed up then if he wanted to be in College Chemistry, we've already booked the entire course with the local university, and there's no more room available... No, ma'am, this is not the end of your child's future."

"I am not teaching you the fart bomb recipe, quit calling me! The Terror is dead, get over it!"

Stiles slammed his office phone down, letting out a strained weep as he slunk down in his rolling chair. Glancing around him, Stiles' tears only grew in angry volume.

Two days before classes started for the high school, and only now did the Administration take a look at the retiring counselor's work on the class scheduling. 19 overbooked classes, 100 people signed up for choir (most of which who hadn't even selected it as a class), and the Honors teachers were threatening to revolt at their class loads. A classic case of "fuck it, this isn't my job anymore, I'll stick everyone in random spots and let the next sap sort it out".

Which left their current counselor, the poor sap in question, to clean up the previous man's mess.

Collapsing on the stack of fifty more student schedules to revise, Stiles huffed, glancing out the open window to his office.

Derek, Jackson, and the pups were off in the Hale land, doing some werewolf bonding, and having fun in the woods on a camping trip. Erica and Boyd had the day off, letting their staff handle the bar on their own for the first time in years. Even his father and Melissa were taking the week off, having "fun" on the beach, and a getaway that Stiles knew was his dad's excuse to finally pop the question. Among other things he chose not to picture.

"To be fair, I did have an entire three months without working after graduation. I shouldn't complain." Stiles lifted himself up, stretching out into the air. Though, as he looked around his sizable office, gloom trickled down his spine.

Flyers, brochures, sex ed banners, and the like, all from the 1970s had been dumped in his office out of the previous counselor's storage room. Student files were in an abhorrent, ancient filing mess, and there were enough yearbooks stacked everywhere to kill someone if they were to fall. His entire first semester would be spent digging himself out of paperwork hell and getting the school into the 21st century.

Sighing, Stiles fell back into his chair, putting his attention back to the online scheduling system he'd bought with his yearly budget. His fingers sped across the keyboard, keying in the next stack of student schedules, with his deadline fast approaching to get the mess fixed.

"No, Principal Finstock, it's fine! Paper and pen is a wonderful way to organize a school of a
thousand students! No, there couldn't possibly be any repercussions of that! Said no sane person EVER!" Stiles spat, already onto this fifth schedule while his forehead twitched.

As Stiles continued to work, Liam and Mason wandered back inside his office, sweat pouring off their bodies. They each stopped to take a long gulp of water from Stiles' portable fridge. Droplets trickled down their neck, and over a predominant triskelion, one on Liam's right side, and another on Mason's left side. With their tank tops on, a blank slab of skin sat where had once been Duke’s pack mark.

Panting, Liam slammed his water down on a side table. "Alright, Stiles... Where's the next load of crap to toss?"

"I'd guess these?" Masons kicked a bulky box, full of AOL floppy disks, and pamphlets on "chat room dangers".

Stiles grinned, bowing once more to his favorites. The teens had sacrificed their last Friday before school started to help Stiles clean out his dump of an office, and turn it into something presentable by Monday morning. They'd spent the entire morning dumping garbage, grabbing furniture, and hauling the stuff that Stiles wouldn't have been able to carry if he dared to try.

"Have I mentioned you two are my favorites?" Stiles winked, waving Liam off. "Yeah, just go dump that internet stuff in the dumpster. Or bury them with the ET cartridges."

"The what?" Both teens asked in unison.

Stiles paled, rubbing his forehead. "Damn... I'm starting to date myself." He went back to his work, pretending he wasn't a few birthdays away from 30. "Toss the VHS tapes too."

Liam hurled three large boxes on his shoulders, while Mason stacked six or seven on a dolly, both teens carrying off another huge chunk of Stiles' mess away.

Stiles toiled away on his computer for hours, finishing up the last of the scheduling conflicts as Liam and Mason finished up their janitorial duties. However, just before Stiles could finally call it a day, outlandish laughter echoed in the hallways of Beacon High.

Cocking an eyebrow, Stiles locked his computer as the laughter grew louder and louder, before it finally stopped just outside of his office. With little ceremony, Danny, Ethan, Aiden, a strange woman, and a young boy barged into Stiles' office.

"Quit laughing, Danny! This isn’t funny! Take this seriously, will you!?” Ethan spat, slapping the back of his husband’s head.

Still rumbling with laughter, Danny shook his head, plopping down in front of Stiles, and shaking his head. “Oh, come on, Ethan. It’s pretty funny, seeing those old coots get what’s coming to them!” He turned his attention to Stiles, nodding in respect. “Hey, Stiles, do you know where Derek’s at? We tried the house, but nobody was there. Need to meet with the Alpha, and then you and I are going to have a chat. You will not BELIEVE what’s happened. Seriously, you’re gonna die! I’ve got pictures and everything!”

Ethan and Aiden sighed in unison.

“Derek’s going to be gone for a couple of days. Out in the woods training with Jackson and the pups. They said they’d be back Saturday afternoon.” Stiles answered, folding his arms. He stared at the woman who’d accompanied them both. A sharply dressed brunette, clearly anxious, with a murderous look about her. The boy beside her stood at attention, his wheat brown hair and soft
features betraying what was a very serious demeanor. He tried to place the face, knowing he’d seen the boy somewhere recently. “Sorry… I don’t think we’ve met.”

The woman extended her hand. “Jill Raeken. This is my son, Theo Raeken.”

Stiles grimaced, forcing himself through the handshake with Jill. Brandon Raeken was an asshole Stiles had plenty of run ins with through his life. He had no idea the man had gotten married, and hadn’t even entertained the thought of anyone finding Brandon attractive. The very thought of someone procreating with him was all the more unbelievable.

Danny’s laughter stopped. He paled, slightly. “Uh… Any chance you could get a hold of Derek?”

“Sorry, no cell reception out in the Hale Land. We could probably send a tracker to find him, but… I think they were going pretty deep, so Jackson could go wild.” Stiles exchanged glances with Ethan and Aiden, who also looked a tad more terrified than they had earlier. Jill, especially, looked distraught. “Uh… Who’s our best tracker? I’m guessing this is important?”

“Isaac and Derek are the only ones who can follow a scent for beans. Next best would be Parrish, but… He’s absolute shit at it in the wildlife…” Danny palmed a hand over his face. “Shit… Fucking hell.”

Jill bit her lip. Reaching down, she pulled Theo closer to her. “Mr. Stilinski is the Hale Pack Second. He can help us, can’t he? In the event the Alpha isn’t present, the Second holds the authority of Alpha, right?”

“I am.” Stiles straightened his posture, trying to gauge the situation as best he could.

Danny nodded, gulping. “Well, I was going to come and laugh this up with you, but… I guess we can’t do that now.” Bringing his hands together, Danny dropped his head. “Stiles… Deucalion’s pack has been disbanded. New Alpha’s orders.”

Stiles’ gut dropped. Had he not known Danny better, he’d assume the man was joking. His expression was anything but humorous.

“What?” Stiles stammered out.

Danny nodded. He slunk down in the chair, glancing away. “Yeah…. Duke chose a successor. Whoever it was, they ordered the pack disbanded. Or, at least, they made that pretty clear.” He lifted the sleeve of his shirt, exposing his shoulder.

Where there had once been a rosy pack mark, was now bare skin. Not a trace of ink remained. Which didn’t make sense, given that Danny hadn’t officially transitioned into Derek’s pack yet, still helping Duke through the process.

“Are you kidding me?” Stiles’ jaw dropped. Duke’s pack was one of the oldest in the Country, arguably dating back to the birth of werewolves. To have it disbanded… Impossible.

Aiden shook his head. The man glared bitterly across the room. “They’ve used their authority to order our land be sold, and the house demolished. Duke confirmed it was legit. We have 48 hours to move out. All of us.”

“We’re homeless.” Ethan said, in a much blunter manner. He dropped his head. “We were hoping… Derek could help us. Well, all of us.”

Stiles shot up, nodding immediately. “Of course we’re going to help you. You’re our pack! Or, you
will be soon, enough, anyway!” He put on a soft smile. “You’re family, Ethan. We’d never let you stay homeless! Hell, we’ll divide everyone up in our houses, and we should be able to fit….”

Realization struck Stiles, before anyone could even say it. His stomach fell, as a sickness struck him.

“Stiles… There’s about thirty of us.” Danny mumbled. He fidgeted in his seat, glancing behind him, at Jill. “Actually… There’s a bigger problem.”

Jill nodded, stepping forward. She bowed her head to Stiles. “Many members of our pack… My husband, included… Have chosen to join Alpha Kali’s pack, in order to cling to some stupid sense of honor and stick with the family bloodline. Many of them are eager to join, but… Many of their spouses, children, or others… Aren’t. Not many of us are willing to put our life in that insane woman’s hands, knowing how they operate.”

Stiles’ stomach rolled. Joining Kali’s pack was practically joining a hate group. A well armed, violent hate group, that were constantly at war, in one form or another. One that even the National Alpha had chosen to target. He could understand Jill’s hesitation.

Shaking her head, Jill bent to one knee. “I’ve refused to put myself or my son in that den of evil. Many of us have no desire to follow that woman, but… We’re under severe pressure to follow them.” Glancing up, Jill flashed her golden eyes at Stiles. “I know my husband has wronged you, and your family. I know the wrongs that many of us put you through, but…”

For the first time in Stiles’ life, he watched as a member of Duke’s pack exposed their neck to him. An act of submission. An act of respect. Something he’d never once been offered by them.

“Even if you can’t accept the adults whom you have every reason to hate, please… Please accept my son. Accept our children, who were innocent in all of this. Place them under the County Alpha’s order of protection, and Kali won’t be able to take them. Even she would have to respect the laws outside of her territory.” Tears rolled down Jill’s face. “Don’t let my stupid husband’s mistake damn them all.”

Before Stiles could even process the information, a tiny pair of lungs flared up behind Jill.

“DAD’S NOT STUPID. You're stupid! The Hales are stupid!” Theo screeched.

Jill spun around, panic in her eyes. “Theo, hush! I’m doing what’s best for you!”

Theo shook his head, bearing a pair of sharp fangs. “Dad wants to be strong! He wants me to be strong! He was going to help make me a Beta in Duke’s pack! Then he’d be proud of me! Then I’d be a good werewolf! I HAVE to be a good werewolf! I HAVE TO BE!” The boy’s words were frantic, a mixture of fear and anxiety.

Jill flashed to her son’s side, bending down and gently cupping his face. “Theo… You don’t know what kind of an Alpha that Kali is. You don’t understand what kind of life you’d live! Your father… Your father is going to get you killed, or worse! I’m trying to save you!”

“I don’t care!” Theo spat back, shaking his head furiously. “I want my dad! I don’t want to join the stupid Hales! I don’t want to be in a pack with that Halfling! Dad said it’ll make me weak! That I won’t be a real wolf anymore! That if I played with the stupid weak halfling, I won’t be his son anymore! That I’d be worthless! I HAVE TO BE STRONG!”

Danny, Ethan, and Aiden grimaced.
Stiles, too, looked upon the child in pity. Too many of Duke’s children, grandchildren, and relatives had been forced into that kind of life. Valuing blood, strength, and honor, above all else. Theo was just another victim. Hell, maybe worse, if he was put in Kali’s grasp.

Jill shook, in a heated rage. “Is this what he’s been telling you? When I’m at work… When he’s supposed to be watching you, he’s been…” Claws erupted from her fingernails. “Providing for his lazy, good for nothing, sorry….”

Stiles folded his arms, taking in a deep breath. He focused his entire gaze on Theo. The poor pup, who seemed a few minutes away from a nervous breakdown. “Theo… What’s a halfling?”

Jill and the rest of the adults all glanced at Stiles, clearly confused.

Theo turned to face Stiles, staring past his mother. “Huh?”

Stiles moved around his desk, sitting on the front edge. He smiled. “You said a halfling would make you weak. What’s a halfling? Do they really make you weak?” He laced his words thickly in questions. Specially placed words, inflections, and phrases that wouldn’t give away the impression of a lie to a werewolf. A unique and valuable skill he’d learned in New York.

The boy scrunched his face, glancing from side to side. Theo fidgeted nervously. “It’s a BAD thing. Dad says they’re disgusting and I’m not supposed to be around them.”

“Why’s it bad?” Stiles continued, maintaining a pleasant enough demeanor.

Theo shrugged, as Jill kept staring in between Stiles and her son. “I don’t know. Dad just said it was.”

“Figured as much.” Stiles thought, shaking his head. He bent down to Theo’s level, crouching down next to the boy. He took a deep breath, thoughts racing past his mind before landing on a crapshoot. “Did you know your Uncle Parrish is a halfling?”

“What?” Theo’s eyes went wide, paling in terror. He growled, seconds away from punching Stiles in the face. “No he’s not! Uncle Parrish is strong! He’s not weak! He makes all the fire and stuff go boom! Plus, Uncle Parrish isn’t gross! Dad said halflings are GROSS, and SMELLED, and…” And were BAD!”

“Bingo.” Stiles would have to thank Jordan later for being a good influence in his pack. Though, if Stiles were being fair, Jordan had been everyone’s favorite in the pack when Stiles had been younger. It wasn’t that far of a leap of logic to make that the flaming werewolf would still be “cool”, all those years later.

Feigning surprise, Stiles chuckled. “Well, Theo, a halfling is a werewolf who has one werewolf parent, and another parent of a different species. That’s all it means. Like Parrish, who’s the child of a werewolf and a demon. Does that make him weak or disgusting?”

Theo snarled, folding both arms. “No. Uncle Parrish isn’t gross. He’s cool. Jordan can set himself on fire, or make fireworks with his armpits!”

Stiles nodded. “Well, that’s all a halfling is. I don’t think that necessarily means someone is weak, does it?”

“Then why’d my dad say they are?” Theo spat, still sizing Stiles up, glaring the human up and down.
Taking a deep breath, Stiles merely shrugged. “I don’t know. Maybe he was mistaken, or maybe he just didn’t know what a halfling was. Nothing wrong with that. There’s plenty of things I don’t know, either. Danny over there know how to draw, and I can barely make a stick figure.” He laughed, winking in Danny’s direction.

“He’s really bad. Like, really, really, really bad.” Danny explained, with a wink at Theo.

Theo folded his arms, huffing as he glanced away. “I guess…”

Stiles felt the relief flooding him. “He’s not completely brainwashed yet. There’s still some basic reasoning left in him.” Reaching behind him, Stiles raided the bowl of candy on his desk, yanking the biggest sucker he could find. He presented it to Theo, all smiles. “So… Would being around a pack with a halfling be all that bad? I mean, you’re already in a pack with one, aren’t you? So, nothing would really change.”

“Guess not.” Theo snatched the sucker from Stiles, unwrapping it and sticking it right in his mouth. He didn’t seem all that pleased with the situation, but had calmed down significantly.

Stiles turned to Jill, taking her hand and planting it Theo’s. “Would you listen to your mom, now? I think you’re a strong enough pup to know how to tell when someone’s telling a lie and the truth. Was your mom lying when she was talking about your dad, or about Kali’s pack?”

A flip switched on Theo’s face. An eager, cocky smirk. “No, mom wasn’t lying! I can tell when there’s a lie! I learned that the fastest in the pack! I’m the best at it! I’d know if mom lied! I’d know it!” Theo screeched in Stiles’ face, more eager and full of life than he’d expected out of the serious pup.

Stiles could see it. The hunger for affection, attention, and any kind of love. Desperate, longing, and hysterical. He’d seen that face before. Far too many times in therapy with Isaac.

Yet, while Isaac hid it with tears and shyness, Theo hid it in anger and an overabundance of confidence.

“Well of course you can!” Stiles beamed, slightly over-exaggerated, but necessary. “I bet you can do a lot of really awesome things I can’t do! Me? I can’t tell when people are lying, you know!” Stiles reached over, ruffling the pup’s punked up hair.

Theo melted under Stiles’ hand, a wide smile crossing his entire face, accompanied by a puffed up chest. “I can climb the tallest tree in our yard in three minutes! I can swim across the lake in five! I can do as many push ups as dad tells me to do, AND pull ups on the big kid bars! None of my cousins can do any of that stuff!”

“Oh wow! That’s pretty cool!” Stiles chuckled, listening to the child brag on his numerous accomplishments. He didn’t interrupt, letting the child ramble for a good while.

That is, until Ethan cleared his throat, tapping the top of the man’s desk. “Hey Stiles… I know you’re in the middle of your “thing”, but… We’re still homeless.”

Stiles flinched, patting Theo on the shoulders. “Oh, right! I should take care of that.” He stood up, moving back to his desk. “Well, it goes without saying that the Hale pack is going to protect you. I can’t promise anybody pack status, but we can definitely get an order of protection, that's definitely in my realm of authority. Mrs. Raken, go ahead and let everyone know to get their things packed up and ready to go.”

Without the need for much thought, Stiles realized quickly exactly how to handle the situation. A
gigantic, smug smirk crossed his lips.

“Uh… How are you going to hold all of us?” Danny asked, with a raised eyebrow.

“Leave that to me.” Stiles reached over, grabbing his office phone. His fingers danced across the touchpad in quick succession. After a few rings, he beamed. “Hey, Lydia, it’s Stiles. I could use a huge favor or twelve and all your moving trucks.”

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The Whittemore Estate, as part of the settlement made with Mr. Whittemore for a suspended sentence, had been turned over to Jackson. All the land, money, possessions, cars, and property, became Jackson’s, as the sole heir to the Whittemore family. Who had, in turn, given it fully to the Hale Pack to use as they saw fit. His offering to the pack, as thanks for everything they’d done for him, and for his new family.

While there hadn’t been any immediate plans for the impressive square footage, or sizable fortune that could be made with it, Stiles decided to use it as the ultimate karmic retribution, and one gigantic middle finger to Mrs. Whittemore. At least, in the short run.

A pack of nearly fifty members from Duke’s pack, a few dozen more than the Hale Pack had expected to take in, ran in and out of the home, removing the ostentatious furniture, and replacing it with more family friendly furnishings that Deucalion’s pack brought with them from the County Pack House.

More kids than adults, in reality, ran through the long hallways, chasing and giggling in the biggest game of hide and seek anyone had ever seen. None of the mothers or fathers who’d split from their spouses in the pack disbandment had the heart to tell any of them of what had happened. They’d leave that for another day, to explain the concept of divorce.

All of Friday, Friday night, Saturday, and Saturday afternoon had been spent moving a shit ton of crap into storage buildings, with each family only bringing the barest of necessities with them. Stiles directed most of the traffic as best he could, the Betas handled all the heavy lifting, while Lydia worked her magic to fit all fifty members (divided up by families) into the property. She’d also be handling the matter of rent, to those not a part of the Hale Pack, in order to help facilitate the costs of such a large estate being used.

“Put those beds in the upstairs dining room, we just finished gutting the china cabinet! We’re turning that into a bedroom! Parrish, make sure and add a lock to that room for privacy!”

“No, no, no! All of the Mahealanis are staying on the East wing! Quit sticking their stuff in the guest house! That’s for the Andersons and the Rakens!”

“Careful with the windows! We’re not paying to have them replaced! Again!”

Stiles pushed Danny, Ethan, and Parrish up the spiral set of stairs with the last mattress of the move, while Lydia and Mason followed behind with several sets of luggage. With that, the last family
should have been fully moved in. “Finally….” he muttered, under his breath.

Several of Duke’s wolves passed by Stiles, eyeing him cautiously as they helped carry in another box of Deucalion’s books. They bowed their heads, hiding their faces out of shame. Stiles recognized them as some of the Elder’s children, who’d been part of the group against joining Kali’s pack. They’d begged, on hand and knees, for forgiveness, and apologized to Stiles in the hopes of their children being safe.

Stiles heard more apologies in those two days, than in his entire life combined.

“Go put that in the study on the third story. Duke’s resting in his bedroom, though, so make sure and be quiet when you’re passing. While you’re up there, can you check on if Grandma and Grandpa Mahalani and see if they need anything? They’re worn out from the move.” Stiles pointed upwards, attempting a feigned smile.

Stiles hadn’t forgiven them. Not yet. Too many years of bad feelings couldn’t be forgotten overnight. Though, for the sake of the kids he’d babysat all those years ago, and for Scott’s family, he wouldn’t turn them away. Nobody deserved to be stuck in Kali’s pack, or threatened to be ripped from their home. He knew Derek would feel the same way.

“Yes, Second Hale. T… Thank you.” Off the wolves went, following Stiles’ order and hefting half a dozen boxes up the long staircase.

Glancing down at his clipboard, Stiles ran through his obscenely long list of things to accomplish. A majority of the time crucial tasks were done, but… Making the estate into a livable home would take a lot of time, money, and effort. Things he couldn’t decide on his own, and would need Derek’s input for.

Descending the staircase, Lydia whipped her hair back, tying it off into a ponytail. She huffed, wiping the sweat from her face. “Well, Stiles, how are we looking?”

Yawning, Stiles scratched at the growing bags under his eyes. “Duke’s books are the last things we had on the list to get. Everyone’s moved in, so now it’s just a matter of everyone arranging things to their liking, and the bickering about living space to explode.”

“Nobody’s going to complain, Stiles.” Lydia folded her arms, as she and Stiles moved out of the main hallway, each taking a seat to the side while a group of Duke’s Betas moved several couches into the living area, now a designated pack area. “Not after everything that happened Friday morning… All that fear, and chaos… I don’t think the pack had ever been that scared before in their lives.”

Stiles sat his clipboard to the side, glancing Lydia’s direction. “I haven’t even heard the full story yet. What the hell happened?”

Lydia sighed, dropping her head. “When everyone woke up Friday morning… Everyone’s pack mark was gone. All of them, and not just us that were leaving.” She looked to her own shoulder, tracing the emerald green triskelion she’d picked out for herself. “Everyone ran into Duke’s study, where Danny, Duke’s guard, and Jordan had to keep a horde of angry werewolves from getting anywhere near Duke.”

“Was anyone hurt?!” Stiles asked, eyes wide in fear.

Lydia shook her head. “No, Danny kept everyone’s heads cool.” A short smirk crossed her face. “That’s when Duke announced he’d picked a successor. Wouldn’t tell us who it was, but… Said
that the new Alpha decided that our pack had no value to modern society, and that would be better off being disbanded. Said we were all free to join any pack we saw fit, or live on our own. The new Alpha wouldn't stop anyone from taking their money out of the pack fund, and wouldn't blackball anyone.” Lydia laughed, pulling her legs up and sitting her chin down on her knees. “The Elders… Were furious. They were screaming about not being consulted about this decision, and ordered the new Alpha be presented to them. To which Duke merely said… That there was no need, since there was no pack anymore, and none of them had an Alpha anymore.”

Stiles watched as a line of kids ran in from the outside, divebombed into a box of toys that had been left out, before retrieving a football.

“Come on! My daddy said that Elder Jared’s not the boss anymore! We can play football all day long!”

“We won’t get in trouble for not training?”

“Nuh uh! Mommy said that Mr. Stiles and Alpha Derek are the bosses now! They let Scotty and Isaac play as much as he wants!”

“That’s so cool! How come they couldn’t be the bosses before? Mr. Stiles is the coolest!”

Lydia put a hand on Stiles’ shoulder, gripping it tightly as they both chuckled in unison. “I think… When Duke said that there wasn’t a pack anymore… Everyone realized what that really meant”

“No more Elders. No more hierarchy. No more power. No more pack fund. Everyone was just a regular citizen.” Stiles nodded, really wishing he’d been there for that moment, and that moment alone. To see that moment when the despots realized that they weren’t any better than Joe Schmoe down the street.

Lydia nodded. She smiled, watching as the older pups tossed a football out on the front lawn of the Whittemore Estate. Though, the smile quickly replaced itself with a solemn expression. “That’s when the divide happened. Brandon Raken claimed he’d already been in touch with Kali Reed. More than I care to admit followed Brandon out of the home in that exact moment, while others argued violently with their spouse, some breaking down and sobbing hysterically at their options. Homelessness, or Kali Reed. Neither were a good option.”

Suddenly, Stiles wasn’t sure if he’d wanted to be a fly on the wall for that moment. He saw Lydia’s distraught gaze, and realized how somber the adults had been all weekend. Suddenly, it made sense. “Were there a lot like Jill?”

“Yeah. I wouldn’t be surprised if all of their bonds of mating were broken in the next couple of weeks.” Lydia shook her head, planting her hands over her lower abdomen. “I don’t know how anyone could place the idea of pride and honor over their own children. Or want a life with Kali Reed for the pups. Who.. Who could actually think that was best?”

Stiles shrugged. He honestly didn’t know. Years of studying the mind, and there were still plenty of things he didn’t know. Why people made the choices they did. Why people valued certain things over other things. Those were the thoughts that kept him up at night, and inspired him to continue studying, even past his graduation.
“I’m announcing my glorious return!” Erica cried out, breaking Stiles and Lydia out of their conversation.

Glancing up, Stiles spotted Erica and Boyd traipse through the front door. In each of Erica’s hands were a huge stack of pizza boxes. Boyd hefted several grocery bags, right behind her.

“I come bearing pizzas! Aunty Erica’s treat! Because I’m everyone’s favorite, always and forever!” Erica was soon followed by an army of pups, cheering the delivery of pizza and reappearance of their favorite pack Beta. In only a few days, Erica had the pups wrapped around her finger.

“I have soda and dessert.” Boyd added, to an equal amount of cheer.

Lydia and Stiles exchanged a brief smile.

“Well, I guess we don’t have to worry about it anymore. Thanks to you.” Lydia pressed a short kiss on Stiles’ forehead, helping him up from the floor. “Come on, Stiles. If we don’t eat fast, the pups are going to eat it all up. Trust me, I learned that the hard way more times than I are to admit.”

Following after the group to the kitchen, Stiles waited patiently at the back of the line, while Erica and Boyd served dinner to the rest of the group, kids first.

Except for one.

“Mr. Stiles?” Theo yanked on the human’s arm, out of the kitchen, and into the main hallway one more. He nearly pulled the human’s arm out of socket.

Cringing at the pain, Stiles massaged his shoulder, following after Theo. “Hey there, little man! What’s going on?” He stole back his hand.

Theo folded his arms, cocking an eyebrow to the central living area, where kids were already digging into their plates of food. “Why did we get food? We didn’t do anything to earn food. I’m not eating until Mom, or Dad, or you tell me it’s okay.”

The pain in Stiles’ arm faded, replaced by an icy chill in his stomach. “What did you have to do to earn food in your home?”

Theo shrugged, glancing away. “Dad would always tell me different stuff. Like running around the house a couple of times, or doing push ups, or pull ups, or… Other stuff. Once Dad was happy, I could eat.”

Stiles’ hand balled into a fist. The next chance he found, Brandon Raken would go flying.

“...and why are they playing with toys? Only babies and weak wolves play with toys. I haven’t played with toys since my last birthday, because I’m not a baby! Dad said so!” Theo puffed his chest out, proud of the statement.

“I’ll send him to hell myself.” Stiles bent down to Theo’s level, sitting cross legged in front of the pup. “Did your father tell you that?”

Theo nodded, rolling his eyes as though Stiles were the dumbest person on the planet. “Duh! That’s what all the pups are supposed to do! They’re just weaker than me, and their parents aren’t as good as my dad, and won’t be strong wolves like I am!” Again, Theo smiled at the pride in his words.

Stiles shook his head, taking a deep sigh. “This pup… Jesus Christ, he’s messed up.” Glancing back at Theo, however, and he managed a short smile.
Because despite Theo’s outward “pride” at being a strong wolf, Stiles noticed the poor pup staring endlessly at the other kids all day long. Even more so now, as his cousins gathered in large groups, eating, talking and laughing. The pup was pretty obvious that he was starving, and had done nothing but stare at the bigger kids playing football all day long.

“Theo has a chance.” Stiles thought. He reached over, ruffling the pup’s hair. “In our pack, Theo, everyone gets food when they’re hungry, no exceptions! They don’t have to do anything extra, except wash their hands before they eat.” He nodded off to the pile of toys in the floor in the living room, where they’d been dumped in lieu of food. “Oh, and everyone can play with toys in our pack. Even the grown ups. Jackson, one of our adult Betas, plays baseball with Liam and Mason all the time! Alpha Derek is especially good at throwing a ball!”

Bewilderment crossed Theo’s face. The pup’s jaw fell down, staring at Stiles incredulously. “I won’t get in trouble? For eating? Or playing?”

“Of course not.” Stiles chuckled, choosing laughter over crying. The poor pup had a warped mind about everything. Even something as simple as food or toys. “I’m the Pack Second. What I say, goes. Do I sound like I’m lying?”

A short, brief blush crossed Theo’s face. “No. I told you, I’m the best at knowing when someone lies! My Dad said so.”

“Good! Then how about you go off and eat some pizza, and after that, you can go play football with the other boys?” Stiles said, standing up and pushing Theo off towards the kitchen.

The pup paused, staring at Stiles, as if waiting to be told otherwise. Thankfully, Erica yanked Theo into the kitchen, forcing a plate in one of his hands, and a large bottle of soda in the other. Boyd nodded in Stiles’ direction, having heard the conversation, and guided the pup into the living room, taking a seat next to the boy and the other kids.

Taking a sigh of relief, Stiles shut his eyes, as the emotional fatigue of the entire weekend finally hit him. Theo. His friends. The Remnants of Duke’s pack. So much had happened too quickly.

“Daddy!” Isaac and Scott screamed.

Jumping, Stiles barely had to turn around before his sons had leapt into his arms. His fatigue lightened, as he leaned down and pressed a kiss on both of their heads. He pulled them close, hugging them for several minutes, and not wanting them out of his sight anytime soon. “There’s my boys! I missed you so much! You can’t leave daddy this long, he gets lonely!”

“I missed you too, Daddy!” Scott answered, nuzzling into Stiles’ neck.

“Me too, Daddy!” Isaac said, tears welling up in his eyes as he buried himself in Stiles’ chest.

Stiles laughed, still hugging the dickens out of his sons. “I’m so glad… You’re both okay. That you’re both… Okay.” He whispered, trying (and failing) not to picture Theo’s face, or any of the other faces he’d seen the last few days.

Stepping inside the renovated Whittemore Estate, Jackson and Derek eyed the massive group gathered in the gutted living room. Alpha and Beta exchanged a confused glance.

“I’m almost scared to ask.” Derek muttered.

“Knowing Stiles… I am, too.” Jackson whispered right back.
“I can hear you both!” Stiles exclaimed, sitting the boys down on the floor. He patted them both on the shoulder. “Go on, there’s pizza in the kitchen. Help yourself!”

“Alright!” Scott shouted, off like a rocket at the prospect of any kind of food. Isaac wasn’t far behind, growling as his brother beat him to the meat lovers box.

Derek folded his arms. “Is everything alright? I looked over all over town for you, and eventually heard from Yukimura that you’d been hauling a good chunk of Duke’s pack to the Whittemore Mansion. Something about a pack divide?”

Stiles stood up, rubbing the back of his neck. He walked up to Derek and Jackson, smiling sweetly. “Uh, well… It’s a really long story, but…” He took a deep breath. “Duke’s pack has disbanded. So we’ve got our thirty members we had to take care of, and I put about 20 more under an Order of Protection, so they wouldn’t be forced into following their stupid families from going to Kali’s pack, and basically ruining their lives. There’s a really big faction divide, a lot of arguing, but everyone here is people we’d want, or people I’d vouch for. Oh, and don’t worry! I had a good \( \frac{2}{3} \) vote to legitimize my decision! I’m not some tyrant trying to take over already, but you weren’t here, and we didn’t have a lot of time. This wasn’t all on me, and we didn’t spend any money. Except for the pizzas. And moving trucks. And maybe a couch or two. Okay, and about twenty trips to Home Depot. Uh, but I can pay for all of that if it’s a really big deal.”

“Stiles… Breath.” Jackson said, raising a hand up to stop Stiles’ insane rambling. He flashed his eyes, guiding Stiles to the nearest seat.

Taking a deep breath, Stiles (in a much more slower and sane tone) recounted the events of the weekend to Derek and Jackson, from beginning to end. From the Order of Protection, to the Whittemore Estate being used as a makeshift pack house, and everything in between.

At the end of it, Jackson snorted. “I, uh… I can’t help but want to take a family photo here and send it to mom in prison. Mother would die if she knew there were wolves eating pizza on her Fabio Leather Sofa.” The Beta beamed, throwing an arm around Stiles. “Seriously, though, this is awesome. I’m glad the place could help so many people out.”

Derek smiled, nodding in agreement with Jackson. “Sounds like you had a stressful weekend. Sorry I was out for all of that.” He leaned over, pressing a kiss onto Stiles’ forehead. A line of worry crossed his face. “You did the right thing, caring for our pack, and for those who couldn’t protect themselves. Of course I’ll agree to the order of protection, there’s no way I’d turn them away. Thanks for taking care of this mess… The first time my pack needed me, and I…” Doubt flashed in the Alpha’s eyes.

“Hey, it all worked out!” Stiles countered, kissing Derek right back on the lips. He poked the Alpha on the cheek, and wasn’t about to let Derek fall down a pit of blame. “Anyway! How was the weekend? Did you feel the call of the wild? Piss on some trees, mark some territory?” Stiles turned the conversation back to Jackson, who looked to be all smiles.

Jackson nodded, flushing. “The weekend was amazing, Stiles. I felt alive for the first time in my life. Running, chasing… Climbing… I felt… Right.”

“Jackson did well. I tried to teach him basic werewolf combat, and he took to it really well. So did Scott, actually, and the pup kept a good pace. Isaac? Well… Isaac will be a great chef, so he won’t need to learn how to fight.” Derek chuckled.

Stiles feigned an overprotective growl. “You did not teach our son how to use his claws. Please tell me you didn’t teach Scotty how to use claws. He’s five, Derek.”
“Just fists, Stiles. Basic defense he’ll need to know on the playground when they’re going to get rough with tag or wrestling. Claw training isn’t going to happen until he’s sixteen or older. Those things are dangerous.” Derek rolled his eyes, flicking his mate playfully on the nose. “Come on, give me a little credit. Do you really think I’d teach our son how to use claws?”

“To be fair, you DID teach him all of a wolf’s pressure points, so he could technically take down a…” Jackson muttered, before Derek slammed a hand on the back of his Beta’s hands.

“You taught him what?” Stiles glared, with a devious grin on his face.

The trio were interrupted by a parade of werewolf pups running out the front door, football in hand, and ready to resume their game.

At the very back of the parade, Scott, Isaac, and Theo stopped just out of Stiles’ earshot.

“...you should be nicer to Scott. You made him cry after our sprinkler party!” Isaac said, eyes flashing gold, in utter disgust at Theo.

“Yeah, you lied to me! My mom loved me. My Daddy and Papa said so, and they weren’t lying.” Scott said, folding his arms.

Stiles froze. Jackson froze. They both felt Derek’s growl bubbling in his stomach just as the words left Scott’s mouth.

Derek shot up, putting himself between Theo and his sons.

All eyes focused on Theo, who fell backwards, cowering in fear at the Alpha’s deadly red gaze.

“Scott… Care to repeat that for me? What did this boy say to you?” Derek spat, radiating a powerful, fearful aura.

Scott, oblivious to his father’s deadly demeanor, just shrugged. “He said my mom went away because I wasn’t a good enough werewolf. Cuz’ I was a halfling.”

A group of Duke’s Betas and members stopped outside the main hall. Jill, herself, covered her mouth, held back by some of her family.

Derek growled, bending down over Theo and planting himself in the boy’s face. “Why would you say that to him? Why the HELL would you say that to him?!”

Theo recoiled at Derek’s overwhelming presence, shaking. Out of fear, the pup scrambled away from Derek, and ran behind Stiles. He hid behind the human’s legs, holding onto them for dear life. “I just said what my Dad said… That’s… That’s all… I just… I just said it, ‘cuz… Cuz my dad… Said I…”

Before Derek could advance on the boy, Stiles held out his hands. One on Theo’s head, to comfort the pup, and the other to Stop Derek from moving forward. “Whoa, Derek… Down, boy. Let’s put away the eyes, okay?”

Duke’s Betas watched in awe, as Derek did actually stop. The Alpha wasn’t all that thrilled, but nodded to his Second.

Stiles bent down, glaring at Theo. “Theo, why don’t you apologize to Scott? That wasn’t a very nice thing to say to him. My son cried because of that, you know. You made him feel really bad.”
Theo dropped his head, gripping his claws into Stiles’ knee. He nodded, forcing back tears, while trembling under Derek’s shadow. “Sorry…”

As though he’d never been wronged in the first place, Scott just smiled, walking over and yanking Theo out from behind Stiles’ knees. “It’s okay!” Come on, want to go play with me and my brother!? There’s a lot of trees out back that we can climb! I saw them drive up, and Jax said they’re REALLY hard to climb, BUT, my Papa showed me how to climb the biggest tree this weekend EVER.”

Never having a chance, Theo was drug out of the house by Scott. Isaac wasn’t that far behind them, keeping a careful, serious eye on Theo the entire time.

The Betas, seeing Derek’s wrathful expression, disbanded immediately. Jill ran after Theo and the other kids, apologizing profusely on behalf of her son as she passed. Even Jackson excused himself, spotting Liam and Mason off in the kitchen.

Derek growled once more, shooting his gaze right at Stiles. “Why is the disrespectful son of of a drunken asshole racist piece of shit playing with my son?”

Sighing, Stiles shook his head. “Derek… You don’t know the whole…”

“That brat made Scott cry. Give me one good reason why I don’t throw him and his mother out on the stone cold pavement, where they fucking belong?” Derek spat, frothing at the mouth as he said it.

Stiles folded his arms, huffing. “Because the drunken asshole racist piece of shit’s wife is a pretty nice woman, who’s broke her back with everyone else here to make this a possibility. She paid for a lot of the trips to Home Depot, too.”

Taken aback, Derek paused.

Stiles leaned over, whispering in Derek’s ears. “Because it’s pretty damn clear the pup had an abusive father, and he’s probably just lashing out at anyone who looks happier than he does. Yeah, he’s a brat, but it’s not completely his fault, either.”

Derek’s rage subsided. He shifted, almost instantly, into the soft marshmallow he was on the inside, worry clouding his eyes. “Did Brandon hit him? Did you see any injuries? If you did, Stiles, I’ll go haul that asshole in, this instant.”

Shaking his head, Stiles sighed. “No, I don’t think so… Different kind of abuse.” He pulled Derek away from the main entryway, and off into what had once been a study. He shut and locked the door behind him before continuing. “The pup has a warped mind. Classic manipulation tactics. Afraid to eat. Afraid to play. Afraid to do anything without permission. Think of old spy movies, where kids are taken from their parents as babies, and only taught how to fight, kill, and disassociate emotions from their actions. That’s an extreme example of what I think Brandon was doing to his son.”

Derek’s face softened, glancing outside the study’s window. Theo had already climbed the large tree, in question, waiting at the topmost limb, while Isaac and Scott were barely halfway done. At the top, both Stiles and Derek could see the pup curled up in a ball, watching over the other pups, in clear envy. Trying desperately to shield himself from the world.

“You don’t have to make him pack, Derek, but I promised him and his mother that we’d protect them. If that pup goes into Kali’s pack, I don’t even want to think about what they’d turn him into.”
Stiles wrapped an arm around his mate’s waist.

Derek huffed through his nose. “What does he need to get better?”

Stiles dropped his head. “A lot of therapy I offered to Jill. Reconditioning normal behavior for a child. Staying the hell away from his father. Having a loving, supportive atmosphere that don’t try and force him into being a “perfect” werewolf.”

Derek’s hands balled into fists. He nodded, in agreement. “Then we’ll get him that.”

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Stiles stayed with the pack overnight at the Whittemore Estate, sleeping on a couch with Derek, while their sons had the biggest sleepover of their lives. Erica and Danny spearheaded the plan to distract the kids long enough for Derek and the other adults of the pack to line out a long term plan, and for Lydia to make some slight adjustments to the Pack House out on Derek’s land.

They’d stayed up into the wee hours of the morning, ironing out the pack rules and expectations of those who weren’t pack, and hadn’t been part of Duke’s original deal. Which ultimately amounted to “don’t start shit, or I’ll throw you out”. Discussion of pack membership would be years down the line, and only when they proved themselves trustworthy, and only if Stiles chose to forgive them.

Nobody argued with Derek, with the only comments being at how “simple” the pack structure was.

Everyone slept well that night, and woke to a peaceful, anxiety free Sunday morning. Derek took Lydia out to the pack land with several Betas, to work on surveying the construction, and to give out new orders for the additional wing they’d have to build to house the additional families they’d taken in. The numerous pups were still knocked out from staying up all night, their collective snores loud enough to be heard from downstairs.

Stiles and Boyd were in the kitchen, with a dozen or so other adults, attempting to cook for the small army they’d acquired overnight. It was then that Stiles first heard the commotion, forcing him to walk away from the kitchen and into the main hall.

“Where’s my son, Jill?”

Freezing on the spot, Stiles saw the flashy group of werewolves standing on the front porch. All in suits, slicked back hair, and emblazoned with a red star, in a falling motion over a scarlet moon. About twenty in total, all showing the mark of Kali Reed.

Though none of that was quite as impressive as the Alpha herself. Tall, lean, with a bronzed complexion, not unlike Scott’s. Styled hair fell down her back, in a mess of flawless curls. Kali stood out from her suited entourage, in a sharp, red dress, and heels as black as night itself. If Stiles had to guess from the woman’s glowing eyes, she was flooding the area with a fearful aura.

Stiles rushed forward, stopping next to Jill. A few other wolves from the kitchen followed behind their second, sensing the human’s panic. Boyd was already on the phone, speaking in a hurried tone to someone on the other line.

Brandon Raken stood at the head of the group, with a cocky grin. “You don’t have a right to keep the boy from a life of glory. In this pack, he would...” Brandon stopped, spotting Stiles and his birth
Stiles stepped forward. He glared at Brandon, but kept a respectful distance from Alpha Kali. “I’m the Hale Pack’s Second.” Despite the bile in his stomach, Stiles bowed to Kali, exposing his neck. “Alpha Kali, it’s a pleasure to meet you. How can I help you so early in the morning?”

Not bothering to show Stiles the same respect, Kali yawned, covering her mouth while also exposing her shiny red claws. “I’m here to claim the son of one of my newest members. One of my blood relatives, and supposedly a future Beta. If you’d be so kind, I’ll take him, and... Kali paused, mid sentence. Her usually arrogant demeanor, like she wore on TV, wavered.

Kali eyed Stiles over, watching him in awe. She sniffed the air around Stiles, stopping once the realization finally hit her. The Alpha’s claws retracted, frozen in the moment. Her eyes flashed blood red, sending Jill staggering backwards.

While unsure what had made the Alpha’s demeanor change, Stiles stepped forward, putting his arm out in front of Jill, and blocking Kali’s entrance to the door. “Under the order of County Alpha Hale, Jill and Theo Raeken are under our protection. While I am sure they are flattered by such a kind offer, they’d prefer to stay with their family here in Beacon Hills then join your ranks down south.”

Regaining her composure, Kali folded both arms, unable to look Stiles in the eyes. “Do you know who I am, Stilinski?”

Stiles cocked an eyebrow, not sure of the woman’s question, or why she’d asked it. “Alpha Kali Reed.”

Kali chuckled. “So, you don’t know me, then. I’m not surprised.” She ignored Stiles’ quizzical look, focusing her deadly glare on the large number of Betas that were now swarming behind and around Stiles.

Danny, Erica, Boyd, Parrish, the Hewitts, and the Masons had circled around Stiles. Each kept themselves in check, unshifted, but forming a defensive barrier around the human.

“Guys, chill. We’re having a lovely conversation, that’s all” Stiles whispered, shivering at the thought of any of them getting hurt. While Stiles knew Derek, formally trained WERE member, could handle Kali, or any member of her pack... He wasn’t sure about anyone else.

“It’s like looking back in my yearbook. She always was surrounded with followers, too.” Kali muttered, shaking her head at the sight before her. “Tell me, Stilinski, what are your plans with Jill and Theo? Will they be part of your pack? Do you intend to use Theo’s training to create a strong Beta? From what I’ve heard, he’s quite a strong boy. Following the old path of training Deucalion put his children through, before he lost it all together. I could make him even better than he already
is. Give Theo a grand life. Maybe, even someday, I’d kill an Alpha, give him the Aura, and let him serve as my personal guard…” She smirked, pointing a claw directly at Stiles. “Or… Do you plan on making him your own personal attack dog?”

Even without an effective nose, Stiles could smell the bile rising all around him, in the stomachs and hearts of his friends. Jill shook beside Stiles, hands balling into a fist, a hair trigger away from punching Kali in the face.

Stiles shook his head. “As of right now, they’re living under our roof, on our land, since they don’t have a place to call home anymore. We’re the County Alpha Pack, and that is our duty. To protect and serve the Supernatural Community within Beacon County. That’s all. The Hale Pack has no interest in training or raising a guard. If the pups want to do that when they’re older, then there’s plenty of time to do it then.” He tried to make eye contact with Alpha Kali, who continued to evade his every attempt. “We don’t need an army that young, anyway. Our Alpha, and our Betas are strong enough to protect our pack and our County.”

Based on the cold sweat all around his Betas, he could tell that Kali had upped her horrific Aura. Attempting to instill fear in their instincts, as a show of power. Not that it mattered to Stiles. Aura didn’t affect him, and all she was doing to him was giving off a constipated bitch face.

A breeze wafted through the area, the sound of the leaves rustling the only noise in the tense silence.

“You really are her son… She wasn’t afraid of us, either.” Kali whispered, barely loud enough for Stiles to hear. Before Stiles could ask, Kali yawned, stretching out into the sky. “So then… I suppose I’ve just wasted my time here. After all, I’m just a guest in this territory. Can’t break a County Alpha’s ordinance unless I challenge him. From what I hear… He’s a top ranking member of WERE. Peter Hale’s son.”

“Second strongest in the Country. Arguably the strongest. Depends on who you ask.” Derek said.

Relief flooded Stiles, practically ready to collapse as Derek broke through the crowd at the front door, and planted himself in front of Stiles. Sweat poured down his face, ragged of breath. He must have ran the entire way from the Hale land, back to the Whittemore estate. His eyes blazed red, arms folded, and fangs hung out of his mouth.

Kali smirked. “Ah yes… The National Alpha’s deadliest attack dog. Must be nice, not having to think for yourself. Only doing what your handler orders.” She chuckled, rubbing her chin with the tip of a claw.

“I serve my country, protecting it and my pack from people who would do them harm.” Derek’s claws expanded, roughly double the size of Kali’s. He stepped forward, growling at her. “I take my job seriously.”

Scoffing, Kali backed away from Derek, snapping her fingers. Several members of her guard stepped forward, hesitantly. They cowered in fear in front of Derek, barely half the Alpha’s size. Stiles would swear none of them looked older than he did, and appeared to have little to no type of muscle about them. Yet, despite that, they circled and shielded Kali as the Hale Betas had done for Stiles.

Though, unlike the Hale Betas, not a one of them seemed impassioned about protecting Kali. They weren’t like Erica and Boyd, who each had held onto Stiles’ hands, or Danny who’d put himself against Stiles’ chest, protecting his entire body. In fact, there was a fair bit of distance between Kali and her guard, enough for the Alpha to run if things looked bad.
“They’re pawns.” Stiles thought, now realizing exactly why Kali’s had taken in such an outlandish number of pack members from Duke, without even blinking an eye. Why even someone like Brandon Raken had been taken in. Each and every one of them… Were sacrificial lambs, only existing in the pack to protect Kali from harm.

“I have no beef with you, Alpha Hale. Hell, I don’t have a problem with you taking the brat. I don’t need WERE attack dog up my ass, and I have no interest in challenging you for anything.” Kali finished, waving the thought away. She folded her arms, glaring at Jill Raken. “A shame, though. One of the few pups who’d gotten Duke’s classic training, from the old days, and he’s going to be wasted on this pack. Truly… A shame.”

Stiles stepped forward, shoulder to shoulder with Derek. He stared at Kali once more, who refused to meet the human’s gaze. “Then, if your business is done here, Alpha Kali… I’m sure you can appreciate that your powerful presence and name makes people nervous here. Again, I’m sure Jill and Theo appreciate your thoughts, but I think we’re done here.”

Kali dropped her head, glancing away from Stiles. She snorted. “You’re asking me to leave?”

“If you would be so kind…” Stiles bowed respectfully, again, pointing to the inside of his home. “The people here aren’t really up for guests right now. They’ve been through a lot the last few days. They’ve lost their home, their pack, and are trying to get back on their feet.”

Brandon’s eyes flared gold, as he stomped to Kali’s side and growled. “Alpha Kali, are you going to let this brat talk to you like that?! Are you going to let a human, this piece of shit talk to you like that?! That worthless human trash, who’s going to turn my son into a pussy? I think…”

In an instant, Kali’s hand wrapped around Brandon’s neck. A cracking noise echoed in the area, accompanied by a deadly, fragile wheeze. The man’s eyes bulged, as the veins around and in them pulsed red. Brandon’s face turned a dark purple, as the very life was choked out of him.

Derek pushed Stiles back, into the arms of the Hale Betas, assuming an attack position, fully shifting on the spot. His hair, eyes, fangs, and claws turned a deep, scarlet red, as he growled in Kali’s direction.

Unphased, Kali stared at the dying man in her hand, lifting him up and off the ground. Expressionless, she tightened her grip, squeezing the man’s neck like a tube of toothpaste. Duke’s pack that had joined Kali’s pack were staring in horror, falling backwards, and scrambling away from the Alpha. Her personal guard just watched, looking away from the sight, but not seeming all that surprised by her action.

As though Brandon were trash, she threw him. Brandon flew across the Whittemore land, slamming headfirst into the largest tree on the property, headfirst. He slumped into a heap of limbs, blood pooling in and round his head.

Derek roared in her direction, as the Hale pack looked on in pale horror. Jill watched her mate’s remains in disbelief.

“Let that be a lesson to you newcomers.” Kali said, matter of factly. She wiped the blood on her hands off on one of Brandon’s former pack members. She flashed her eyes. “Don’t think. Obey.” She snapped her fingers again. Her guard scrambled, walking away from the property. Those who had followed Brandon just watched his lifeless corpse in awe, as the reality of their decision finally came to full fruition.

Kali curtseyed to Derek, smirking. “I’ll be leaving now. You may keep Jill and Theo. Considering
their father’s incompetence, I don’t have any faith in his son being anything worthwhile.” She then blew a kiss in Stiles’ direction. “Goodbye, Mr. Stilinski. It was good to see you again, it’s been far too long.”

Just as quickly as they’d arrived, Kali’s pack exited, piling into a flashy limousine and driving off. They didn’t bother collecting Brandon, leaving his body to lay in their yard.

“Go check on Mr. Raeken. Now.” Stiles ordered, breaking the silence in the area. He moved forward, taking Derek’s hand, and helping the Alpha revert to his human half.

Danny and Erica shot forward, racing across the Hale Estate. They pulled the man’s body up from the remains of the tree, laying him flat on the ground, upright. After a short inspection, Erica stood, shaking her head negatively. No words needed to be spoken, as the waft of death carried itself on the wind.

Jill fell to both knees, held up by Boyd and Parrish. They carried her away, helping her back into the home as she lost all color in her face, and deep sobs began wracking from her lungs. “I told him! I told him! Why didn’t he listen!? WHY!? Why didn’t he listen!?"

“Can Kali get away with that? She just killed a man in front of you.” Stiles muttered, balling his hand into a fist.

Derek nodded, growling under his breath, as he held Stiles close to him. “Raken signed on to her pack. Her pack, her laws. Death in our culture is a lot different than in human culture.” He dropped his head. “Even if he was killed in my territory, there’s nothing I can do about it. Because… He wasn’t under my protection any longer, he was under Kali’s.”

“Fucker.” Stiles spat under his breath. He shook, fuming.

Derek took control of the scene. Swiftly, and before the pups could wake up, he wrapped up Brandon’s body, and called the county coroner to come retrieve him. The Betas did their best to clean up the blood, eventually relying on Ethan and Aiden to call up the crime scene cleaners who specialized in that sort it thing.

In the span of half an hour, the front lawn looked as it always did, save for the roped off area next to the tree.

Stiles, meanwhile, tried to be there for Jill. She cried on his shoulder, mourning the memory of what had once been a proper mate. He made sure the other members of the pack kept the pups in the dark, until there was a proper time to explain what had happened.

Yet, a pair of tiny feet ran down the staircase, breaking through the Betas and adult werewolves.

Theo’s frantic, tiny face met his mother’s. His nose recoiled at the scent coming in from the front door, where a covered body was be placed inside of the coroner’s van.

“Mom, why are you crying? Why does everyone smell sad and scared? Why… Why do I smell dad?!?” Theo screamed, standing shakily on legs that threatened to collapse on themselves.

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After a particularly horrible day with the pack, Erica was happy to get away from the Hale Estate. Too much grief and sadness had clogged up her nose, and she needed a break.

Boyd strode beside her, as they walked up and down the aisles of the grocery store.

They'd offered to go buy and prepare the food for the pups’ lunches for their first day of school. None of the adults could function, let alone go shopping after watching one of their own be slaughtered in front of their eyes. Not that Brandon had been part of the Hales, or even been that great of a person but… He was blood to most of them. Derek would hold a brief funeral for the man, and give him a wolf's burial later that week.

Down the cookie aisle, Boyd stopped, tossing several packages of extra large cookies into the basket. “They need something extra special in their lunches. They had a rough day.”

Erica nodded, remembering how the pups looked when the news hit them. Most were too young to really appreciate what death meant, let alone murder. The teens had been hit pretty hard, worrying about their relatives now living under Kali’s orders. Not all of the kids had been spared like Theo. There were pups in Kali's hands. Few, but a few too many.

“Let's get them some honey flavored turkey for the sandwiches, and some thick, fresh cheddar.” Erica added.

“Big Capri Suns. Barbecue chips. I'll make fresh bread tonight. French loaf, my best stuff.” Boyd said, driving the buggy down the next aisle.

Erica beamed, leaning over pecking a kiss on Boyd’s cheek. “Well aren't you the doting uncle? Spoiling the pups already with your home cooking?”

“Getting ready for my own.” Boyd answered, with a sly grin on his face.

“Oh really?” Erica growled, slapping Boyd on the ass. “Babe, don't get me riled up like that. We've still got a month until I'm ready.”

“Practice never hurts.” Boyd grinned, dumping several more items into grocery cart.

Erica rolled her eyes, snorting. Though, as they passed the dairy aisle, she grabbed a fan of whipped cream. For dessert. In the bedroom.

By the time the duo had the cart full of food and ready to check out, Erica stopped. A familiar scent hit her nose. Honeysuckle.

Boyd’s eyes went wide, glaring to Erica.

The mated couple partially shifted, with popped claws and fangs, growling as they tracked down the source of the scent. Honeysuckle drove them to the shelves of alcohol on the far end of the grocery store.

Standing in a tattered tank top and shorts, was a hulking mass of muscle, with a short, buzzed haircut. The man had a cart of nothing but booze, threatening to collapse on itself. He turned to the side, allowing the chiseled profile to come into view.

Erica’s eyes lit up in gold. The claws and fangs vanished. She folded her arms, as tears built up in her eyes. “Hey! Fart face booger bully! What's your ugly mug doing here?!”

The man dropped a bottle of whiskey, catching it at the last possible second. He shot up, trembling
at the sight of Erica and Boyd.

A rare, all encompassing smile crossed Boyd’s face. “Good to see you… Ennis.”

“Erica!” Ennis bolted halfway across the store, meeting Erica halfway. They embraced in the middle of the grocery store, both sobbing into the other’s shoulder. “Erica… Oh my God…. Erica…. I… I’ve missed you so much. Missed you too much.” The mass of muscle devolved into a bluberring baby.

Erica smiled through the tears, squeezing the life out of Ennis’ neck. “Ennis Reyes, you unbelievable dorky big brother, what on earth are you doing here?! I've tried calling the last couple of years!”

The duo released their embrace. Erica stopped and took a good stock of her older brother. He looked much more massive than he'd ever been in his life. Dark, horrible circles crossed under his eyes.

Ennis looked away from Erica. “We… Relocated a few years ago.” His heart thumped out of beat, making a horrible scent alongside it.

“Oh…” Erica nodded, taking her brother's hands within her own. “Is Alpha Serah still a bitch? I bet she made all of you move because someone pissed her off. Or did someone else take her place already? Oh! How’s mom and dad?! I've got to catch up with…”

Erica stopped. More tears ripped out of Ennis, as the man fell to his knees. He held onto Erica’s hands, trembling. “I'm sorry… I'm sorry… Erica I'm so sorry…”

Erica and Boyd exchanged a fearful glance. Bending down to her brother’s level, Erica wrapped her arms around him. “Ennis… What's wrong? Come on, what happened? It can't be that bad.”


Ennis dropped his hand, grabbing Erica’s hands tightly. “Erica… They’re gone. The Reyes Pack… Is dead. Mom and Dad… The Boyds, everyone… They're dead.”

Time stopped for Erica and Boyd. An overwhelming cold wrapped around them.

Erica’s lips trembled. She pictured the last time she's seen her parents. The last hug and kiss goodbye before running away. A promise to see each other again. One last plea from her mother to stay, so she could see her little girl grow up.

That image shattered in her mind.

“What?” Erica grabbed both of Ennis’ shoulders, shaking him with all she had. “What!? How!! The Reyes Pack was one of the strongest! How could they die?!”

Ennis rose his eyes, eyes glowing a somber red.

Erica gasped, sensing the lingering will of Alpha Serah’s aura, now living inside of Ennis. Her brother hadn't been an Alpha before, and wasn't anywhere in the line of succession.

He reached up, pulling down the collar of his tank top. On his chest, a branded, falling red star over a scarlet moon that stuck out like a sore thumb.

Boyd flinched at the scarred, disfigured mark of Kali’s pack.
“Because I made a deal with the devil to save the kids I could, and damned us all to hell.” Ennis said, as the terror flowed in his eyes.

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Thanks for reading! We're getting to the end of Part I, here in a few more chapters! Your comments and thoughts are always appreciated! :)
Chapter 15

Erica and Boyd followed Ennis to the run down motel on the far edge of town. The place where the less ethical members of Beacon Hills lived, or “sold” their goods. Based on the number of marked vehicles surrounding the area, Erica assumed there were well over fifty members of Kali’s pack staying in the rotten, run down motel.

Ennis stepped out his own marked hummer, bundling up the absurd amount of alcohol under his arms, walking off to the edge of the motel.

“You’re kidding. Alpha Kali Reed is staying in a place like this?” Erica asked, shaking her head in disbelief.

Ennis laughed. He stopped at room 001, fumbling with a door key. “Not a chance. She’s staying in a suite, on the other side of town with her personal guard. Those of us here aren’t high enough ranked in her Pack to warrant an extravagant room.”

Boyd stomped a roach that scurried next to him. He folded his arms, nose wrinkling at the offensive bouquet of scents around the area. “What an astounding Alpha.” He muttered, under his breath.

Erica’s opinion of Alpha Kali downgraded as Ennis pushed open the door. Because not only had Kali stuck her own pack members in a roach motel… She’d stuck them 10 to a room, sharing a single, moldy bed.

Stepping inside the motel room, Erica’s nose threatened to revolt by the scent of genuine despair. A scent usually reserved for those who succumbed to suicidal tendencies. She’d never, personally, partaken that horrendous, vacant smell.

9 other werewolves were in various places in the room, heads down, and surrounded by a sea of empty alcoholic containers. Most were in various states of undress, hunched over, and distraught. They didn’t even notice Ennis, Boyd, and Erica, with Erica pondering if a few were sleeping with their eyes open. Or even, perhaps, dead.

Except for one, who couldn’t have been older than Liam or Mason. He looked up, eyes scouring the trio, helpless, and devoid of life.

Ennis managed a lopsided smile, reaching inside one of the grocery sacks, and pulling out a candy bar, a wrapped up deli sandwich, and a large bottle of soda. “Eat up, Corey. You’ve lost weight.”

“But…” Corey muttered, unable to stop Ennis from shoving the food in the kid’s arm.

“Eat. That’s an order from your boss. Then get to bed, you get the mattress. My rules. Youngest always gets the mattress.” Ennis said, flashing his eyes at Brett, who flashed his own in return. A vivid, cerulean blue.

Erica’s eyes went wide. A werewolf whose eyes glowed blue, only did so as a sign of guilt. Guilt, from taking the life of an innocent. A punishment worse than death, to many. As she glanced around, Erica saw plenty of blue eyes around her. An eerie, deadly sight.

Somehow… Erica didn’t believe any of them had earned their blue eyes of the own volition.

Corey nodded, unwrapping the sandwich and gorging himself on it. Ennis passed around the bag of booze, that the rest of his group took to, greedily.
Standing quietly in place, Erica didn’t question anything her brother did. She merely watched him taking care of those in his group. Shoving food down their throats, getting them comfortable on the floor, and given them whatever they needed.

One older man, in particular, Ennis drew pain from, on an open cut that refused to heal, and looked infected. A sign of a wolf in dire straights, if their healing wasn’t working properly.

“...they’re sick.” Boyd whispered, quietly enough for only Erica to hear.

Erica nodded. She could see the signs of malnourished, the depression, the sickness… In the dark days when she and Boyd had been on the run, before they’d found jobs, or a stable place to live, they’d been like that for a few months. Hopeless, tired, and sick. They couldn't have healed then, either.

Ennis finished up the work around his group, before tossing his pillow at Corey, and making sure the teen finished his meal. He walked back to Erica, nodding outside. “We should talk in private.”

The trio went back outside, as Ennis shut the door behind him. They moved to the backside of the building, next to the main highway, where vehicles flew by, making it difficult to listen in to their conversation.

“What the fresh hell was that? Who were those people? Who was that kid? He looked half dead!” Erica spat, instantly. She glared up and down the motels many rooms, shuddering to think what was behind the rest of them.

Ennis reached into his back pocket, grabbing a cigarette. He lit it up, taking a long drag before turning away from his sister. “Kali has about 20 Alphas in total, under her control. Each Alpha has 9 Betas they’re responsible for, and whatever pack they had with them. Disobedience of an Alpha, means death to their Betas, and death to the pack they have back at her compound.” He nodded inside the room. “Those nine are my Betas. None of them are from our old pack. They’re castaways that Kali picked up across the South. The boy, Corey… Lone survivor of a pack Kali wiped out. He chose to follow her over dying. Though... I think he regrets that decision.”

“You still haven’t told us what happened to the Reyes Pack.” Boyd stepped forward, glaring right into Ennis’ eyes. “You have Serah’s power. Did you kill her?”

Laughing, Ennis shook his head, flicking his used cigarette away. “Happened three months after you two ran. I was still a kid, so not a chance.” He shook his head, hand trembling as he lit up a second one. “Kali came around one day, demanding Serah’s Aura and all of our land and property. To submit, or face death. Serah told her to fuck off, that she’d have to be challenged to give up her land. Kali and her pack swarmed in a week later, slaughtering everyone in their reach. She won that challenge.”

A growl ripped from Erica’s throat, eyes brimming a deep, dark gold.

Boyd folded his arms. He backed away from Ennis, bowing in apology. “I apologize. I made a wrong assumption. Then how did you manage to get her power?”

“A deal.” Ennis spat, sliding down the motel’s exterior wall, all the way to the ground. He gulped, burying his head down to his knees. “Mom and Dad died protecting me, a few of our cousins, and the pups. They’d tried to hide us in the barn. After Dad died… Kali caught us. Mom tried to fight her off, but… Lost. Badly.” He looked up to Erica and Boyd, smiling. “I’m glad you guys weren’t there. Really… Glad.”
Erica slid down next to her brother, taking his hand in her own.

Ennis managed a brief smile. “Boyd, your parents killed some of her best Alphas… Of course, they were the smart ones, and actually had some strategy. There for a while, I thought… I thought we might survive. Mom and Dad… They fought hard, too. Everyone did. Well, up until… We all knew what was coming.”

Shaking in fury, Erica tried to not to picture the scene in her head. Boyd leaned up against the motel wall, shutting his eyes.

“It was just me, and the other pups. I was the oldest, just shy of 18, and a pretty strong kid, so… Kali made me the deal.” Ennis rested his head on Erica’s shoulder. “We could all live, and I’d become an Alpha for the Reed Pack. So long as I swore my undying loyalty, and pledged all of our lives to the Reed Pack… We wouldn’t die, and we’d be given a home.”

“So, that’s how you got Serah’s power.” Boyd muttered.

Ennis nodded. “Apparently, Kali needs Alphas more than she needs more Aura. Her pack is in the hundreds, bordering on a thousand or more. She uses people like me, who have their entire families, and Betas, on the line, to keep order. Because… When it came down to it, I’d do anything she ordered. I wouldn’t risk my Betas, and I wouldn’t risk anyone of the Reyes Pack. Especially not with my daughter living in the main house back home.”

“Daughter?” Erica froze, a sweeping terror shooting down her spine.

Ennis pulled out his wallet, retrieving a photo. He showed Erica the photograph, of a teenage girl, with soft black hair, and a killer smile. “Hayden. She’s thirteen, this year. One of Kali’s personal favorites. Sharp girl. Talented gymnast. Probably will end up being one of Kali’s personal guard. Not that I want that for her, but… There’s nothing I can do. Her future’s been decided.” The man, once more, was on the verge of tears.

Erica took the photograph, eyeing her niece. She shot up, handing Ennis the picture back. “No, it’s not. Hell, fucking, no.” Her eyes burned gold, turning to Boyd. “Boyd, we’re leaving. Now.” She glared at Ennis. “I’m not going to let this stand. I’m taking this to my Alpha, and our Second. Don’t worry Ennis. We’ll get you out of this.”

Panic poured out of Ennis. He grabbed Erica by the hand, a frantic red glow billowing from his eyes. “Like hell I’m not!” Erica shouted back, yanking her hand free. Standing a good foot smaller than her brother, she jabbed her pointed nails into his chest. “Do you really believe I’m going to sit here and let this pass? Let you, our pack, your betas, and apparently my niece, live like this? Then you don’t remember me very well! This bitch is going down! Nobody, and I mean, nobody, messes with my big brother!”

Boyd nodded. “We have powerful allies. Our Alpha and our Second are good men, who won’t let this sit. Former Alpha Deucalion is among our ranks, as a Pack Advisor. County Alpha Laura Hale, of San Francisco, is the sister to our Alpha, and National Alpha Peter is our Alpha’s father. Our pack is young, but we have a great deal of people supporting us.”

Ennis shook his head. “It doesn’t matter… You can’t… Erica, Boyd… You don’t know what this woman’s like. She doesn’t control a thousand of us for no good reason. She… She breaks you. She knows exactly how to get what she wants, and doesn’t care who she has to kill or step on to get it.” He shook his sister, back and forth. “Don’t get your pack involved with this! Don’t let them rip
you apart! Enjoy what happiness you’ve found, and don’t worry about me.”

Another door down the way, room 005, burst open. Two young women, college aged, staggered out of the room. Each had the appearance of a skeleton, with dark, black bags under their eyes.

“Boss says we’re supposed to go eat before our shift. Says we look “weak”.”

“Why bother looking strong? Kali will just kill us someday, anyway. Like she did with that Raeken guy. The man was built, I saw him. In the end we’re all expendable.”

“I’m not even all that hungry, to be honest. I haven’t been hungry for a long time.”

“I hear that Corey, under Alpha Ennis, has been starving himself. He’s not the only one. Makes it easier to die in battle. Maybe we wouldn’t have kill anyone anymore, and our families would stay safe.”

“I guess… That’s the only way out.”

Ennis dropped his head, turning away from the pitiable sight. He slipped back down the exterior motel wall, crumbled in a heap. “God… Godammit.”

“I refuse to accept this.” Erica said, shaking her head. She bent down, to her brother’s level, pressing a kiss on his forehead. “We’ll make this right, Ennis. Even if I have gut that bitch myself.”

Boyd nodded. “Everyone will help us, Erica. I trust Derek. He saved Jackson, after all.” A small grin formed on his face. “He saved Duke’s pack, and protected Jill and Theo Raken. He didn’t even like any of those people. You’re his favorite, anyway.”

“I’m everyone’s favorite.” Erica replied, with a gentle smirk.

On the floor, Ennis looked up to his younger sister, and Boyd, their close family friend. He recalled their hopeless faces, all those years ago. Hell, he remembered how sorry he felt for the two when they left. How they’d given up the chance of being one of the strongest packs in the South. A powerful legacy, that would have given them a bright, successful future.

Yet, now that he looked at them from the grimy floor of a motel parking lot, he felt like he’d been the one in the wrong, all along.

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Derek tried to think “happy” thoughts as he sat in an emergency Hale Pack assembly, in the formal study of the Whittemore Estate.

He pictured Scott and Isaac, off on their first day of school, painting, coloring, and being read a story by Mrs. Honey. Making friends. Frolicking in the playground with all their new friends they’d made that previous weekend.

Even the thought of Stiles amused him, his mate rambling on at the first assembly for the new school
year, “inspiring” students that he knew would be bored out of their mind listening to the new high school counselor.

Derek thought of the coming Thanksgiving, when his and Laura’s packs would formally become allies, and meet for a large celebration, where Isaac could finally meet more of his family. Scott, too, come to think of it.

Unfortunately, the happiest thoughts were fleeting and few.

Erica and Boyd recounted what they’d learned about Alpha Kali’s pack, and the deplorable living conditions they were in. How they treated Alphas and Betas in their numbers, and of the Reyes massacre. He learned of fate of Erica’s older brother, and what few members of her family were left. Of a teenager Erica had witnessed herself, with blue eyes. Erica’s word alone would have spurred Derek to action.

Danny, Ethan, Aiden, Parrish, Lydia, the Masons, and the Hewitts sat in as well, spoke on behalf of the remnants of Deucalion’s pack. Combined with what they’d learned from Erica and Boyd, they formally requested that something be done to help free the pups and teens from Kali’s clutches. They’d already had called from relatives, warning them not to join Kali’s ranks, and of the “expectations” they faced, under threat of death.

Jackson had shared his experience with a couple of deputies on the force, who’d seen Kali beat one of her own pack members into a pulp, for merely stepping out of place. The man had refused medical treatment, and begged on hands and knees for Kali’s forgiveness, while his jaw and arm sat askew from the rest of his body.

Though, perhaps the most disturbing of all had come from the humans and werewolves all around in Beacon County. Brandon Raeken’s death had been televised all around the county on the morning news, and the murder had spurred fear in every living soul under Derek’s protection. Whether or not Brandon knew it, wherever he was now, he’d created an overnight revolution against Alpha Kali.

Derek’s new office, the only spare room in the entire Whittemore Estate, had blown up with phone calls, and personal visits from the many citizens in Beacon County. All begging Derek to get Kali out of the County, and away from their children. He’d compromised in the short term, planting members of the Sheriff’s department in all of the schools. Not that he could do anything more than that, anyway.

Peter and Deucalion joined the pack assembly that day, as advisors, on Derek’s requests. Given their coming summit with Alpha Kali, they were an important part of dealing with the troublesome Alpha.

The meeting had been… Energetic.

“She has to be dealt with. Not in a sappy “let’s talk it out and cry happy tears at the end” kind of way either, that’s bullshit that would never work. No amount of conversation is going to get this crazy bitch to change. This summit is just a waste of time and energy!” Erica said, slamming her fist on the circular table. Straight, and to the point.

Derek turned to Peter. Erica had just challenged the authority of the National Alpha. Not that Peter cared, behind closed doors, but it was funny to watch his father taken aback (and impressed) by her blunt response.

Smirking, Peter shook his head. “My human counterparts in Washington are abhorrently against her death. Should she die, the economy in the south would tank. Whether we like it or not, Alpha Kali
is an effective means of generating a great deal of income. Her “workforce” produces more crops and livestock than the state of Iowa produces corn. She pays a great deal of taxes on the federal level.” Sighing, he tapped his fingers anxiously against the wooden table.


Peter reluctantly nodded. “I’ve spoken with a few informants. The “workforce” aren’t paid in monetary gains. Rather, they’re paid in being allowed to live, and occasionally fed. Housing is deplorable for them.”

The room erupted in disgusted grumbling.

“I’m going to cut the bitch. With my best knives. Then, we’ll feed her to the dogs.” Boyd said, growling through his teeth. The table shook from the vibrations erupting through his throat.

Derek scooted away from Boyd. He could count on zero hands the number of times he’d seen Boyd in a bad mood. Or, in any kind of mood at all. The rest of the pack shied away from his killer gaze, just as Derek did.

Except, naturally, for Peter. “I favor that decision.” He agreed, leaning back in his chair. He sighed, shaking his head. “Though, if I execute Kali… It’s not without its own complications. There’s no guarantee she doesn’t have safeguards in place, to extract revenge on anyone who ended her. A woman in power like her, most certainly, has contingencies in place. Which could effectively end the lives of countless innocents. Or… Something just as dark.”

Taken aback, Erica glared incredulously at Peter. “Can she… Do that? Doesn’t everyone hate her? Who in their right mind would get revenge for her?”

“With enough Aura, and a cruel enough mind… It’s completely possible for an Alpha to command those in their pack with unrestricted authority. To order them into doing things they would be otherwise incapable of doing.” Peter glanced up, sighing. “Kali has the accumulated Aura of around 12 Alphas, potentially more. It’s completely within her ability to do so. I have no proof of this happening, but… Knowing Kali, it’s not that much of a stretch.”

The room silenced. A foul, disturbing sense of dread reverberated into the Pack.

Deucalion tapped his cane on the ground, forcing everyone to flinch in response. “If I may speak?” He said, raising up from the table. Duke glanced in Derek’s direction, with a gentle smile. “We’ve heard from Erica, Peter, my own pack, and the humans in the territory. The facts are laid before us. We know everything we need to know about Kali. So now… What does our Alpha think of all of this? What is our Alpha going to do?”

All eyes focused on Derek. At his place at the head of the table, Derek straightened up, clearing his throat.

“I…” Derek paused, his thoughts still lying with his pups, and Stiles. What he decided today would affect them as well. Still… He had responsibilities to everyone, now. Responsibilities to people he knew Stiles cared about just as much as he did. Derek shut his eyes. “I think we can all agree that this is personal, now. Erica’s brother is involved with Kali, and so are a lot of the friends and blood family of our pack. So this is our problem to attend to. If we do nothing, a lot of people are going to be hurt.” He opened his eyes, allowing them to glow a gentle red. “Not to mention, that there are innocent people in her pack that need our help. I’m not going to turn my back away from this.”

Erica whistled through her fingertips, and a flood of relief washed over most of Duke’s old pack.
Peter sighed, but managed a weak grin.

Duke nodded in agreement. “A fair assessment of the situation. Now, how do you plan on handling Kali?”

“I, uh…” Derek muttered, glancing away.

There weren’t that many options available to him. He had nothing to trade Kali for the people he need to be freed. Being a new Alpha with a relatively small pack size, he had no chance of intimidating her to step down, even if he were more tactically skilled than she was. Worst of all, he had no standing in the State Alpha’s eyes. The youngest, newest County Alpha. He had no hopes of calling in any favors with Satomi, he hadn’t earned that right yet. Peter was out, too, given he had his own interests and orders to fall into, on an international level.

“The way I see it…” Duke said, taking a deep breath before reaching over and clasping a hand on Derek’s shoulder. “There are only two options our pack can take. Violence or nonviolence. We fight Kali, or we talk to Kali.”

Derek shook his head. Neither seemed like a viable option. The former would end in blood, while the latter would be a mere waste of time. "Neither sound.. Plausible."

“Then, Derek, consider yourself invited to the summit.” Deucalion said, breaking the morbid silence.

“Huh?” Derek muttered, turning around to meet Duke’s gaze.

Peter, too, stared at Duke, eyebrow cocked. His eyes glowed, in genuine surprise.

Duke ignored Peter’s questioning glare. “You said it yourself, Derek. This is a personal matter for you and your pack. I’ll have you in attendance, so that you can air your grievances to Kali, to National Alpha Hale, and to State Alpha Satomi and State Alpha Roman. If violence and nonviolence are options we can take, then we go a different direction. A mixture of both. Speaking, with the threat of violence.”

“I’ll… What?” Derek felt his face burn red. Alpha Satomi was one of the most revered werewolves in the country, more respected than Peter, himself. Alpha Roman, Kali’s State Alpha… Well, he was the opposite of Satomi, as a crafty, sneaky, lying son of a bitch, like any other politician. Yet, somehow, he had managed to stay in power, despite Kali constantly breathing down his throat.

“Two State Alphas, and the National Alpha can’t ignore a County Alpha’s plea for help, especially when there is family involved. I believe that even Kali would be unable to stand up to that level of scrutiny. Or rather, she’d be fearful of Peter and Satomi’s forces. Fearful of you, Derek. A quiet, unspoken threat of WERE is enough to terrify any Alpha.” Duke added, nodding in Peter’s direction. “Satomi’s sons and her oldest daughter are all members of WERE. Peter has unrestricted access to WERE. Derek is WERE’s poster child. Am I correct in thinking that your original plan, Peter, is to use WERE as a viable threat?”

Peter cocked an eyebrow back at Duke. “That was the original plan, yes. Should she not react to WERE intervention, I was going to physically mobilize them.”

“Excellent.” Duke smiled, nodding in Derek’s direction. “Then it shouldn’t be an issue to add Derek’s input to our meeting. They’re not all that different than the original requests to Kali.”

“No. It shouldn’t be an issue. I’d intended to invite him anyway, as the County Alpha. Good experience for him.” Peter folded his arms, side eyeing Duke.
Derek caught a relieved smile on Erica and Boyd’s faces, and on Duke’s pack. His own relaxed, and he glanced back at Duke. “Then let’s do that. Is everyone okay with this?”

All around were nods from his pack, and a unanimous voice of support later.

Duke smiled, chuckling as he prodded Derek with his cane. “Naturally, this will be a formal assembly. I’ll need your Second to attend, and you are permitted to bring a personal guard of 5 Betas, or similarly ranking wolf. This is what all of the participants have agreed to.” He stood from the table, waving to the members around the table, smiling at his many blood relatives taking up the table. “You have many capable wolves to choose from. Most of which I raised to be strong, kind, and courageous individuals. I’m sure they won’t object to guarding you and Stiles during this event."

Shooting up, Erica saluted Derek, with an overwhelming glow to her eyes. “Count me in! I don’t care what it takes. Even if I have to wear one of those stupid suit skirts that all the constipated State Betas wear. Totally worth the sacrifice!”

Boyd stood, nodding in agreement, eyes burning gold. “Same.”

Danny waved, standing up at the same time as Parrish. “You got us, Alpha. Strongest Beta in the old pack, and Sparky here, we’ll make sure nobody tries to give Stiles any shit. Or, you know, we’ll kick their ass.” Both men now sported triskelions, in a sharp red, on their necks. They nodded in unison. Flames rippled in Parrish’ hair, as dark markings trailed up and down his face. While Danny’s eyes lit up in a warm gold, Parrish’s radiated a vivid orange.

Jackson stayed seated, nodding silently to Derek. “I’ve got your back, like you had mine.” He smirked, tracing the silver and black triskelion on his wrist. His eyes melted in a golden honey.

Derek flashed his eyes in a candy red, wordlessly thanking his Betas. He radiated an appreciative, proud, and calming Aura. “Thanks. All of you.” He dropped his head. “…and If it doesn’t work out, then we’ll make it work out.”

“Like punching the bitch in the face?” ERica asked, eyes wide and hopeful.

“Like punching a bitch in the face. Just don’t tell the boys their Papa is mean.” Derek countered, with a micheveous smile.

“I wouldn’t worry about needing to punch her. I’m confident things will work out.” Deucalion nodded, turning back to Peter. “I believe you and I have some other matters to attend to, and notify the change in attendance for this weekend. Satomi needs to be made aware.” Standing up, Deucalion stood beside Peter, bowing to Derek. Please, continue your meeting, Alpha.”

Derek nodded. “Yeah. We need to talk about the Pack House, and about the vacant mayor’s spot. The City Council are looking for volunteers, and want our input. For who knows why, they can’t find anyone to take the spot.”

“We’re trying to get the Old Man to take the spot. He’d be the most qualified.” Jackson sighed, rubbing his forehead. “Stubborn old artifact won’t even hear of it.”

Parrish chuckled, alongside Ethan and Aiden. “Don’t let the Old Man hear you talking like that. You’ll get the shit shifts for a lifetime.”

A plethora of bickering went back and forth between many of the deputies, Derek, and other pack members. Lydia attempted to maintain order, pulling out pictures and documents from the home’s foundation, which was well over halfway done.
Deucalion and Peter snuck out of the room, taking their leave from the lively assembly. As they walked through the busy hallway of the newly dubbed “Hale” Estate, (not even Jackson called his childhood home by anything else anymore), they brushed by several men and women from Duke’s old pack, many of unemployed members who’d lived off the pack fund. They cleaned and made repairs on the house, helping out with minor construction as the Estate was transformed into a proper living facility.

“I’m very surprised by Derek and Stiles. Not many Alphas or their Seconds would give up such a palatial mansion. They could have sold this property and land for quite a bit of money, and made themselves very comfortable.” Deucalion said, as they walked around several members, who were breaking down a wall to open up the second story for another living area.

Peter nodded. “My son and Stiles are good men. This pack is full of good people. People who suffered more than most, so I’m not all that surprised.”

Reaching the end of the second floor hallway, Peter stopped Duke, grabbing him by his shoulder and shoving him into an unoccupied room. His eyes flared up, with a dark grin on his face. “Apologies, Duke, but I have to know. How far ahead did you plan all of this? This is all too convenient. Kali’s arrival, my son’s rise to becoming a County Alpha, Stiles’ friends being overwhelmingly powerful Betas, and the Whittemore boy… All of this happening, all at once? I refuse to believe in coincidence.”

Nodding, passively, Deucalion leaned back against a wall. He sighed, as his frail body struggled to stand upright. “About twenty or so years ago, my daughter, Jackie, was murdered on her anniversary vacation to New Orleans. A coalition of Southern Alphas were responsible. They wanted to send a message to the Tyrant of the West that my kin wasn’t welcome in their territory, and that they would stop me at all costs from invading. This was far after I’d ended my campaign for the National Throne. I hadn’t been aggressive in years. The violence came as a shock.”

Peter folded his arms. His eyes ceased to glow. “I apologize… I wasn’t sure what happened to your daughter. I saw her pictures on the wall, but… Didn’t feel it was right to ask.”

“Kali became an Alpha then, murdering the one who’d taken Jackie’s life.” Duke continued, ignoring Peter’s words as his features paled. “All of this has been revenge on her cousin’s behalf, finding and torturing anyone who’d been involved. Though…” A gentle smile crossed Duke’s face. “Perhaps cousin is the wrong term. They reminded me a lot of Scott and Isaac, actually. Kali, Claudia Stilinski, and Jackie? They were closer than sisters. They were each other’s whole life.”

“Stilinksi? Stiles’ mother?” Peter muttered, eyes growing wide in realization.

Duke nodded, smiling. “Indeed.” He pictured the little girl he’d met all those years ago. The little girl in the red hoodie, who’d showed up in his life ages ago. The first human he’d ever respected, and the one who showed him the real meaning to a happy life. “…and I believe it will be that love Kali shared with Claudia and Jackie that will dictate the events that are to follow.”

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Arriving at Beacon Elementary a solid hour before school let out, Derek paced back and forth in the parking lot. He wasn’t fond of the idea that parents weren’t allowed inside until the final bell rang to pick up their children, nor was he thrilled that Stiles had all but ordered him not to “embarrass” their
sons by grabbing them earlier. A half hour conversation on the phone later, and Derek finally agreed.

Peter had joined him, for whatever reason, and seemed to be enjoying Derek’s internal torment, as he downed a flask of what Derek hoped was a non alcoholic beverage.

“Would you calm down, Derek? Your sons are fine. They’ve probably had more fun than they know what to do with. Most of the pack from the estate are all in that same class.” Peter grumbled, offering his flask to Derek.

Derek waved Peter’s offer away. “I know that, Dad. Hell, if Scott doesn’t come out with at least fifty friends, and dragging Isaac behind him to meet them all, I’m going to be disappointed.”

“Then why the stereotypical pacing anxious dad routine?” Peter countered, downing the last of his flask before tucking it away inside his suit.

Growling, Derek tapping his claws on the roof of Peter’s rental car. “I’m worried about Kali and her pack. I’m worried about Erica’s brother. I’m worried about what this means for Beacon Hills, and my instinct is boiling on the inside with the thought of Kali living in my borders. I’m worried about your ancient ass if a fight breaks out. When’s the last time you hit the gym?”

Peter snorted. “Muscle memory will be good enough, and not all the muscle has melted away. I can still give you a run for your money, young man.” He hopped off the roof of car, slugging Derek by the shoulder. ”Oh, and quit deflecting, Derek. What are you really worried about, right here, right now?”

Huffing, Derek folded his arms. He leaned back on Peter’s car. “I’m worried about Theo. The whole situation isn’t sitting right with me.”

“Jill still hasn’t told him?” Peter rolled his eyes, sighing. “I’d be worried, too.”

Derek shook his head. “Jill made up an excuse. Said that Brandon had gone on a long trip, and wasn’t coming back anytime soon. Sent the pup off to school, while we handled the body. He’s been returned to the earth in Beacon Forest. Jill planted a pine sapling with his remains. Emissary Deaton performed final rites. A private ceremony, just Jill and Deucalion.”

“Theo should have been a part of that rite.” Peter grimaced.

Derek shrugged, picturing his own mother’s final rite. She’d been buried on her land, with a mess of seeds that had created the floral scenery all over the Hale land over time. Her body became one with the earth, just as Brandon’s would. “I think with everything going on, Jill just thinks she’s protecting him. Really, because of Brandon, a lot of Duke’s people were tricked into Kali’s pack. Of course, with the truth about Brandon’s treatment of Theo coming out, I’m sure that has a lot to play into this too. Theo’s too young to know that his father was a bastard.”

“I assume the pup knew she was lying, though.” Peter muttered.

“Skilled pup, of course he knew. Despite Brandon being a nutjob, Theo’s well trained. Better than my own sons, by a mile.” Derek admitted, glumly. Of course, he hadn’t forced either of his boys to sacrifice their childhood, either. They trained when the boys wanted to train, and usually played more than trained. There wasn’t anything wrong with that. They’d mature in time.

“So why are you worried about him? He’s not your pack.” Peter smirked, as if he didn’t know the answer already.
A brief sigh later, and Derek rubbed his forehead. “I feel for him. Poor pup had a shit dad. Now he doesn’t have one, period. I know what that feels like.”

Peter gripped Derek’s shoulder, stopping him in place. He shook his head. “He has a mother that clearly loves him, and an Alpha that cares. I’m not wrong in guessing you’re going to invite him into the pack, yes?”

“That obvious?” Derek said, eventually nodding. “As long as he gets along with Scott and Isaac… I want him to have a place to call home. He’ll need Stiles, too. Hell, everyone in our pack could use Stiles after this mess is over.”

“My son is a good man, and a great Alpha. I’d be disappointed if I were wrong.” Peter chuckled, shaking his head. “Actually, I could use Stiles, myself. Maybe once this mess is over, I could steal him away for an afternoon.”

“You’d need him more than one afternoon.” Derek snarked, as he and his father bickered back and forth.

Their conversation continued for quite a while, broken by the sound of the elementary bell ringing throughout the region.

Derek led Peter through the long hallways, trying to pass by the army of pups, human children, elves, and other supernatural creatures. Difficult, given that they were stopped multiple times by werewolf teachers and adults that would bow in respect to Peter, and smile in Derek’s direction. Each time, Peter made sure to introduce himself as Scott and Isaac’s grandfather.

Just outside Miss Honey’s classroom, Derek glared at Peter. “You came just to make sure that nobody fucked with your grandkids didn’t you?”

Peter grinned, quietly, as he opened the elementary classroom for Derek, letting his son enter before himself.

Once inside, Derek’s ears were assaulted with the sound of a dozen eager pups and children. All gathered around a playmat section of the classroom, in a circle of eager conversation about their day.

Scott and Isaac were in the midst of the conversation, as Scott did most of the talking, and had earned the attention of everyone in the circle. The other pups and kids listened on, grinning and laughing to their newest friend.

“Oh! Looks like we’ve got another pick up!”

Derek turned to meet Scott and Isaac’s teacher. A human woman with bright blonde curls, and a colorful ensemble, with a pair of thin rimmed glasses. Mrs. Honey, an older educator about Peter’s age that Stiles had recommended.

“Oh! Well look at this, everyone! It’s County Alpha Hale, and….” Mrs. Honey’s face paled at the sight of Peter. “Nat… National…”

“I’m Poppy.” Peter corrected, extending his hand and shaking Mrs. Honey’s. “I’ve heard wonderful things about you from Stiles. Lovely to meet you.”

Derek rolled his eyes, mentally cringing at the sight of his father… Flirting.

“Papa!” Isaac yelled, bounding up from the floor and rushing to Derek’s side, the pup’s backpack shaking as he moved. He hugged Derek’s leg, nuzzling into the man’s side.
“PAPA! Poppy!” Scott dashed right after Isaac, but instead aimed for Derek’s hand. He pulled Derek back to the playmat, eyes brimming in gold. Come on, come on, you’ve got to meet my friends!”

Letting Scott take the lead, Derek was presented with several members of Duke’s pack that he’d taken in, and already knew. Though among them, there were a few he wasn’t sure of. One human, one… Very clearly not human. The hair on the back of his neck stood up on end from a terrifying amount of power that radiated in one of them.

Scott pointed to the source of the latter. “This is Meredith, but that’s too long to say, so I call her Meri! Daddy already knows her, because we met at the park! We’re best friends now, though! Papa, she’s so cool! Meri’s a Seer! She can see the future, and her eyes go all white, and it’s just SUPER SUPER COOL. She knew what we were having for lunch, before we even got there!”

The shy little girl with soft hair waved sheepishly at Derek, muttering a quiet hello. She didn’t seem much for words.

“Seer? Well, that explains that terrifying amount of power I was sensing.” Derek thought to himself, but smiling all the same at Meredith. Seers were an odd lot. Wholly human in every way, but with the gift of future sight. A gift that tended to make them… A tad nuts, if used in excess.

Right beside Meredith, Scott presented his next friend. Another human girl, with short, curled brown hair, and a soft, delicate face. Yet, she smelt of something fiercer than a typical human, a lot like Stiles. There was something… Special about her, something he couldn’t quite place. “This is Allison! She can do tricks on the jungle gym, because she takes gymnastics! Her big sister, Kate, taught her everything!

Allison waved politely, extending her hand to Derek. “Hello Scott and Isaac’s dad! Scott and Isaac were really fun to play with today! Can they come over with Meri to my house someday? I’ve got a big trampoline that my dad got me for my birthday! My big sister also got me a toy bow, and nerf guns! My dumb brother Matt never plays with me, either!”

Derek chuckled, shaking the girl’s hand. “Well, I’d have to talk to your mommy and daddy about that. Maybe I can meet them someday when I pick Scott and Isaac up.”

With a straight, happy face, Allison nodded earnestly. “I can ask my Daddy! I don’t have a mommy anymore, because she and Daddy didn’t love each other, and now mommy lives in another house with Grandpa.”

“Good God….” A cold chill ran down Derek’s spine. The girl seemed rather… Chipper about that fact. He couldn’t catch the smell of any kind of grief on her. This also taught him the valuable lesson of never saying anything around Scott and Isaac that he didn’t want later repeated. “Oh… Oh, I’m sorry to hear that.”

Breaking up a potentially awkward conversation, Derek’s phone buzzed. He pulled up a message from Stiles, excusing himself from the playmat while Scott and Allison excitedly planned for all the games they could play on the trampoline, and the potential Nerf War.

Stiles: Can you grab Theo? Jill stopped by my office, and we’re both going to be a while talking things out. Get the kid some ice cream or something, I’m going to try to talk Jill into letting him know about his dad. Like, can you try and spoil him? A little bit?
Derek’s stomach flipped on Theo’s behalf, before replying with a quick confirmation to his mate. Suddenly, he realized there was someone missing from Scott’s circle of friends. After a quick glance around the classroom, Derek caught sight of Theo, sitting in the back row of the classroom, still at his desk. He seemed to be coloring something, with a vacant look about his face.

Before approaching the pup, Derek interrupted Peter and Mrs. Honey’s conversation. “Excuse me… I’m actually also Theo’s caretaker. He’s living with our pack right now, under my roof, and under my protection. If you don’t mind, I’ll take him home with us as well. Something came up with his mother.”

Mrs. Honey nodded. “Of course, Alpha Hale. Mrs. Raken has you and Dr. Stilinski listed as an emergency contact. All of the pups here are listed with you and Dr. Stilinski as contacts, actually. That’s pretty common in large packs around here.”

“Great… Well, I’ll grab the pups, and get Peter here out of your hair, and…” Derek said, interrupted as Mrs. Honey rose up a hand.

“Oh, actually, Alpha Hale?” Mrs. Honey brought Derek off to the side, and away from the kids. She spoke softly into her hand, to keep wandering ears from listening in. “About Theo… He didn’t get along very well with any of the other students today. Your sons ate lunch with him, and tried to keep a conversation with him, but on the playground… Theo climbed a large tree that none of the other pups could climb, and stayed up there until the final bell rang. He didn’t sleep at naptime, or listen to any of the stories we read today. All he did was color. Is… Everything alright?”

Derek cringed, rubbing the back of his neck. “Things are… Difficult at home right now. I’m sure you heard about Former Alpha Deucalion’s pack? Maybe you also heard about the death from Alpha Kali Reed? Well… That was…” He glanced over to Theo, and Mrs. Honey covered her mouth in untold horror.

“Oh my goodness, that poor little pup. I understand, completely, and I’ll make sure to keep my eyes on him. I just… Wanted you to know.”

Derek nodded appreciatively. “Thank you. We all appreciate it. Stiles is going to be working with him soon.”

After finishing the pleasantries with Mrs. Honey, and while Peter wrangled up Scott and Isaac, Derek grabbed Theo. The pup was wordless as he packed away his things, and tagged along beside Derek, keeping his tiny hand inside of Derek’s, holding on for dear life.

Derek and Peter strapped the pups into the backseat of Peter’s car, with Peter driving the three of them off towards the Hale Estate. Scott rambled endlessly with Derek and Peter about their first day of class, and everything he’d learned, and how excited he was to go back the next day. Isaac explained about how he’d made friends with the Mrs. Honey, who’d let him pass out milk at snack time with Allison, the latter who he described as “really pretty”.

Theo, however, said nothing about school. He stared listlessly outside the side window, with a vacant expression on his face.

Derek caught the ever brief moment in between Scott and Isaac’s excited ramblings. “You know what, I think you guys had a great time at school today. I think we should celebrate. Who wants ice cream?”
The cheer from Scott and Isaac was instantaneous. Even Peter seemed a tad excited, swerving the car in the opposite direction at the next turn.

“My treat. We’ll go to a lovely little Italian place I ate at last week. Some of the best gelato I’ve ever had.” Peter said, practically drooling on the steering wheel.


The pup shrugged. “I don’t like ice cream. Ice cream is for babies.”

Scott’s ears perked up. “Theo likes chocolate! I saw him eat chocolate pudding at lunch! He didn’t eat anything else, so I bet it’s his favorite.”

Visibly pissed, Theo growled at Scott. “No it’s not!”

“You ate three puddings that your mom packed. You do too!” Scott added.

Theo shifted, his entire face wolfish, and glaring gold. “Shut up, Scott! So what if I like chocolate?! I’m not pack, I’m not a Beta, and I’m not good enough for Alpha Hale, so I don’t get any ice cream! Ice cream was only for REALLY good wolves. Dad never gave me ANY ice cream, because I never deserved ice cream!”

Scott scoffed, folding his arms. “Nuh uh! You are pack! Because I said so!”

Theo snarled. “That’s not how it works! Alpha Hale decides! Only the Alpha decides!”

Taking his turn to shift, Scott wolfed out, eyes flaring up. “Nuh uh! Pack means family, and you’re my cousin, so that means your my pack, too! That’s how come Isaac and I are brothers!”

Scott and Theo grappled, their tiny hands locked in a playful manner. Derek looked on in awe, watching as Scott, for the first time in his life, actually attempted to exert dominance. Most pups wrestled and argued for that by the age of four, or younger. A manner of play that all pups took part in, with their closest friends and allies. Derek had been the one to teach Scott and Isaac all of that, in the woods with Jackson just that weekend.

“I am not!”

“Are too!”

“Am not!”

“Are too!”

The two growled, snapped, and snarled at each other, as Theo attempted to overpower Scott and crush him into the middle seat. Scott, at the same time, used his brute force and extra weight to fight back. The bout continued for several minutes, until the pups attempted to roar into each other, but barely managed a cute set of squeaks.

Isaac sighed, facepalming on the other side of the car. “Are you guys gonna fight, again!? Mrs. Honey said if you’re gonna fight, you have to do it outside at recess, because fighting inside wasn’t polite!”

Theo stopped grappling with Scott, instead focusing on Isaac. “We’re not indoors, Isaac!”
“Uh huh! We’re IN a car!” Isaac replied, with a tone that insinuated that Theo was dumb.

“In a car that’s outside!” Theo belted right back.

“But we’re IN it!” Isaac spat, fully shifted in a half second. He growled at Theo, practically throwing himself on Scott’s lap to get a better distance at Theo.

“You’re yelling, too!” Theo and Isaac started to grappled, fighting on Scott’s lap, who was pushing at both their heads with the blunt ends of his claws.

“Get off me! I was fighting him first, Isaac, because he’s wrong, and he’s pack, and I’m right! Wait your turn!” Scott whined, as the three devolved into a mess of limbs.

Derek and Peter shared a gentle smile.

Sure, the kids were “fighting”, and snapping at each other, but… In a way that all pups fought. At the very least, it had brought some kind of emotion to Theo’s face, and brought out a little more wolf in Scott, and some confidence in Isaac.

“You and Laura fought like that all the time.” Peter muttered.

Derek couldn’t hold back his own blinding grin. “I know we did. Made us closer. She was the only one who’d play with me like that when I was a kid. Hell, even when we were teenagers, we got into pretty heated brawls. Made for a good bonding experience.”

“So… I don’t think we have to worry about those three getting along.” Peter said.

Shaking his head, Derek chuckled as he took one last glance in the rear view mirror. Scott had Theo pinned on his side of the seat, while Theo’s foot was firmly lodged in Isaac’s stomach, and Isaac was pulling at Scott’s thick hair. “I’ll talk to Jill about letting Theo into the pack.”

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Beacon Hills Hospital always smelt of antiseptic and death. More than enough stench to force Kali’s nose to recoil in horror. Yet, she toughed it out. After Claudia’s diagnosis, and with the final days upon them, she would have fought through hell and back to say goodbye.

Though now that she could see Claudia again… Goodbye was the least on her mind.

The bright, strong, energetic woman she’d once known and loved… Reduced to a mere skeleton of bones, smelling of the poison that traveled through her veins, and wearing a shimmering red scarf to hide her lack of hair.

Though, Claudia’s eyes remained unchanged. The soft, warm, loving shade of honey brown. The woman’s eyes were more powerful, more full of life than the brightest glow of an Alpha’s Aura. She could stare at those eyes for hours on end.

“Promise me, Kali.” Claudia muttered, in a ragged breath that struggled to form words.

Kali shook her head, eyes burning a fierce red. “I can’t. Not until every last one of her murderers suffer, I’m not going to stop. I’ve hunted most of them down, Claudia. All I have left is the Muldors, the Reignas, and the Reyes. Once those three fall… The bastards will all have been murdered, and then their children will suffer.”
Coughing, Claudia wiped the spray of blood from her hand. “Kali... What good is that going to do? It’s not going to bring Jackie back. This revenge... It’s... Foolish. The sins of the few shouldn’t damn everyone!”

“You wouldn’t understand.” Kali’s eyes flared, as she took Claudia’s fragile hand in her own. “My instinct, it... It won’t let me stop. They have to die, and their packs have to suffer for this stupidity. Nobody, and I mean nobody... Will get away with this.”

Claudia’s eyes faded in light, as she turned away from Kali. “Then... Can you promise me something else?”

Kali nodded, without hesitation.

Weakly, Claudia attempted to grip Kali’s hand. “Kali... Promise me... That you’ll protect my son, my husband, and everyone that they love.”

“What? That’s all?” Kali chuckled, as streams of tears ran down her eyes. She wiped them away. “Claudia... I promise... Nothing bad will ever come to him or Ema. I’m their Godmother, for Christ’s sake. I’d give my life for them. They’re... They’re all I’m going to have left of you and Jackie...” The Alpha broke down into a dark sob, crying into Claudia’s frail hand.

“A darkness is going to come.” Claudia muttered.

Kali glanced up, wiping the tears away.

“I spoke to Old Lady Walker. The Seer. She shared her Sight with me, and allowed me to see my son, all grown up. Stiles... Stiles is going to be a handsome young man... So smart, and... Such a good father to those boys. Little Scott and Isaac...” Claudia smiled, tears streaming down her face.

“Stiles? What’s a Stiles?” Kali questioned, with cocked head.

“Apparently he isn’t going to be fond of his name in high school. I always loved the name Klimek. I loved his father’s name, too. My little Klimek and my strong Konstantyn...” Claudia muttered.

“I, personally, think that Deputy Stilinski’s parents just hated him, and that you were too cruel to your child to pick such a stupid name. Polish is beautiful, don’t get me wrong, but... This is the 21st Century America. You’re just asking for him to get wedgies and shoved in a locker.” Kali joked, laughing alongside Claudia.

The laughter stopped, as Claudia shook her head. “In Old Lady Walker’s vision... We saw a darkness. A darkness that looms over his family’s head. A darkness that threatens to tear his family apart. I spoke of this darkness to Deauclion. I asked for his assistance in this matter, too.”

Kali rolled her eyes. “That cowardly old Alpha isn’t going to do anything. He’s content to sit on his blind ass and let everyone walk over him. Useless...”

Claudia frowned, gripping Kali’s hand with all her might. “Someday... When you see my son’s eyes again, when you’ve finished seeking your revenge on Jackie... Please... Promise me that you’ll protect him and his family. They’ll need your help to overcome all of this.” A gentle smile crossed Claudia’s face, as she brought the Alpha’s hand to her lips, kissing it. “I know that you’ll do the right thing. I believe in you.”

"I promise... I promise, Claudia."
A booming knock shot Kali out of her dreams.

“Alpha Kali? May I come in? It’s 9 AM, and I’m waking you as you requested.”

Kali’s eyes shot open, glancing up from the comfort of her suite pillow. Raising up, she rubbed the sleep, and fresh tears from her eyes. The phantom touch on her hand still felt warm. “Enter.” Kali barked.

One of her attendants entered the room, head down, with a platter of food in his hands. The man, her butler, crossed the room, not once making eye contact as he presented her with breakfast in bed. He then busied himself with menial tasks, cleaning up the mess of dinner and wine Kali had left for him. Sebastian, who’d been a loyal member of her staff since she’d become an Alpha.

“Any calls or matters I should be aware of?” Kali asked, picking up a fork and slicing into the eggs benedict.

“Peter Hale called on two matters. One, he’s politely requested that you refrain from killing anyone else while in Derek Hale’s territory. Or, if you wish to eliminate a member of your own pack, do it out of sight, in the privacy of your own home.” Sebastian said, as he gathered Kali’s unwashed garments, and the garments of the Beta she’d bedded the night before.

“Of course he did.” Kali engulfed her eggs in a few bites, before tearing into a bowl of sweetened fruits.

“Secondly, Peter informed me that there was a change this weekend’s summit. Alpha Derek Hale will be in attendance with his Second, Stiles Stilinski. A guard of 5 betas will come with them.” Sebastian said.

“Stilinski.” Kali’s fork stopped halfway between the plate and her mouth. She lowered the utensil, laying on the plate to the side.


Kali shook her head. “Nothing.” She reached immediately into the bucket, cut off the top of a wine bottle with a claw, and poured half of the bottle’s contents into a glass.

After downing most of her drink. She turned and faced Sebastian. “Can you answer me something, Sebastian?”

“Yes, Alpha Kali?”

“I expect absolute honesty.”

“Yes, Alpha Kali, I understand.”

Kali swirled the last of her drink between her fingertips. “Would you ever consider me to be a good person? Someone… Kind?”

Sebastian’s mouth poised to answer, as his heart thudded in all the wrong ways that precipitated a lie. He smelt of fear.

“You don’t have to answer. Your heart answered for you.” Kali sat her glass to the side, catching the man’s terrified expression. “Leave me. You’re not in trouble.”
Kali watched Sebastian excuse himself quickly from her presence. Left on her own devices, Kali poked around her food for several minutes, as hunger began to wade from her body. She took several deep breaths, still unable to get Klimek’s, or rather this "Stiles" face out of her head. The man’s eyes, unmistakably... Were his mother’s. Ever since, all she could think of was Claudia, and Jackie, and… Of everything she’d done in her life. Those eyes... She’d never thought she’d see them again.

“Kali?”

The smell of a doddering old Alpha hit her nostrils. Kali recoiled, rolling her eyes in an exasperated sigh. “Come in, you blind old fool.”

Breaking the handle of the door, Deucalion left himself inside of Kali’s room. Using his cane, he found his way to the nearest seat he could find. “Rather spacious accommodations. I can even smell the steak and what appears to be a deluxe breakfast platter. Business must be good.”

“Get to the point, old man. I’m busy.” Kali spat, grabbing a steak knife and cutting into its tender flesh.

Deucalion laughed, nodding. “Very well. I came to offer you some sage advice, as a wolf who’s lived countless decades, and who knows a thing or two about this world. Heed it or not.”

“I’m listening.” Kali muttered, glaring in her Uncle’s direction. “You weren’t always a spineless coward. I remember an Older Deucalion, who would have followed me to slaughter these bastards.”

Duke took a short breath, fiddling with his cane. “Leave this town and never return. Give in to Peter’s demands, and relinquish any and all packs that you have under your control. Derek, Satomi, and Roman will step in to handle the mess. Stop what you’re doing, for everyone’s sake. This is your one and only chance.”

Kali laughed. She pictured the old bat, Satomi, and how she’d let herself go in old age. Roman was a clown who feared the very thought of her shadow. Derek, even as a member of WERE... Well, she firmly believed he could be bought, given the proper incentive. “Why would I do that?”

“I’d rather not see my niece die.” Duke muttered, grimly. “Or rather... I don’t want to see the memory of my favorite niece die. I still remember your face... All wild and carefree... Tagging along behind Claudia and Jackie, following those two wherever they went. You were Claudia’s Maid of Honor. You’re Ema and Stiles’ Godmother.” Pointing his cane at Kali, he removed his bandages, as a pair of grey eyes settled on Kali’s face. “Could you stop all of this? Could that Kali come back to us? Just for a single day? For Stiles? For Ema? For everyone you love?”

Kali’s chest ached, if only for a moment. Applying her Aura, she deadened her emotions. “No. Anything else stupid you want to waste your time with?”

“Tell me... When did you cast away your heart? Jackie’s death? Claudia’s? Or... Was it my fault?” Duke said, shaking his head in disgust at his niece.

“I wouldn’t say it was anyone’s fault. I just realized that our kind needed to kept on a short leash.” Kali gripped her knife, stabbing the steak before her. The slightest trail of blood dripped down the meat, just a hair cooked. “A very short leash.”

“Has that fixed anything? Did it bring Jackie back? Did it make you feel better?” Duke spat, standing up and slamming his cane down on the floor. “At what point did all of this death, all of this disgusting treatment of your fellow kind... When did it seem right?!"
A coy smile crossed Kali’s face. She threw her platter of food across the room, inches from Duke’s face. “It’s funny, Deucalion.” Kali stepped out of bed, her silken red gown sliding behind her, like a pool of blood. “Since I became the Tyrant of the South… The only person doing any killing… Is me.”

Kali drew her claw across Duke’s neck, making a tiny, microscopic slice that dribbled blood for only a moment before fully healing. Her eyes billowed red that cast the room in a dark shadow of crimson. “Not the humans, against werewolves. Not the Hunters against the Supernatural. Not werewolves against werewolves… Nobody dies without my permission. Nobody kills without my permission. If they do? They know that I’ll hunt them down, and leave their loved ones to suffer for as long as I live.” Laughing, Kali applied her aura once more, suppressing the image of Claudia’s tears. “It’s just me… Alpha Kali Reed. Killing those who don’t deserve to live, and making sure each and every member of their blood is made to suffer.”

Grinning, Kali pictured the worthless slobs back at the motel. The remnants of the worst packs of the South. She’d done well to snuff out any hope or life out of them, years ago. Frankly, she’d been surprised more hadn’t killed themselves. They all deserved it. Their blood deserved to suffer. A mere death wasn’t enough to avenge Jackie’s murder. Blood hadn’t satisfied her.

“So… I suppose your kin deserve the same punishment? Brandon deserved to die?” Duke said, as he flipped his cane forward, against Kali’s neck. He pressed a button, as a blade popped from the cane’s tip.

Kali laughed at the man’s pathetic attempt at intimidation. “A shame that the Hales saved who they had. I’d planned on making them all suffer, like they deserve. Out in the fields, day in and day out. The old farts from the Elders are heading there as soon as we get back to my compound. They’ll be dead by year’s end. Or, I’ll make sure they’re dead by year’s end, at any rate.” She stepped forward, letting the blade cut at her neck. "Brandon was kind enough to let me know ALL about how they’d taken care of Stiles, kicked out his and Ema's child, and ran off the "slut". I was so grateful to know all of that. Made his death feel all the more... Justified."

“Is that truly what they deserve?” Duke spat.

“It’s what you deserve, too.” Kali reached up, gripping Duke’s cane. It shattered under her hand, throwing Deucalion backwards. She laughed at his pathetic excuse of a body, no better than a human’s at this point. “You’re lucky Stiles loves you, and I made a promise with his mother. Otherwise… The other night? You wouldn’t have survived me. I’d have ripped your eyes out, and let you bleed out. Today? You threatening me with your little toy? I would have gutted you.”

On the floor, on his knees, Deucalion smiled. He glanced up, doing his best to stay on both feet. “I see… Well, then I suppose I owe Claudia my life again. Good to know I’m in Stiles’ graces.”

Kali kicked her Uncle, sending him flying across the room. He collapsed against the front door, slumping into a heap on the ground. “Get out. Don’t come back. Just because I won’t kill you doesn’t mean I won’t throw you to my Betas and Alphas for some “fun”.”

Stumbling up, Duke gripped the broken handle. Again, the old man could only smile. As though he’d learned something from all of this. “Very well.” Duke turned away, stepping out into the hallway. “Just know… You’ll discover that your revenge is only going to end up with you dying, or miserable. Doing all of this won’t bring back Jackie and Claudia. This isn’t justice or revenge, anymore. This is malice, plain and simple. All you’ve done… Is alienate yourself from everyone who cared about you, and ensured that you’re nothing more than a darkness that needs to be destroyed. By living in the past… You’ve eliminated the hope for your future.”
Kali lost her breath. She stood, stoically watching as Duke left her presence. Turning to the side, she caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror. Her eyes, glowing in a swirling pit of dark red, gave the illusion of her entire body being clouded in shadows.

Stepping forward, Kali could barely make out her own face in the mirror. She slammed her fist into the mirror, shattering the glass all over the room, and letting shards lodge into her hand.

Blood trickled down Kali’s knuckles. Kali didn’t bother to remove the shards, staring at the broken remains of the mirror before her. A crack ran down the center of her face in the reflection, coated in blood.

“I was your darkness, wasn’t, I Claudia?”
Chapter 16

Despite the heavy cloud hanging over the Hale Pack heads, Stiles clung to whatever hope he could muster. Tried to find the silver lining, anywhere he could. Thankfully, Sheriff Stilinski and Dr. Delgado, back from their short vacation, brought just the perfect amount of joy that everyone needed in that moment. They pulled Stiles off to the side, and shared the news of the official engagement with him before anyone else.

In his and Derek’s bedroom of the Hale Estate, Stiles practically strangled his father with a hug, beaming brightly as the Old Man managed to finally crack a smile. For the first time, in a long time, the “Old Man” looked a little younger, and far happier than he’d been since Claudia passed away.

“I’m so happy for you, dad. Seriously, I’m… I’m really happy for you.” Stiles refused to cry. He’d cried enough these past months, and was frankly, sick of it. Smiling through it all, he turned and threw his arms around Melissa. “I’m happy for you too, Melissa. Really, you’ve been like a mother to me through all of the crap I went through as a teenager.” He grinned, mischievously. “I guess this makes you the Old Lady? I couldn’t want anyone else.”

Melissa choked up, in a mixture of laughter and tears, but still managed to smack Stiles upside the head. “Thank, you Stiles. I’m not THAT old, just yet, you know!”

Shooting up, Stiles beamed, pulling them both up from the bedside. “Come on, come on, we’ve got to tell everyone! Best news we’ve had in a LONG time!” As he turned to run out of the room and scream the news from the rooftops, Stiles felt his father’s hand grab him.

“Stiles…” Sheriff Stilinski muttered. He cleared his throat, as a low sweat covered his brow. If Stiles didn’t know his father any better, he’d think the Old Man was blushing. Or rather, embarrassed.

“There’s one other thing we wanted to tell you.” Melissa muttered, exchanging a quiet glance with the Sheriff. She clutched at her stomach, just as nervous as he was. Like the Sheriff, she looked embarrassed.

Too hopped up on excited energy, Stiles was unable to see past the joy in the moment, or catch their nervous expression. “You want a bachelor and bachelorette party? Seriously, I know Erica would LOVE to blow off some steam right now, Melissa. She’d get you the most epic of strippers, and cook you an AMAZING meal.” He turned to his father. “Dad, I can wrangle up the Deputies, and the lot of us can hit the Blue Moon, and I won’t even bitch about what Boyd cooks you up. Pizza, bread, fried chicken, whatever you want!” Stiles laughed, practically vibrating in an excited buzz. “The Pack needs this right now. This is… Jesus, you don’t know how good this news is.”

Melissa and the Old Man exchanged a brief, panicked exchange. “Is something wrong?”

Unhappy about breaking the happy moment, Stiles briefly explained the situation regarding Alpha Kali, the summit, and about everything that had occurred with Brandon Raeken while they’d been on vacation. As he did, Stiles watched his father paling at the mention of “Kali”. Melissa looked a tad green, learning about the state of Kali’s pack, and people like Ennis Reyes.

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to put everyone in a bad mood. We’ll get through this, and everyone will blow off some steam, and we’ll go back to everything being good again.” Stiles put up both hands, shaking it off. “What were you going to tell me, anyway?”
“You know what? It can wait.” Melissa said, clapping her hands together and moving up to wring out another hug from Stiles.

“She’s right. How about, for now, we all just have a big dinner to celebrate?” Sheriff Stilinski said, just as a small army of Duke’s grandkids rushed by Derek and Stiles’ bedroom, a screaming mess of flailing limbs, and what appeared to be a pet iguana. A few adults chased after them, chastising them. “Maybe.. Not Pack big? Maybe just… You, Derek, and the pups? A family dinner? Something simple?”

Stiles snorted, shaking his head. “You should see them all at dinner. I can’t wait till our real house is ready, we need a table at least three times as big, and twice as less destructible.” He pulled his father into a tight hug once more, before jogging out of the room. “I’ll go grab my boys, and meet you guys at wherever you want to eat. My treat!”

Ignoring the small whoop coming from his father, and the ramifications of giving his father free reign over the choices in food, Stiles jogged downstairs in search of his family. He stopped first at the living room, peeking inside the mass of couches they’d seemed to accumulate.

Erica, and several other mothers, were sprawled out in the living room, with the teenage girls in the pack. Some were helping the others with their nails, while others were passionately screaming at the television screen. Junk food was lined out in front of them all, half eaten.

“What is this crap?! Go for the legs! Stupid Beta doesn’t know how to fight his way out of a paper bag!”

“Oh my God, that asshole doesn’t even know how to place his feet! That bastard deserves to lose!”

Peering closer, he saw as the WERE District Qualifiers played out on the TV screen. A gathering of strong werewolves, looking to prove their strength and skill to earn sponsorship into WERE. The entire world watched as wolves from all over America, Canada, and Mexico flocked to arenas, fighting in honor for their pack, and to be seen as some of the strongest in the Continent. Less than 10 wolves a year made it through the District, State, and National Qualifiers, but by the end of the yearly competition, the matches were some of the most watched event in the world. The Olympic Committee could eat their hearts out.

Erica snorted, pointing at the TV screen. “Okay, see that, girls? That’s going to lose him the match, because the doesn’t know how to defend his weakest points, and he’s all about offense and flexing off those stupid muscles. Even in the real world, that’s going to get you punched in the jaw trying to take down a drunken brawler. Any minute now, he’s going to get punched in the...”

A pained screech echoed from the TV, and Stiles cringed at the rather painful end to a match.

“Like that.” Erica finished, tossing popcorn in the air and munching on it eagerly. “Though, a valuable lesson. Always watch your pressure points, keep moving, and don’t be a dumbass.”

The teenage girls all nodded in agreement. A few, however, watched her in awe.

“Hey, Erica, can you show us how to fight someday?”

“Yeah! I saw you and Jackson sparring outside yesterday, and I want to learn how to do that stuff!”

“Please?!”

One of the mothers rose up a hand, clearly flustered. “Now, now... I’m sure Beta Reyes is a very busy woman. We can’t bother her with such unimportant things.”
Beaming, Erica turned to face the mothers. “Oh, I don’t care. If you’re okay with it, I’d love to! Actually, there’s plenty I’d love to teach all the kids. More than just fighting. Real life survival skills, and all the things you need to be independent. The future’s never certain, you know, and it’s best to be prepared. Wish I’d known a lot more when I was their age, to be honest.”

While the young women shrieked in excitement, to be taught by one of the Pack’s Betas, Stiles watched the older woman, the mothers, react in genuine surprise. Dumbfounded, the mother from earlier stammered out something to the affirmative. “I.. Really? Beta Reyes, are you sure? My daughter isn’t even part of this pack. We’re just…”

“Pfft. Why does that matter? We’re all in this together, living under one roof, right?” Erica leaned up from the couch, grinning at the young women in the room. “Oh, and it’s just Erica. None of that “Beta” nonsense. If Derek hasn’t made it obvious already, this isn’t a typical pack. This is OUR pack, and I don’t do titles.”

Stiles smiled as Erica and the girls started watching the next match on the TV.

Out of everyone in their pack, Erica had thrived the most with such a large number of members. Her natural “cool aunt” vibe attracted the youth in droves, and she spoiled the lot of them rotten. Though the adults admired her as much as the kids did, after an incident at their front gate, involving a local werewolf trying to start shit with Duke’s former pack. Erica “took care” of the incident, immediately earning her pack “cred”. How she did it was, frankly, a mystery. Stiles didn’t ask questions he didn’t want the answer to.

Stiles moved past the living area, and on his way outside the back door, where the sounds of growls and happy laughter echoed from.

Peeking outside the back exit, Stiles spotted Jackson, Danny, Ethan, Aiden, and a group of teenagers playing a game of skins and shirts basketball. Jackson, as part of the skins team, passed the ball to Liam, who charged through an army of his cousins, allying up the ball to Jackson at the last moment, who leapt up and dunked the ball through the hoop. The basketball stand shook violently from the impact, and Jackson hung off the rim with his claws.

Onlookers, like Mason, Parrish, and younger boys, yelled in excitement, cheering on as the match continued its fervent pace.

Stiles watched for a few minutes, as the game devolved into a blur of an inhuman amount of speed and strength.. Danny, and some of his younger brothers and cousins threw out all the stops to try and stop Liam, Mason’s family, and Jackson. Which, given Jackson’s lifetime of being an athlete, and Liam’s training with Jackson all summer, was short lived. Jackson ran circles around Danny, and Liam had better ball control than anyone on the pavement.

Aiden and Ethan tapped out after a while, unable to keep pace with the other wolves, eventually getting outran by Mason’s 11 year old brother, in a flash of fur. The collapsed on the grass, huffing and puffing in pure exhaustion.

“LEFT!” Jackson yelled, as he chunked the ball across the length of the pavement. Liam caught it in mid air, following in his mentor’s footsteps and dunking the ball right into Danny’s face.

“‘That’s a hundred! Jackson’s team wins!” Mason called out from the sidelines.

“HA HA! Suck it, losers!” Liam’s mouth grinned with a set of sharp fangs, clasping a hand with Jackson as the duo bumped chests, and exchanged a complicated handshake. The rest of the team devolved into a mess of hoots and hollers, as Jackson high fived and congratulated the rest of
Mason’s brothers.

Danny’s family grumbled, all staring up at their oldest brother. “Come on! How come we don’t get Jackson!? Danny sucks!” One of Danny’s little brothers cried out, clearly pissed.

“Hey!” Danny smacked one of his brothers upside the head, growling at him. “Get me a lacrosse stick, and I’ll show that punk ass who’s the REAL boss here. That bastard can’t shoot for shit!”

Jackson rolled his eyes, scoffing as he waved off Danny’s comment. “Love you, too, bro. Why don’t you go get your sticks, and we’ll just see about that? You, me, first to 10.”

Danny and Jackson growled, pressing up against each other, eyes flashing as the two grappled back and forth. Stiles chuckled, glad to see their competitive spirit burning as brightly as ever. They’d been just as bad in high school.

Liam broke the two up, grabbing Jackson and yanking him back to the court. “Dude, you’ve got to get me prepped for basketball season! Seriously, why aren’t you our coach at school?! You’re a thousand time better than Principal Finstock! He’s ancient!”

“He’s the Eclipse Survivor. Of course he’s got awesome moves!” One of the teens exclaimed.

“Dude has the biggest balls of them all!” Another shouted.

Slowly, Jackson was overwhelmed by a swarm of the family’s most passionate athletes, tugging him around in every different direction. Stiles snorted, watching Jackson blush at all of the attention.

Since Jackson’s curse broke, he’d become something of a celebrity around the country. News stations around the globe were still selling his story, while covering Mrs. Whittemore’s arrest, and Mr. Whittemore’s plea agreement. Countless authors were begging to write about his life, harassing him on a daily basis.

As the “Eclipse Survivor” (as Jackson was dubbed), a great deal of people wanted a piece of Jackson, for one reason or another. He’d declined them all, choosing to stay loyal to Alpha Hale, and remain a Deputy for Beacon Hills.

“Alright, alright! Quit begging! Grab the ball and we’ll do some drills! Line up, and watch!” Jackson finally said, giving into the constant requests. While Jackson might have protested a bit, Stiles could see through the man’s feigned annoyance. The wide smile, the relaxed posture, and the golden glow of Jackson’s eyes? The man was happier than he’d ever been in his life.

Stiles trudged away from the backyard, and making his way into the kitchen.

Half a dozen wolves were already prepping for dinner, helping out Boyd, who’d become the unofficial (official, as far as Stiles was concerned) denkeeper of the Pack. Boyd kept stomachs full, everyone organized on chores and cooking schedules, and made sure everyone was out the door each morning with a smile on their face. All while running the Blue Moon’s kitchen, and barely speaking more than two or three lines at a time. The man was, literally and figuratively, a beast.

Despite his busy schedule, though, Boyd still had time to keep his biggest promise.

Stiles watched from the kitchen entryway, as Boyd and Isaac worked together over the kitchen sink. Isaac was propped up on the counter, watching Boyd’s every movement in awe, both dressed in aprons, and covered in parts of food.

“Humans crack eggs, which can be a big mess. We, as wolves, can slice them off and not have to
worry about a single shell getting mixed in. It’s important to make the cut clean, though, or we’ll just crack it.” Boyd explained, raising up an egg to Isaac’s face. With his index claw, Boyd sawed through the top of the egg, slicing an opening at the top in a fraction of a second. He tipped the egg, pouring its entire contents into a mixing bowl. “See? Just make a gentle sawing motion, back and forth, back and forth.”

Isaac watched Boyd repeat the process on two other eggs. He nodded eagerly, listening in to Boyd’s every word.

On the last egg of the bundle, Boyd handed Isaac the egg, with a confident smile. “Come on, your turn. You’ve got to do it at some point.”

Frowning, Isaac held the egg tightly in his hand. “But… What if I screw up? What if I break it and make everything messy?”

“Then it means you’re learning, and you’ll get it right soon enough.” Boyd nodded to the side, where an industrial package of roughly a hundred more eggs sat beside them. “Trust me, there’s no shame in making a mistake. I cooked in a restaurant once, where I burned an entire skillet’s worth of our best steaks, during our dinner rush, put us all behind by an hour, and lost us a three hundred dollar ticket for being so slow. I lost my job that night, Isaac.” He smiled, patting the pup on the shoulder. “But hey, I learned how “not” to cook a steak after that, and I got an even better job the next week, with a better chef. So, don’t worry. Everything will be alright. You’re going to do just fine.”

Stiles smiled. There was something endearing at how much Boyd supported everyone in the pack. Maybe it was the lack of support Boyd faced in his original pack, or natural fathering instincts, but whatever the case, the stoic Beta refused to let anyone feel like a failure. He also seemed to be opening up more and more each day.

Isaac nodded, with a big smile. Unhinging his claws, he shakily brought the tip of his index finger to the top of the egg. He followed Boyd’s instructions, sawing back and forth in a gentle motion. The pup took longer than was probably necessary, treating the egg like a priceless diamond, but eventually managed to cut the entire top off. The pup dumped the egg’s contents, shell free, into the mixing bowl.

“Perfect.” Boyd said, granting Isaac a high five, a fist bump, and some kind of handshake that Stiles had no hope of following, worse than Jackson and Liam's had been. The two giggled in joy, as Boyd put the bowl back into a mixer, and shot on the machine.

Stiles stepped into the kitchen, waving at his son. “Hey there, buddy! You real busy?”

Isaac beamed. “Daddy, I’m helping Boyd cook dinner for everyone! See? I cut the egg open, and didn’t get any shells in it!”

Leaning over, Stiles pecked a kiss on Isaac’s forehead. He ruffled the pup’s hair. “That’s my little Chef! I can’t believe you’re already THAT good with your claws! Next thing you know, you’ll be dicing onions like a pro!”

Boyd nodded, with a proud grin. “My apprentice is unparalleled in egg cutting skill. We’ll be moving on to a much more decisive skill, very soon.”

“Yeah! Boyd said he’ll show me how to make TOAST for breakfast tomorrow!” Isaac shouted, puffing out his chest with a goofy grin.
“Oooh! With Jam and Butter?” Stiles asked, already drooling at the thought of Erica’s homemade Jam, and Boyd’s homemade bread. Those two would put 20 pounds and a heart attack on Stiles if he weren’t careful. Hell, he could die in peace with their cooking, and he’d be okay with that.

“Yeah! It’ll be delicious! I’ll make yours EXTRA special, Daddy.” Isaac answered.

“I can’t wait!” Stiles caught the sight of Isaac’s dirty apron, and a few spots of flour on the pup’s cheeks. He turned to Boyd, while wiping off the flour with a nearby towel. “Can you wash him up in a bit when you two are finished? I’m going out for dinner with my dad and Melissa, and they want the grandpups.”

“Sure thing, Stiles.” Boyd took the towel from Stiles, peeling off the apron from Isaac and helping wash off the pup’s face. He nodded upstairs. “Scott’s upstairs with Duke. I think he was wanting to look at all of Duke’s old books in the study.”

“Of course he does.” Stiles rolled his eyes, picturing Scott attempting to dig through Duke’s tomes, attempting to cipher out latin.

Hopping back upstairs, Stiles made his way to the estate’s study. About twice as large as Duke’s had been, that made Stiles recall the library scene from Beauty and the Beast. Though, the Whittemores had been a little more progressive, and installed several fancy computer stations in the corner of the room, and more modern literature occupied its shelves.

Stiles peeked inside, spotting several wolves of the pack lounging around the study. Some teens were on the computers, doing their homework for the night. A younger couple were off in a windowed nook, curled up and reading on top of each other. Though, in the dead center of the room, sitting on a plush couch, was Duke, Scott, and Theo.

Scott and Theo sat on either side of Deucalion, both of their eyes focused on their grandfather, catching onto his every word in a state of calm awe. The Former Alpha seemed to be in the midst of a story, and Stiles paused at the door for him to finish.

“....so as the Grand Wolf Fenrir drew his last breath, he collapsed just outside the village of humans he’d fought so hard to protect. A village that desired nothing more than a peaceful life, free from their tyrannical King. Fenrir felt grief for those kind humans who’d helped him, and a profound sense of failure at being unable to save them from the King’s Army. With a final roar, he blessed those humans with the remnants of his soul, as it was ripped from his body. Those humans absorbed Fenrir’s soul, and became something much greater than they’d ever been. Whereas Fenrir had been a single Grand Wolf, they now became a grand species, a species of mankind who could become one with a wolf. A werewolf. With their combined power, they fought back against their Tyrant King, and were able to claim peace for their homeland, once and for all.” Deucalion finished, with a gentle smile on his face.

Scott’s mouth shot open the first chance he could find, bouncing up and down on the couch. “Is that REALLY where werewolves came from? Was all that true?!?”

Duke nodded, chuckling at the pup’s bounding enthusiasm. “That is a story told from my ancestors, passed down from father to son, from our Pack’s first Alpha. A story that packs across Europe share in unity, where our heritage began.” He smiled, resting his hand on Scott and Theo’s shoulders. “My great grandfather believed that our oldest living ancestor was a member of that first pack of wolves. Of course, that village existed in a Medieval Era, and was before my family came to America, so there’s little chance of proving it. Though... It’s a story I choose to believe.”

Theo dropped his head, kicking his feet back and forth off the edge of the couch. “That was a...
Cool story, Grandpa. Thanks for telling it."

“Yeah! It was the BEST! Do you know more stories?! Can we hear them?! Please? Pretty please!?” Scott exclaimed, leaning over and staring right at Theo. “You want to hear another one, right?” He beamed, focusing his attention back to Deucalion. “Theo like stories, too! Like last night, when Papa read us out of your old book, Theo liked those a lot! He giggled when Papa did the voices!”

Theo flushed, huffing as he glanced away. The pup folded his arms, clearly in “protest”. “Alpha Hale was telling us a story. So I had to listen! The Alpha’s word is Law.”

“Oh, really?” Deucalion brought his hand to rest on Theo’s head, ruffling the pup’s hair. “Theo… As your grandfather, and as your former Alpha… I want you to know that it’s perfectly fine to enjoy stories. Before I lost my sight, my favorite pastime was reading. Even today, I spend my spare time reading my special books. There is no shame in seeking knowledge, and should be, in fact, encouraged.”

Theo’s eyes went wide, nodding in eager respect to Duke. “Yes, Sir!”

Pulling Theo and Scott onto his lap, Duke hugged both of his grandsons. A fragile smile cracked on his face as both pups hugged him right back. “No need for “Sir”, Theo. I’m your grandpa. Nothing more, nothing less. I love you, and Scott, and everyone else in this pack, no matter what.”

Theo pulled away from Duke, disbelief in his eyes.

“I love you, too, grandpa!” Scott answered, before glancing right back at Theo. “You, too, Theo!”

Flinking, Theo gulped, sitting awkwardly on Duke’s lap. He didn’t seem to know what to do with himself, mouth stammering to argue.

Duke just put his arm around Theo, pulling him close again, and calming the pup. Glancing across the room, Duke nodded in Stiles’ direction. “Good afternoon. Is there anything I can do for the good Doctor?”

“Hi Daddy!” Scott waved eagerly. “Grandpa was telling us stories! Do you want to come listen, too? Grandpa knows a LOT about stuff that happened a long time ago!” A look of sheer joy crossed Scott’s face, as he glanced up to Duke, a sparkle in his eyes. “Grandpa, do you know anything about the dinosaurs?!”

Duke feigned a playful growl, flashing his fangs at his grandson. “Scott, I’m not THAT old. I’m barely middle aged by our species’ standards. Most wolves live into their two hundreds. I just happen to be horrendous health.”

“Oh. Did YOUR grandpa know any dinosaurs?” Scott didn’t seem at all dissuaded by that news.

Stiles snorted, moving up and ruffling Scott and Theo’s hair. His heart broke a little, feeling how Theo melted under the slightest touch or praise. Poor pup was starved for attention. “Sorry, I didn’t mean to interrupt storytime, but can I steal Scotty for a bit? We’re having a family dinner tonight with my father and Melissa. Knowing my dad, and Melissa’s stomach, I’m guessing we’ll be going for barbecue.”

“Wow, really?!” Scott was already up and off Duke’s lap, and howling in joy. The pup was always most excited when promised large quantities of meat.

“Yeah! Why don’t you go head downstairs and wait with Isaac? I’ll grab Papa and be down and
ready to go in just a minute.” Stiles said.

Before Stiles could catch his son, Scott had Theo by the hand, and dragging him out the door.

“Come on, Theo! Dinner! Meat! LOTS of it, and potatoes, and fries, and all kinds of good stuff! Paw Paw orders the best stuff, always!” Scott exclaimed.


“Wait! Scott, it’s just for…” Stiles yelled, but unable to get his point across before he heard the pups leaping down the stairs, and cheers about a big dinner. Sighing, Stiles rubbed the back of his neck.

“Oh, screw it. Uh, Duke, let Jill know that I’m stealing her kid for the night. Dinner’s on us.” He muttered, grinning with a low chuckle.

Duke nodded, with a solemn frown forming on his face. “She’s working overtime again tonight at the law firm. Told me to watch Theo, because she won’t be home until after bedtime for the pups.”

“Avoiding the awkward conversation with Theo. Dammit…” Stiles shook his head in disgust. “If I didn’t have a license to protect, I’d slap that woman upside the head and tell her exactly what I thought about her.” He thought, taking in deep breaths.

Duke nodded. “I may offer to tell on her behalf. Theo’s been through enough as it is. He doesn’t need a parent lying to him, on top of it. Though… I sympathize with her. Brandon’s death is going to be hard on Theo as it is, and that doesn’t include learning that his father damned half of his pack to Hell under Kali’s rule. I’m sure there will be… Struggles. Similar to what Isaac faces with his own father’s dark history. The sins of the father will pass to the son.”

“Thanks, Duke…” Stiles rubbed the back of his neck, trying to think happy thoughts. He and Lydia had a wedding to plan. Bachelor and Bachelorette parties to throw. Tuxes to order, and dresses to be bought. Wonderful things to plan and look forward to, instead of the mess of stress they were all currently involved in. Good things, happy things. Because everything with Kali was going to work out… It had to.

Deucalion cleared his throat, pointing to the third floor upstairs. “If you’re still looking for Derek, I saw Lydia drag him to the girls’ playroom. You might want to go rescue him.”

Unsure of what Duke meant by that, Stiles shot up the last set of stairs, and off to the third floor’s open area, that had become a makeshift play area for the girls. As he bounded up the last step, Stiles spotted the tiny set of play tables, a fake tea set, and a group of giggling girls sat around a table, dressed in various costumes, ranging from princesses, to a knight, and what appeared to be a fully shifted girl, in full fangs.

At the head of the table was Derek, wearing a plastic king’s crown, pretending to sip tea. Lydia was beside him, watching the conversations around them play out.

“The evil meanie dragon Liam must be stopped at all costs! We’ll send our best knight to defeat him, for the crime of not playing tea party!” Exclaimed a little girl, one of Liam’s cousins, dressed in a bright pink princess costume.

“Yes! Lady Mahealani will vanquish him with a sword! Right in the private parts!” Another girl said, clearly one of Mason’s relatives, and dressed up like Katniss, complete with toy bow.

One of Danny’s youngest sisters stood up, with a wooden sword raised to the ceiling, dressed in oversized football equipment, meant to emulate a knight. “I’ll destroy the dragon, in the name of Alpha Hale and Queen Lydia!”
Lydia bowed in respect to Danny’s sister, curtseying in her colorful skirt. “The Queen doth appreciate your bravery, young knight.”

All eyes focused on Derek. When he didn’t say anything, Lydia nudged him in the side.

“Oh!” Derek nodded, flashing his red eyes, and standing up, offering a salute. “The Alpha of this Queendom… Doth… Bid you… Bravery and courage in this, your… Finest day. Slay the dragon with utmost caution, and come back safely!” He tried his best to speak in an authoritative tone, but came off more like a horrendous Shakespearean actor.

“Huzzah!” The girls screamed in unison, before charging down the stairs, out of the house, and off to likely pelt “the dragon”.

Stiles stepped inside the room, folding his arms and staring at his mate. “So, what are you up today, your majesty?” He pointed at the Alpha’s crown.

Flushing, Derek took the crown off his head, tossing it to the side. “I was having a tea party. Or rather, a war meeting. They take their pretend time very seriously.”

Lydia giggled, patting Derek on the shoulder. “The girls wanted to meet Alpha Hale, and invited him as a guest to their tea party. They’re not used to having an Alpha pay them so much attention, so I think they were impressed.”

“I’m glad.” Derek sighed in relief, rubbing the back of his neck. “I’m trying to learn all twelve million names of the people in this house, and Lydia’s been helping me. Unfortunately, I have an awful memory, and apparently none of your friends’ parents believe in birth control.”

Stiles laughed, moving to his mate’s side, and grabbing him by the hand. “You’ll learn soon enough. Or, hell, even if you don’t, it’s not the end of the world. At least you care enough to try.” He pulled Derek off to the stairs. “Come on, we’ve got dinner plans, your Majesty.”

“I’m not living this down anytime soon, am I?” Derek smirked, following after his mate.

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Dinner at the local BBQ Joint left Stiles feeling bloated. He hadn’t eaten such a large quantity of food in ages, but Stiles couldn’t help himself. It took everything in his power not to chastise his father’s equally gluttonous rampage of food, but hell, that couple of hours’ worth of happy conversation, and delicious food, was enough to keep his mouth shut.

Though, perhaps the ice cream right after the BBQ had not been the smartest idea. Their group returned to the Hale Estate, in a unison of groans, and full, bloated stomachs.

By the time they’d all had time to digest, Melissa and the Sheriff shared their news with the rest of the pack. While most of Deucalion’s members merely clapped out of respect, Derek’s pack surrounded the couple with an endless amount of support and congratulations. So much so, that a secondary celebration started on the spot, as Erica popped out the champagne, and Derek gave a moving toast.

Stiles stepped away from the loud elation, letting the Pack share Melissa and his father as he walked around the flower gardens of the Estate. Surprisingly, most of the remnants of Duke’s pack took
responsibility for caring of the grounds, without being asked, with the summer flowers blooming at
their peak. The moon shone overhead, shining in tandem with an angelic fountain in the dead center
of the grounds.

Taking a seat at the fountain’s edge, Stiles took a deep breath, dipping his feet into the cool water.
Between work, his role as Second for the pack, and raising his hyperactive boys, his feet were tired
and sore. The water did well to ease the dull ache.


Jumping, Stiles turned around, watching Duke maneuver himself through the edge of the grounds,
and towards Stiles. He laughed, wiggling his toes in the water. “More like taking a walk. I think I
gained five pounds today!”

Duke chuckled, easing down next to Stiles on the fountain’s edge. He took a deep breath, prodding
Stiles’ leg with his cane. “Something’s bothering you, still. You’re a particularly skilled liar, but…
I’ve known you your entire life, Stiles. I can tell when you’re upset.”

Frowning, Stiles dropped forward, letting his shoulders sag. “Among the many stresses in my life
right now… I miss my mom.”

Silently, Duke brought his hand to rest on Stiles’ shoulder.

“With everything going on, and now with dad getting remarried, I’ve thought more and more about
her lately. How much I’d love to talk to her about all of this mess. Mom was… Really good about
listening. Helped me get through a lot of things. Like getting bullied for hanging out with Ema and
the other wolves from human kids. Or about my crush on Ema, and my crush on Danny at the same
time. She… She always knew exactly what to say.” Stiles let out a deep, tired sigh. He wasn’t
going to sob over her anymore. Though, if ever there were a time, he felt himself inches away from
losing it completely. “Mom… Mom loved me, for everything I was. Her and Dad were great
parents, and… And… I didn’t know what the hell despair was until she died. Every day with
her… Every day with mom was… Perfect.”

Gripping Stiles’ shoulder, Duke nodded. “Stiles, your mother was a special woman. One of the
strongest I’d ever known.”

“Yeah.” Stiles hitched his breath, nodding. “Yeah, she was.”

They sat in mutual silence, Duke never taking his hand from Stiles.

“I remember the first time I met your mother.” Duke muttered, in a deep, gravelly, tone.

Stiles smiled. He’d heard the story from his mother, before. “She was a little girl, right? I think
she’d just become friends with Jackie.”

“Oh yes… She walked up to our property, walking home with Jackie from school. An adorable
little girl in a red hoodie. All smiles.” Duke took a deep breath, gulping as he took his hand away
from Stiles. “I remember thinking… How I was going to cut her throat for coming within five feet
of my daughter, and leave her corpse on a pike.”

Stiles’ body froze in place. That was… Not how he’d heard the story before. He met Duke’s gaze,
trying to pierce the man’s mind, to see if he were possibly joking. Not that Duke ever made those
kind of jokes. Which left the bone chilling realization that Duke was telling the truth.

“In those days, I was not the same man I am today.” Duke added, dropping his head and resting on
the top of his cane. “A tyrant who ruled his pack with an iron fist. Forcing his pups, children, and adults into a tight regime of honor, and fighting for my name, and my name alone. Feared the world over as one of the strongest Alphas. People trembled when they heard my name. The Nation, as a whole, were terrified of me.”

Stiles gulped, feeling his chest’s rapid heartbeat. He wasn’t stupid. He knew about Duke’s past, and knew exactly what kind of a man he’d used to be. Not that Stiles ever knew “that” Duke. His entire life, he’d known Duke as the wizened, calm, and often vague Alpha, who tried his best to rule a pack that no longer respected him.

“All trembled, except, of course…” Duke muttered, with a wide smile. “For little red, Claudia.” A flash of life coated Duke’s eyes, as a set of tears gathered. “Fully shifted, and roaring at her to leave my daughter alone… Little Red merely stood in my way, protecting Jackie from me. Arms outstretched, not realizing I was Jackie’s father. Putting her life on the line, for a wolf.”

“Leave my friend alone, you big meanie doo doo head!” Duke mocked, in a tiny voice. He chuckled, wiping away the tears from his face, unable to hold back the flood of laughter leaving his lips. “A little girl… Five years old. The first to ever stand up to me… The first.”

Stiles tried to picture the scene. Soon, his fear and anxiety over Duke’s words were replaced with a fragile, teary eyed smile. Either insanity or the result of stress finally collapsing on Stiles, he laughed. “She… She didn’t really call the Tyrant of the West… A doo doo head…”

Duke nodded, barking in laughter. “Yes! Yes, she did! I’d never been spoken to in such as manner! Immediately, there I was, Alpha of Beacon County, finding myself respecting this little girl! I thought her to be one of the strongest souls I’d ever met, and allowed her into our ranks.”

The two laughed in unison, Stiles and Duke unable to keep the tears from flowing. They wiped them away as quickly as they came.

As the first to stop laughing, Duke shook his head, planting a hand over his heart. “Oh, goodness… She didn’t stop there, either… Over many years, Claudia… Claudia showed me how strong humans could be, and the real meaning behind life. Claudia made my daughter happy, and… My niece even happier. She gave them a glimpse at a normal life, of happiness, and what unconditional love really meant, something none of our children ever experienced. Something I’d never had as a child. She had such a big heart, and shared it with everyone she came across.” Lifting his head, Duke allowed several tears to fall down his face, smiling at Stiles. “You remind me of her, Stiles. Your eyes… The way you speak, the way you act… For myself… It’s as if I never lost her. I… I have faith that you’ll continue down her path, and… Be the one to save us all.”

Stiles laughed, shaking his head. “Yeah, right. Everyone says I’m more like my dad. 100 pounds of sarcasm and dry humor, with a bottomless pit of a stomach.”

Duke paused, ready to argue the point when the sound of tiny footsteps echoed through the garden. “Daddy?! Where are you, Daddy?!” Scott whined, the boy’s voice filled with exhaustion.

“He’s over here. I can smell him and Grandpa Duke.” Isaac yawned, stretching out into the air as he led Scott and Theo through the gardens.

The pups caught sight of Stiles and Duke, making a beeline for them. Scott tugged at Stiles’ shirt, wiping away the sleep from his eyes. “Daddy, can you come tuck us in, and read us a story?! Uncle Boyd says it’s our bedtime, but we can’t go to sleep without a story!”
“Yeah! It’s your turn tonight! Papa told us one last night!” Isaac answered, laying his head on Stiles’ lap.

Behind the two, Theo waited patiently behind, but stared at Stiles with a hopeful, longing expression. Likely, he’d be sharing Scott and Isaac’s room again that night.

“Alright, alright, Daddy knows when he’s beat.” Pulling his feet out of the fountain, he nodded appreciatively to Duke for his helpful ear.

Stiles walked the three pups up to their room on the third floor, right next to Derek and Stiles.’ While the three changed into their jammies, Stiles changed into his own night clothes, and tried to make space on the Queen sized bed for all three of the pups. Difficult, giving Isaac and Scott’s combined animal collection of stuffed friends that absolutely HAD to sleep with them every night.

“Daddy… Can we have two bedtime stories tonight?” Scott begged, as he crawled into place on his bed. He yawned, curling up against his toy wolf.

Isaac and Theo were quick to follow, crawling on either side of Scott. Isaac grabbed his own wolf, while Theo was handed a teddy bear from Scott. The three bickered for a bit on pillows, before finally settling into place.

Stiles smiled, grabbing Deucalion’s Grimoire, and taking his spot at the edge of the bed. “Maybe. Let’s see if you guys can stay awake that long. You had a really long day at school, didn’t you?”

Though, to Stiles’ surprise, the pups stayed awake through the first story, and through all of the second one. They struggled to stay awake with each word, and he grew more and more concerned when Isaac clasped his hand with Stiles, not wanting to let go.

“Alright, guys… That’s two. I think you guys need to get to bed. You’ve got to wake up early in the morning, remember?” Stiles started to stand, as Isaac’s firm grip brought him right back down. A frantic, sleepy whimper left Isaac’s throat. Theo and Scott looked just as distraught.

“Daddy? Could you sleep in here with us tonight? Please?!?” Isaac eyes flashed in gold, shivering. Taken aback, Stiles ran a hand through Isaac’s curls, pulling the pup into his lap, and laying down on the bed beside the boys. “Hey, hey… It’s alright, buddy. Why do you want me with you guys, tonight? Is it scary being up here? Do you want to be in a different room? Maybe with Liam and Mason?”

Isaac frowned, exchanging a nervous glance with Theo and Scott. He whimpered, burying his face in Stiles’ chest.

Theo raised his head, bracing his face as best he could from fear. “Some kids on the playground said there was a really bad lady living here right now. A Devil who killed a werewolf. They say… The Devil kills lots of werewolves, just because she can.”

Blood boiled in every inch of Stiles’ veins. It didn’t take him any time at all to know that the “Devil” was Kali. A woman who’d already become a boogeyman for pups in the County. “Where did you hear that from? Who told you that story?”

Scott and Isaac whined, still buried into Stiles’ side.

Theo folded his arms. “A bigger kid, who’s a werewolf. He was telling all of the little kids about the Devil Lady at recess. Don’t know his name. I told him to shut up or I’d break his jaw. Because
he was scaring Scott and Isaac.”

Stiles bit his lip. He’d be getting to the bottom of that tomorrow at school, for sure. “Boys... There is a lady Alpha living here in town, who’s very strong. But she can’t come anywhere near our pack. Alpha Derek will make sure of that, and we’ve got Jackson and Danny to keep us safe at night. They guard our property, remember? They’ve got their sleeping bags right by the front door!”

Scott and Isaac seemed to calm down, hearing that. They both knew how strong Derek was, and had seen Danny and Jackson training under him.

“C.. Can you still stay with us tonight?” Scott asked, with pleading, puppy eyes.

“Please?!?” Isaac pouted, keeping his hands firmly locked onto Stiles.

Smiling, Stiles realized he wouldn’t be going anywhere, anyway, with Isaac holding him down. So, instead, he pressed a kiss on Scott and Isaac’s head. “Of course I will. Just let me go, and let’s get ready for bedtime. Grab your stuffed toys, and let’s lay down. Daddy has to work in the morning, too, you know!”

Laying down on the mattress, Stiles felt the pups come to rest all around him. Scott claimed his usual spot, on Stiles’ chest. Isaac and Theo curled around his sides, unable to settle until Stiles’ arms came to rest on their backs.

Stiles hummed a quiet melody, one he’d used for Scott since he was a baby. The pups fought off sleep, still clearly worried about the rumors of Kali, despite Stiles’ assurances. Yet, one by one, they slowly descended into a serenade of snores and snuffles. Knowing he was stuck, with the pups pinning him to the bed, Stiles shut his eyes, not willing to disturb their sleep.

“Everything okay?” Derek asked, peeking inside the pup’s bedroom. He stepped inside, spotting the trio laid all around him. “Want me to move them? They’re out like a light, and I can use my Aura to keep them snoozing.”

Stiles waved Derek off. “Just leave them be. The bed isn’t that bad, and they wanted me to sleep with them. They’re worried about the Devil Lady.” He caught Derek up on the story the pups had been told.

Derek balled his hand into a fist, before grabbing a pillow on the bed and laying down to rest beside his mate and sons. His eyes glowed red. “I’ll crash here, tonight. They’ll rest better if I’m here.”

Nodding, Stiles brought his hands up to scratch at Scott’s hair. Derek’s Aura had calmed his sons, and Theo, down. They were resting far easier, now. Sighing, Stiles planted his head on a pillow, slamming his eyes shut. “This weekend is the summit, right?”

Derek nodded. “Peter’s already prepared me for what I need to say. Satomi and Roman will be here tomorrow. It’ll be here, soon.”

Stiles clutched Scott closer to him than before. “Good. I’m ready to end this... Once and for all. For our pups, for our town, and... For our family.”
Derek felt nerves flaring over every inch of his body. His hands shook, while attempting to fiddle with his tie, to complete the last of his outfit. Looking over the status of his fitted suit in the bathroom mirror, he tied the loop of his tie for the tenth time, trying to remember the trick Peter taught him, well over a decade prior.

“The Summit will be fine. My dad knows what he is doing. Alpha Satomi is a world renowned Alpha, who knows how these things work. WERE will be there. Kali will have no choice but to submit. Nobody’s that big of a fool to take on two of the most powerful Alphas in this country.”

Sighing, Derek glanced down at the miserable state of his tie. A silken red, wrinkled mess by this point, barely worthy of salvaging.

“Having trouble there, big guy?” Stiles stepped inside their shared bathroom, attaching a cufflink to the end of his suit’s sleeve. He eyed Derek’s tie, snorting. “Well, despite the sorry state of your tie, you look handsome.” Stiles said, with a sly grin.

Derek chuckled, standing still as Stiles moved over to fix his tie. With Stiles next to him, he felt his nerves over everything dull. “You look sharp, too, Dr. Stilinski. A shame you don’t dress like this more often.” He growled, flashing a playful fang.

“You cleaned up nice, too, Alpha Hale.” As Stiles finished Derek’s tie, he leaned forward, pressing a quick, frantic kiss into his mate.

Responding in kind, Derek pressed right back, wrapping Stiles up in his arms. He kicked the bathroom door closed, cutting out the chance of any wandering ears. Running his hands up and down Stiles’ body, it took all of his willpower not to rip them to shreds and call off their involvement in the summit.

After a few moments, Derek came back up for air, grinning alongside Stiles.

“Too bad we’ve got something else planned this weekend. I wouldn’t mind taking this a little further, but… Don’t think the Summit contributors would care to smell that on us.” Stiles broke their embrace, taking in a deep breath.

"No... No, they wouldn't. I'd rather my first meeting with Alpha Satomi be a little more... Professional." Derek hoped to make a good first impression with the old Alpha. Having connections was important, especially with his new boss.

A brief frown crossed Stiles’ face as he went back up for one final peck on Derek's lips.

Derek rose an eyebrow, wrapping his arms around Stiles’ waist. “Everything okay? Worried about today?”

Stiles shrugged. “A little about the Summit, yeah, but…” He paused, sighing as he leaned back into Derek’s chest. “You know… I think we skipped the honeymoon phase of our relationship, entirely. Granted, we both have kids, so that changes a lot of things, but I don’t think we’ve got enough time like this right here. Our Hanky Panky is seriously lacking.”

Derek cringed. He hadn’t really wanted to admit it, but... Stiles wasn’t wrong. Between the pups, all the mess about becoming the County Alpha, emergency after emergency... It left their love life, and their relationship, on the backburner. Though... Like Stiles said, that was part of being a
“A lot of things got in the way. I was a Deputy with long hours, and a weird schedule. Then I was a father. Now I’m a County Alpha, who’s going to be just as busy.” Derek massaged the back of Stiles’ shoulders, taking in his mate’s scent.

Stiles shook his head. “I’m just as much to blame. I was too worried about Scott to see past anything else. For a long time, all I cared about was him not missing out on his wolf heritage, and made that my one and only focus. Then Isaac came along, and… I just wanted to wrap him up in a blanket and take all the pain away.” He smiled, taking in a deep breath. “Though… I wouldn’t trade what we have now, for anything.”

Derek smirked. “I agree. One good thing came of this craziness, is that we have each night together, in a room we can share. We’ve got the family we both always wanted.”

A low hum of agreement came from Stiles. “I love the evenings, right after the pups’ bedtime story. You, me… In each other’s arms, wrapped under a blanket. Pretending to watch TV, while we just zone out and… Be there for each other. Not think about all the bad things, and… Have a little, brief, quiet happiness for each other.”

Derek nodded. “I prefer the mornings. When we’re just waking up, and trying to talk about everything we have to do for the day. Complaining about the news, talking about what we should wear, and arguing over how many times we can hit the snooze button without being late.”

“Or how long we have until Scott or Isaac come bounding through our door on the weekends.”
Stiles snorted, laughing in unison with Derek. He sighed, turning around and sharing another kiss with Derek.

Derek broke their kiss, shutting his eyes. “When this Kali mess is all over today, how about you and I take a short vacation? Just a weekend? Our own little honeymoon, just for us. Away from everyone and everything? We can leave the Erica and Lydia in charge, and Duke’s here to advise them. Jackson and Boyd would probably be thrilled to watch the pups, and spoil them rotten.”

A wide smile crossed Stiles’ face. “You know, I think they can survive without us for three days. Hell, let’s make it four. I can take a Friday off from school.”

“Stiles! Derek! We’re leaving in ten minutes! Peter’s here with his good looking WERE guys! Don’t leave me alone with them for very long!” Erica screamed, from the first floor.

Derek and Stiles groaned, rolling their eyes.

Stiles opened the door to their bathroom as they both strode out into their bedroom. “Okay, so rules of the date… No happy meals, no talk about the pack, no talk about the County, or my job, or the shitty kids I want to beat upside the head from the school, or anything negative. Just us. Just about us. Happy thoughts!”

“I know a great cottage on the Beach that Laura owns. I’m sure she’ll let us rent it for free.” Derek smiled, as he and Stiles made their way down the staircase, and to the front foyer of the Hale Estate.

Erica, Boyd, Jackson, Parrish, and Danny stood at the front entrance, in spiffy suits. Peter and an envoy of the 3rd to 7th strongest members of WERE stood in perfect formation, a terrifying sight to behold, and dressed far nicer than anyone else in the pack.

Stiles leaned over, whispering into Derek’s ear. “Only if I can pig out on lobster, and we spend every waking hour at the beach, with you in a speedo.”
Derek flushed, knowing damn well that everyone in the foyer had heard that. Though, based on their smiles, he didn’t think any of them minded all that much. “It’s a date.”

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The Summit, as agreed upon by Peter and Kali, was to be held in the neutral territory. Away from Kali’s army in the south, and away from Peter’s army in the National Capital.

Which left the strongest Alphas in the country surrounding the conference table of the local Hilton. The Alphas and Seconds occupied the table’s seats, while the Betas of each pack surrounded and protected their leaders. All while the sounds of the State and National media echoed through the hallway, in a low fervor over what will come of the Summit, and trying to probe information out of the hotel security.

Derek glanced to the side, eyeing Kali’s placement at the table. Despite the forces amassed against her, she managed to maintain the coy, and surprisingly calm smile about her.

Alpha Satomi sat next to Kali, and despite her plump, grandmotherly figure, Derek could feel her superior aura radiating in full mass. Surrounding her were her sons and daughters, that Derek recognized from the California WERE class he’d been a part of, ranking somewhere in the top 20s with ease. Her second, Noshiko Yukimura, sat in a pensive state, as sparks shone in her golden-orange eyes. Like her daughter, Kira, Noshiko was a talented Kitsune, and had a long standing relationship with the old Alpha.

In a stark contrast, State Alpha Roman sat in his tacky white suit, and tackier orange scarf, smoking his third cigar of the meeting, appearing (and smelling) hungover. The Betas surrounding him looked bored, and his second (a petite young woman with colorful hair), appeared to be embarrassed of the entire display her pack showed.

“...so that takes care of the legal niceties.” Peter slammed his book shut, that he’d been reciting from, in a dull tone. He carded his hands together, taking a deep breath before leaning on his hands. “I won’t waste any of our valuable time here. Alpha Kali Reed, do you understand the charges that have been brought up against you?”

Kali crossed her legs, shaking her heads. “As a matter of fact, no, I don’t. All I’ve heard are the miserable whining from the National Alpha, telling me how to run my pack.”

A crack rang out through the hall, as Satomi slammed her claws on the table, sending a splinter of wood rocketing just past Kali’s face. “Do not toy with us, Alpha Reed. The things I’ve heard today are a disgusting example of Alpha Leadership. Had you been under my State Authority, I’d have had your Aura taken by now, and you shackled in prison, or far worse!” She pointed to Derek, as her eyes burned a sickening color of red. “Even this young man, a naive, ignorant, and infantile Alpha, seems to have a better grasp of what it means to run a pack.”

“Gee, thanks.” Derek thought, exchanging a insulted glance with Stiles, who just shrugged.

“What crimes have I committed, oh wise Alpha Satomi?” Kali asked, with a smug grin. She turned to Roman, with an innocent glance. “As far as I was aware, I was operating within State Regulations. An Alpha’s Orders, in my State, are absolute, and beyond legal review. Is that not correct, Alpha Roman?”
Roman shot back a flask, shrugging. “I let my Alphas do what they want. As far as I can tell, the only legitimate complaint here is the living conditions. I wasn’t… Aware of the young ones.” His eyes, dull and lifeless, glanced away from Derek’s incredulous glare.

“They are fed and given shelter. What more could they hope for? They are, after all, rather worthless. The bloody remnants of the packs that plagued the South. They deserve dirt.” Kali asked, as her claws grew out, ripping a deep hole into the table. Her smirk remained.

“They’re children!” Stiles spat.

All eyes turned to focus on the human. Satomi seemed a little put out by the Second speaking over his Alpha, and Roman seemed taken aback. Kali, however, shook as she glared Stiles’ direction, infuriated.

Derek placed a hand on his mate’s shoulder, feeling the rage billowing from inside of Stiles. “My Second and I are of the same mind. Hearing the reports from our Betas, we can’t turn away from the truth of the matter. Especially, given that some of them are blood to this pack.”

Satomi rifled through one of the reports in front of her, skimming its contents quickly. “Ah, yes… I believe that Mrs. Reyes also remarked that many of these young ones also displayed blue eyes?” She growled at Kali, pointing her finger inches away from Kali’s face. “Care to explain that?”

Laughing, Kali smacked Satomi’s hand away. “Young or not, they are Betas, and they will enact my will. The fact they feel guilt is on their own conscience. Their blood has done far worse, and had their packs lived, I’m sure they would just be as terrible. So, I don’t see what the problem is. They’re a tool to be used. Nothing more, nothing less.”

The room went deathly silent. Kali’s guard, which included Ennis, went pale in the face. Satomi and Noshiko appeared to be one twitch away from cutting Kali’s throat. Derek smelt Erica’s rage just behind him, and feel the force by which Parrish and Danny were using to keep her in place.

“By the umpteen million Gods, Kali… Why do you have to make all of this… So damned complicated? Can’t play nice for ten seconds…” Roman rubbed his forehead, reaching into a different pocket and popping open a second flask.

Peter shook his head in disbelief. “Kali… This is unacceptable.” Standing from his seat, Peter snapped his fingers. The WERE guard moved into place, surrounding Kali and her pack. “

Derek watched as his father shifted. Being the National Alpha, and one of the strongest Alphas in the Country, if not the world, his shifted form was something that of nightmares. His hair flared in a bright red, matching his eyes, claws, and fangs. The man’s Aura sent a chill down Derek’s spine.

Peter pointed a claw at Kali. “As I said earlier, I am loathe to waste any of our time here.” Hopping on top of the table, Peter walked across, bearing his fangs and claws just above Kali’s throat. Derek smelt Erica’s rage just behind him, and feel the force by which Parrish and Danny were using to keep her in place.

Peter shook his head in disbelief. “Kali… This is unacceptable.” Standing from his seat, Peter snapped his fingers. The WERE guard moved into place, surrounding Kali and her pack. “

The Summit members focused on Kali. Her calm, unphased face. The sneering, disrespectful smile. An overwhelming glow from her eyes, stronger in Aura than he remembered her having on his front doorstep. Windows across the room began to crack under the pressure of her presence.
Glancing behind, Derek watched as his Betas all froze in place, holding onto Stiles, and crowding around him. Erica, especially, wrapped her arms strategically, protecting Stiles’ vital organs around his chest.

Satomi and Noshiko eyed Kali incredulously, with Satomi’s children moving to stand in between their Alpha and Kali. They yanked Satomi away from the scene, circling her protectively.

Roman sat in place, sighing as he laid his head down on the table.

Kali rose her head, with a low, terrifying laugh, spitting in Peter’s face. “I decline.”

Peter’s roar shattered glass, already weakened by Kali’s Aura. Screams could be heard throughout the Hotel. He hopped off the table, wrapping his hand around her neck, claws drawing blood with tiny nicks. “Alpha Reed, I don’t think you quite understand the predicament that you find yourself in! We’re not asking for this. We’re demanding it. Fail, and I won’t hesitate to make your life a living hell.”

Kali giggled. A sugary sweet laugh that forced Derek’s stomach to roll. He smelled neither fear or intimidation on Kali’s scent. Rather… He could barely make out… Joy.

In a flash, Kali had Peter’s arm in an overwhelming grasp. The sound of bones breaking hit the room, as Peter flew across the room, slamming into a wall, and leaving a crater where he fell.

“I decline.” Kali snapped her fingers. Her guard shifted on the spot, shaking as they surrounded her. They stood in front of Peter’s WERE guard, like a child attempting to fight a professional fighter.

“Get Stiles away!” Derek shouted immediately. The Hale Betas responded instantly, yanking Stiles away from the fight, clear across the room. Derek shucked off his suit coat, rushing to his father’s side. Dropping down, he helped Peter to his feet.

Once up, Peter growled, forcing the protruding bone on his arms back into place. Steam rose from his arms, as they healed on the spot. “I order Kali Reed be placed under arrest, and taken to the nearest holding facility, by the authority of the National Alpha. Now!”

The barked order hung in the air.

Met with instant silence.

Peter eyed his guard. “What are you all waiting for!? I ordered you to take her in! NOW!”

Derek felt the air drain out of his lungs, as watched his brothers and sisters in WERE. The ones Peter had brought with him, the strongest members in the Country. They surrounded Kali, in a defensive formation. None said a word, keeping their heads down. Yet, they removed their sunglasses, one by one. Each of their eyes now glowed a soft red.

“W… What?!” Peter stumbled backwards, putting his arm out in front of Derek. “None of you were Alphas! Not a one of you! Wh…” Realization struck. He shifted to Kali’s eyes, growling. “What have you done?!”

Kali laughed, shaking her head. She stepped forward, as her eyes swirled in a mess of black and red. Derek felt the overwhelming gravity emanating from them. Her eyeballs bulged, as black veins protruded on and around them, taking up the top of her forehead.

“Amazing what the promise of power, and threatening the lives of their loved ones can do. I made them a clear offer. They help me, or I massacre the ones closest to them. In exchange for their
support, I also gave them the power all werewolves crave. Anyone can be bought, or forced into
doing anything, Peter. That’s how pathetically worthless our race is. That’s what I learned, all those
years ago.” Kali snapped her fingers, as her WERE guard moved into a V-formation, claws out and
ready to attack. Tears ran down many of their faces, shaking under the weight of Kali’s Aura.
“Once I kill you, Peter, I’ll become the National Alpha. Then… Nobody will ever kill again.
Except. For. Me.”

Kali snapped her fingers again.

Reluctantly, Roman stood from the table. He, and his guard moved to Kali’s side, eyes fixated on
Satomi’s pack.

“Shit… Shit…” Derek balled his hand into a fist. Outnumbered. Outmaneuvered. Even with
Satomi’s members, himself, Peter, and his Betas, Derek knew this wouldn’t end nicely. Yet, he
moved forward, pushing his injured father back.

Satomi shook her head, spitting at Roman’s feet. “You would turn your back on our Country?
Despicable.”

Roman sighed, rubbing the back of his neck. “Sorry Old Lady, but I’d rather live to see the end of
next week, and not see my pack get torn to shreds. I’ve got kids. Kids she promised to spare from
all of this.” He balled his hand into a fist. “You… Haven’t seen what she can do. Imagine your
children… Their remains looking like shredded chicken.”

Kali stepped forward, her guard. She took a deep breath, pointing at Derek. “Alpha Derek, you are
not part of this situation. You are an unneeded element. Take your pack and leave. I have no
qualms with you, and will allow your group to continue its authority in this town. That is my offer to
you. Leave, and live.”

Shaking, Derek shot his glance to his pack across the room. He spotted Stiles, and wasn’t given the
opportunity to answer.

Stiles stepped forward, shaking his head as Erica and Boyd held him back. “What is wrong with
you!? What is wrong with all of you?!”

“Be silent, boy.” Kali spat, not taking her eyes away from Derek. “This is it, Derek. My offer, take
it or leave it. Do you want to see your people hurt? Step out of my way, WERE-boy, and nothing
has to change with your perfect little family.”

Derek’s chest hurt. He grasped Peter’s shoulder tightly, backing away with his father in hand.

“Why are you all following her?! Don’t you have any idea of what she’s done?!” Stiles continued,
furiously frothing at the mouth as he yelled. “What she’s capable of?! I watched her kill a member
of her own pack just for talking out of turn! Do you really think any of you are worth anything to
her?!”

“I SAID BE QUIET, BOY!” Kali roared in Stiles’ direction.

Jackson and Danny shot forward, arms up and braced for anything she shot their way. Both of their
eyes glowed in tandem, growling at her face, despite the overwhelming Aura that she shot their
way.

“…wh… What? How can you two… Defy me!?” Kali stepped backwards, eyes shaking as he met
Jackson and Danny’s.
Derek took the opportunity, with her focused on Stiles, to yank himself and Peter away from their position. They moved next to Stiles, and the rest of the Hale Betas, both Hales shifting and bent down into an attack position.

“Nothing will change if she becomes the National Alpha! Even if she’s threatening your loved ones, what’s going to stop her from doing this the rest of your life!? Nothing! Because she’s a psychopath! Nobody matters to her! She’ll kill anyone she wants, and won’t give a damn! Promises mean nothing to her!” Stiles continued, eyes focused on the WERE members, and Roman’s pack.

Kali’s face broke into a devolving mess of twitches, pulsating black veins, and the general appearance of madness. “Nothing? Nothing? They mean nothing!?”

Ignoring her completely, Stiles kept his attention on the members of WERE, and Roman’s pack. “If you let Kali become the National Alpha, you’re letting this madwoman have the power to affect every werewolf in this country! Do you really want her having power over your children!? Over your family!? Over your grandchildren!?!” He shook his head, thumping his chest. “My boys already are having nightmares about this woman! They’re scared to death of her, and they’ve never even met her!”

“Shut up. Shut up. Shut up!” Kali screeched, shooting forward. Her claws were out, aimed right towards Stiles, the swirl of red and black overtaking her eyes completely.

Derek made a single step forward, stopped as Jackson’s fist, Erica’s foot, Parrish’ flaming claws, and Danny’s knee hit Kali before Derek could even register the movement from his Betas.

Kali’s pack, Roman’s pack, and the WERE members watched her fly across the room, slamming into a wall.

“Don’t even fucking think you’re touching Derek or Stiles.” Jackson said.

“Lay off.” Danny spat.

Parrish stood, his entire body engulfed in a mess of flames (sans his now charbroiled suit, naked as a jaybird), and covered in black soot. His demonic presence, and orange eyes said enough.

Erica and Boyd took their position on either side of Stiles, arms folded, and deadly glares focused on Kali.

Staggering up, Kali wiped the blood from her mouth, arm covering her stomach.

“See?” Stiles shook his head, pointing at Kali’s pack. “Kali’s not all powerful. She’s one woman. One Alpha. One werewolf. Leave her alone, and she’s nothing but a lone wolf, ready to be hunted down like any other prey.” Derek watched in awe as Stiles’ eyes flashed bright, hopeful, and resounding. “Right here, right now? She has no army. She has no power in this room. All she has are all of you, who she’s threatened. Step down… And we can stop this, once and for all. You can all be free!”

Derek watched as Stiles glared across the room, focused entirely on Kali. In turn, Derek also watched as Kali seemed to shake in terror.

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Kali finally met Stiles’ eyes. After trying so hard to avoid her son, Kali had to give in.
Honey brown, full of life, full of energy, and… Utterly fearless.

Just like Claudia, Kali saw the boy’s talent was just as strong as his mother’s. A talent that made him just as terrifying as any Alpha. His words were his weapons, drawing people together, and rallying them to a cause. A weapon Claudia had used to tame the Tyrant of the West. To change the hearts of countless werewolves in the Reed Pack, who bore the children that now surrounded her son. A talent that gave Kali faith in mankind, and made her love Claudia more than any other living being.

“Claudia… You… Were you really only a human?”

Stuttering over her words, Kali gazed at the ones surrounding Stiles. The Betas, Alpha Derek, Alpha Peter… They all surrounded him, protecting him with astounding resolve. She smelt their passion, and knew… Each of them, Stiles included, would die for one and other.

Kali turned to her own pack. Alphas she’d taken, and forced into protecting her. The WERE members. Roman, the useless hack. None of them came to her aid, as the Hale Betas had done for Stiles. They stood, uncertain, and wavering in their loyalty. All she smelt of them was fear, confusion, and… Betrayal.

“W… What are you all waiting for!?” Kali screamed. She snapped her fingertips. “Get over here and protect me! Get into formation! We’re going to take the National Throne!”

Silence coated the room.

The WERE members stepped backwards. They neither joined Peter, nor came to Kali’s aid. Most dropped to their knees, easily overcoming Kali’s order.

The man she knew as Ennis Reyes shook, eyes twitching as he stepped forward on shaky legs. He took the hands of his fellow Alphas, and… Using every fiber of their being to fight Kali’s Aura, sunk their claws into one and other. They all screamed in agony, using pain to fight her, and winning the conflict.

Roman trembled, generally useless as always. It was his second, the petite woman by his side, that shoved him backwards, and proceeded to flip Kali the bird.

Blood boiling, Kali roared, shaking the foundation of the hotel. “I ORDER YOU ALL! I COMMAND YOU TO FIGHT! Come to me, NOW!” She glared at her own pack, slamming her claws into the wall, leaving a crater in its wake. “I’ll kill them all. Everyone you all hold dear. Your Betas, your loved ones, EVERYONE.”

Ennis rose his head, eyes bleeding from the struggle. Like the rest of Kali’s pack members, he struggled to keep his body from moving, paling from the exertion.

“No.”

“Fuck off…”

“We’re better off dead than letting you lead this country. That human guy is right.”

“I don’t even want to live anymore, and neither does my family, so why should we fear dying?”
Kali watched as each of her members dug their claws deeper into their skin. They refused to listen to her, and she couldn’t force them any further.

“Surrender now.” Peter smirked, stepping forward as the last of his disjointed arm finished healing. “An attempted coup of the National Throne is subject to the death penalty. Give up now, and surrender your Aura, and I’ll spare you from that fate.” He pointed all around. “You’ve got nothing, now. As Stiles said… You’re nothing, alone. Just another Alpha, that we can defeat easily.”

Kali shivered, glancing over to Stiles. She took in his disgusted expression, and the hatred lurking in his eyes. As though Claudia herself were there at that moment, chastising her. Like she was a child, all over again, with a hand caught in the cookie jar.

Stepping away, she crossed her arms, huddling for any sense of warmth. She wished for nothing more than Jackie or Claudia’s arms at that moment. For her big sisters to tell her everything was going to be alright. That… They still loved her. That all of this hadn’t been a waste of time. That she wasn’t a nightmare to her Godson’s children.

Tears billowed in her eyes, fangs flashing out of her mouth.

“I kept my promise. Don’t you… Ever forget that…” Kali whispered, to the air.

With one final scream, Kali leapt out of the broken window, and into the back parking lot. She slammed onto the hood of a car, and darted off to the nearest woods.

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Derek, Peter, Noshiko, and the Hale/Satomi Betas began an immediate hunt for Kali Reed, while Stiles and Satomi handled the Media Circus back at the hotel.

Kali’s scent was on Derek’s nose, and he followed it with everything he had. Rushing through the trees of Beacon Forest, Derek had gone into a full Alpha shift, a blur of red to anyone who watched him.

“You’re not getting away. You threatened my father, my family, and my County. I’m not letting you go free. You’re not going to hurt anyone, ever again.”

Breaking through a clearing, Derek finally spotted the bitch in question. Running by the river, Kali was only a few miles south of the County Border.

“Stop right there!” Derek yelled, pushing himself harder.

Kali darted back and forth on the limbs of trees, her agile build having an easier time than Derek’s bulky self. A challenge made all that easier as Derek shot himself downwards, punching through a tree Kali had just landed on.

Falling to the ground from the force of Derek’s attack on her tree, Kali caught herself on a spare branch. She landed on both feet, growling on all fours, ready to pounce and attack.

Derek assumed his own position, circling around Kali. “You’re not getting out of here.”

“Don’t make me hurt you, Baby Alpha. I really don’t want to break my promise, but… I’m not going to lose. Not to that boy, of all people. Not her son! Not after everything I’ve done for them!” Kali howled, her Aura slamming against Derek’s. Sparks flew from their eyes.

Unphased, Derek snarled, lunging forward. His claw swiped at her head, missing by an inch.
Kali shot her foot into Derek’s stomach, forcing him backwards. With both claws, Kali aimed for Derek’s neck. A sloppy, uncoordinated attack, that Derek saw through immediately.

Catching Kali’s attack, Derek swung the opposite Alpha by her hands, round and round, slamming her into the trunk of a tree. The tree collapsed by the impact, as Derek pinned Kali down on the bark. Rearing back, he slammed his fist into her face. He repeated the attack several times over, into her stomach, ribs, lungs, and onto other points of pressure.

Derek huffed for air, glancing down at Kali as he stood over her. With the wind knocked out of her, several key pressure points hit, and a few broken bones, she wouldn’t be getting up anytime soon. Aside from him being an Alpha, he’d strategically shut down most of her body’s healing system. Basic WERE de-escalation tactics.

“...damn promise…” Kali muttered, under her breath, struggling to breathe.

“Stay down.” Derek reared his head back, howling into the air. Peter and his Betas would hear his call, and come to take her into custody. In the meantime, Derek glared down at Kali’s pulsating red eyes. “Remove the orders you’ve placed on your pack. They’re dying where you left them, and had to be restrained. Let them die, and Peter will see you executed.”

Laughing, Kali smirked. “Not a chance. I’ll let them die... At least then... My loss won’t be in vain. The pain... Must be unbearable... To disobey an Alpha’s order…”

Derek shook his head. He growled, bending down to Kali’s side. “Then... You leave me no choice. Dammit.” Flaring his eyes, Derek slammed his hands down upon her eyes. Using his Aura, Derek tried to follow Peter’s advice on how to steal another Alpha’s powers. He’d rather Peter be doing this, but... Time was of the essence.

In that moment, Derek felt his own Aura engulfing Kali, coating her body in a field of red. One by one, Derek felt a weight grow in his hand, as each of Kali’s stolen Aura’s became his own.

Memories from Kali crept into his own. Short flashes of recollection, emotions, and feelings.

Love. Admiration. A young woman’s face, who had Stiles’ eyes, holding Kali’s hand as they walked in the park on a warm summer’s day.

Joy. Love. Peace. Visions of graduation day, being congratulated by a pair of women, both proud of her beyond words.


Two babies, born only a few weeks apart. Brimming pride and joy at being their Godmother.


Blood. Revenge. Dead bodies as they writhed in agony, begging for mercy. Kali gives them none.

More despair. Another funeral. Aura being used to bury emotions, and continue the bloody revenge. A little boy, with honey brown eyes, crying into Deputy Stilinski’s shirt.

Derek rose up, shivering as he felt the pulsating mass in his hand, gasping for air as cold engulfed his entire body. The Aura he’d pulled out from Kali, about the size of a baseball, beating like a human heart, but shimmering a dazzling gleam, like a ruby. Far bigger than he’d ever seen in any book at college.

“To the victor goes the spoils.” Tears ran down Kali’s blue eyes, glowing in a dull, lifeless ache. She didn’t bother moving from the ground, still as a corpse. Laughing, she stared up into the sky, focusing beyond the clouds, and barely in the moment. “The Aura of countless Alphas. The control and power over all of the packs I’ve created. They’re all yours now, Derek Hale. Only yours.”

Glancing down, Derek felt the hum of power in his hand. Felt the lives of thousands of werewolves, and their connection to Kali. Their heartbeats, all as one in his hand.

“Maybe… Maybe that will be enough, for them… Stiles… Jackie and Claudia’s grandchildren… Will be safe, in your hands. I saw your life, too. I saw… What they did to you. How much you… Love your boys, and love Stiles…” More tears rippled down Kali’s face. “A shame… I’ll never know that feeling again.”

Derek smelled it, the unholy scent of despair. Without her Aura, without being an Alpha, Kali couldn’t hold back her emotions any longer. The weight of her sins, now bearing down, crushing her entire body. Guilt over the lives she’d ruined, now coming to the forefront.

Kali turned her head, laughing in Derek’s direction. “With my Aura… You can become a God. The strongest Alpha in this world… With your training, your skills, and your heart… Nobody could stop you. They’ll fear you, Derek Hale. Nobody… Will ever step on you, or Stiles, or your boys… Ever again.”

With only a moment of thought, Derek dropped the Aura, where it clinked against forest floor. He raised up his shoe, stomping on the Aura, and shattering it with ease into a mess of broken shards, and a wailing cry. The crack rang out through the entire region, as wisps of billowing red smoke rose to the air, dissipating into particles of dust.

Kali’s eyes widened, “W… What have you… Do you… Do you realize what you’ve just done!?”

Derek sighed, leaning against a tree’s trunk. “Nobody needs that kind of power. Not me, not my successor, not my father, not anyone in this world, and especially not you. My goal in all of this, to begin with, was to help Ennis Reyes, and the teens you had under your control.” He shut his eyes, taking in a deep breath. “Those wolves don’t want or need another Alpha to have control of them, not even me. They deserve freedom. To live their own lives, however they want, wherever they want.”

Kali’s jaw gaped, unable to fathom Derek’s words.

Chuckling, Derek caught the sounds of footsteps racing towards them. “Besides… I have something more important in my life to focus on, than becoming the strongest Alpha. My relationship with my mate, my boys, and my pack… They’ll always come first.”

Kali didn’t have time to argue the point. Derek’s Betas dropped onto the scene, all in shifted forms, and all snarling in Kali’s direction.

“Place her under arrest. Chain her up, and tranquilize her with a collar. Make sure she doesn’t go anywhere. My father is going to want to charge her accordingly.” Derek ordered.

“Yes, Sir!” Boyd, Erica, and Parrish recited in unison. In a flash, Derek’s betas had Kali up, in
Parrish’s cuffs, and bound as tightly as they could around the neck with a tranquilizer collar. With little objections on her part, Kali was drug away. Several other members of the WERE guard came along to give them a hand, while Peter lead their entire group, reading Kali her rights.

Falling back, Derek plopped back onto the forest ground. He stared up at the sky, and watched as a leaf fell from the sky, landing on his face. Derek picked it up, a auburn gold, that crunched in his palm.

“Huh… Summer’s just about over, isn’t it?” Stiles said.

Derek smiled, nodding as he leaned up. “Almost September. Unreal how fast these last few months have gone.”

Stiles brushed off his dusty pants, plopping down beside Derek. Sighing, Stiles leaned over, resting his head on Derek’s shoulder. “Is everyone okay? You didn’t get hurt, did you?”

“For whatever reason… She didn’t fight me at her full strength. I expected… More.” Derek shrugged, reaching his arm around Stiles and pulling his mate closer. “How about you? How went the media circus?”

Stiles snorted. “I just BSed them for half an hour, until they got bored of hearing me talk in circles. Then Satomi broke Roman’s jaw, on-camera and called for his immediate disbandment from the State Alphas. So, yeah, then they got up in that shit and focused on that. Completely missed the whole “psycho Alpha killer” angle pretty fast. Then again… Old ladies punching drunkards is pretty damn entertaining.”

Laughing alongside Stiles, Derek eventually dropped his head. Sure, they could laugh about all of this, but… The fact remained that they were all in an obscene amount of danger. Had Stiles not talked everyone down, had Kali’s pack or the WERE guard not heeded Stiles’ advice, and had Kali actually fought him with a fraction of her real power… The day could have ended on a much more somber note.

“You okay?” Stiles asked, catching Derek’s weary face.

Derek sighed, falling backward and resting his head among the forest floor. He shut his eyes, covering them with his arm. “Let’s…. Let’s just go home. Peter can… Handle this mess, it was his mess to begin with. You and I… We’ve got a date to plan, and a couple of boys to pick up from school in just a couple of hours. Until then… I’d really just like to take a nap and pretend this day never happened.”

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A/N: I'd say we have two more regular chapters for part one, and an intermediary bonus chapter for part one. Then we move onto part two, after a fairly large time skip! Thanks for reading thus far, and your comments are always appreciated!
The last remnants of summer wafted through the edge of the Californian coastline, near a resort bar sat just on the edge of the waves. Water caught up to Stiles’ bare feet, coating them in the warm mixture of sand and the ocean’s waves. Leaning back, Stiles stretched out, letting his opened beach shirt catch some of the sun on his pale chest.

“Here you go, my good man.” The bartender offered Stiles two drinks, a tumbler of whiskey, and a tall, pink, fruity drink.

“No, thank you!” Stiles grabbed the tumbler of whiskey, sipping the edges of it. He glanced across the bar, where a portable TV was switched over to the major news outlet by several of the patrons.

“We continue our coverage today on the arrest of Alpha Kali Reed, and the disbarment of Former State Alpha Roman. Here shortly, we will hear the first interview with California State Alpha Satomi, and finally learn of the events that led to Former Alpha Kali’s arrest, and her life sentence at the National Compound. Later this evening, National Alpha, Peter Hale, will announce his appointment for Roman’s replacement. Many speculate that he will appoint a member of the Vire Pack, the Ontario Pack that cultivated peace during the uprising in ‘92, and whom many believe could one day lead the North American Continent, as the National Alpha.”

“Crazy stuff, huh?” The bartender asked, wiping down a glass. She nodded over to the TV. “I’ve heard through the grapevine that it was a County Alpha that actually gave ol’ bitch tits her beatdown. The new one, from that tiny town of Beacon? Darren? David? The guy that took over for that bastard Tyrant, Deucalion.”

Stiles smirked. “Alpha Derek Hale is the County Alpha of Beacon. Not sure about all of that, but I do know he’s a trained member of WERE. Abs like a freaking washboard.” He chuckled under his breath, pride blooming out of his chest.

While Satomi and Peter had done a rather amazing job of covering up Kali’s attempted coup from the public eye (to avoid a widespread panic and distrust of the National Alpha's strength), nuggets of truth slowly spurted out from the media that had been at the hotel. Rumors flew across the internet, about the “Second Alpha” who’d been photographed jumping out of a window to chase Kali. A few others spoke of the “military precision injuries” that Kali had on her, and suspected that a member of WERE had been the real savior of the day. Plenty had already connected the dots, claiming Derek Hale as the real hero of the day.

So, naturally, for the sake of Peter’s image, and everyone’s sanity, Derek was “encouraged” to take his vacation early, while things died down, and to avoid the media circus. All expenses paid, naturally, on the National Alpha’s card. Stiles, as his second, absolutely HAD to accompany him. Or at least, that was the BS he fed the Principal at the high school. Helped that he had Peter backing him up, with a generous check to the school as “thanks” for their cooperation in the matter.

Stiles leaned back taking another long sip of his drink. The summer breeze felt good on his skin, and the stress continued to melt away on him. Like finally waking up from a bad dream, all the pent up anxieties seemed to finally float away. No more Kali. No more bullshit from Duke's pack. No more worrying about his father being alone for the rest of his life. Now, Stiles could enjoy his life in
peace, with his mate, his sons, and his newfound pack.

“Stiles?” Derek asked, peeking his head around the bar as he finally came to join his mate. Aside from a pair of baggy, embarrassingly touristy tropical swim trunks, all Derek wore was a genuine, warm smile.

“Hey, babe.” Stiles hopped off the barstool, handing Derek his tropical drink, with a wide smile on his face. “Got you a drink! Your favorite, one of those sugary sweet insults to real alcohol.”

“Already learning my favorites?” Derek took the drink, sipping greedily from the curly straw, as he intertwined his fingertips with Stiles’. He rolled his eyes. “Also, you’re a booze snob.”

Stiles snorted. “Never realized you had such a freaking sweet tooth. Especially with anything strawberry in it. It’s adorable.” He grinned, recalling the last few nights’ worth of fabulous dinners, and Derek’s insatiable gullet when it came to sweets. He'd have to remember to tell Boyd that, in the future.

Derek rolled his eyes, leaning over to nip the lobe of Stiles’ ear.

Giggling, Stiles bumped his hip into Derek’s, wrapping an arm around the man’s waist. “That wasn’t a long phone call you took. I’m guessing the pups are doing okay, and Erica’s running the show just fine? No fires, major disasters, or other psychotic killers running on the loose?”

Out of the many qualified candidates to run Beacon County while the Alpha and Second were both out of town, they decided that Erica was best suited to not put up with anyone's bullshit. Of course, it helped that WERE and Peter were still on site, alongside a slew of National investigators, but Stiles (and Derek) trusted Erica's judgement.

Derek nodded, sipping at his drink while they walked down the beach. There wasn’t much of a crowd out, with Summer basically at its end, leaving most of the beach unoccupied, and all theirs. “Isaac gives his love, but had to get back to helping Boyd with lunch. It was of the utmost important that he help skin and chop the potatoes, or lunch would be ruined. He’s going to show us how he does it with his claws, when we get back.”

An even wider grin splayed out on the man’s face. “Scott sounded out of breath, and barely said hello, because apparently he and Theo are playing war games with the Princesses, and losing. I don’t know how, but apparently one of the warrior princesses managed to find Jackson’s old lacrosse stick, and are using it to hit them, screaming "repent ye foolish infidels!"”

Stiles snorted. “Of course the Princesses win the war games. Erica’s been showing ALL of them how to put a pounding. I’m serious Derek, you are going to have some stiff competition picking out the next generation of Betas.”

The two of them found a spot to settle on the beach-side. Derek slid down into the sand, with Stiles sliding in front of him, locking into one and other. Waves danced up and around their feet and hips.

“They sounded happy.” Derek grumbled, slurping down his drink.

“Well, good.” Stiles prodded Derek on the nose. “See, Papa Der, I told you they were going to be fine. Having a pack is like having 12 different sets of parents, and a million brothers and sisters. There was nothing to worry about, because our pups are well adjusted, happy little campers, who love their pack.”

“Yeah.” Derek grumbled, again. The last of his drink vanished.

“Oh my God, your feelings are hurt that they don’t miss you, aren’t they?!?” Stiles dropped his jaw,
finding great joy in watching Derek actually pout in front of him. Like a sullen, childish bullfrog.

More and more of Derek’s endearing traits had begun to slip out during the vacation. Emotions he wouldn’t normally show in public, or around the pups. Worry, annoyance, anger, and a loathing hatred of the media, who Derek cursed at each morning, as they claimed Peter’s “incompetence” in the Kali Reed matter.

Derek flushed on the spot. “No… Not that.” He paused, groaning as he rubbed his forehead. “Well. Not all of it anyway.” Sighing, he rested his chin on Stiles’ head, wrapping both arms around his mate and taking a deep scent from him. “I always hated being in a Pack, especially if Laura and Peter weren’t around. I suppose I felt like I was abandoning them for awhile. I just… Sometimes, I forget we’ve got our pack now. A… A really great pack, with enough love to make Disney choke on.”

“Yeah. You do. We’re all there for you, you know? Even the ones who aren’t pack yet, love you.” Stiles grinned. “Buuuuut… A loving pack that’s got you wrapped around their little finger. Seriously, I fear for your sanity when our kids are teenagers. For being such a tough Alpha, you’re a marshmallow.” Stiles prodded Derek’s navel, half expecting a “hee hee”.

Derek flashed his fangs, playfully nibbling on the the back of Stiles’ head, a feigned growl in his throat.

Humming, Stiles patted Derek’s hands, gripping them tightly within his own. They sat still, breathing in sync, listening to the beat of their hearts. A particularly large wave whipped up, pushing them both backward, as they soaked in the process.

Stiles coughed up a lungful of water, laughing as he wiped off the seaweed from his chest. “So! What do you want to do today? We’ve only got today and tomorrow left before we head home.”

Derek pulled a set of shells out of Stiles’ hair. “I’m pretty happy right now, to be honest. We’ve done nothing but run everywhere all week, and stuff our faces. How about some downtime?”

“Slumming it on the beach? I’m game!” Stiles finished off the last of his drink, hacking at the taste of seawater that had gotten inside the glass.

They lounged backwards, splayed out for a suntan, and far enough away to not get drowned out by the tide. Derek offered his arm to be used as a pillow for Stiles, which he took, grateful for the warm touch.

Settling next to Derek, Stiles glanced over, nuzzling his head into the crook of Derek’s neck. “What did you do for fun, before Isaac came along? Before all the crazy descended upon us?”

“Huh?” Derek cocked an eyebrow, turning to meet his mate’s gaze.

“I’m serious! Come on, this week is about us, remember? I want to get to know YOU more. What butters your biscuits?” Stiles asked, prodding Derek in the side.

Stiles knew plenty about Derek. He knew Derek was a kind man, a loving father, and took Monopoly way too seriously for a man his age. Yet, aside from work, parenting, and being an Alpha, Stiles had never seen Derek do anything fun, for just himself.

Derek shrugged, sighing. “To be honest, my life was boring before you all came into it. Kept to myself, worked overtime, hit the gym.” He pressed a gentle kiss on Stiles’ forehead. “Now I’m never bored.” He grinned, scratching the back of Stiles’ wet hair. “Though, if I was really down in the dumps, I liked going for runs. Long runs, where I never stopped. Music cranked up in my ears,
“Why am I not surprised?” Stiles shrugged. “I’m more of a treadmill kind of guy, you know? Running in place, in front of a TV, and laughing my ass off at a comedy, or cussing out a drama when they kill of my favorite character.”

“That sounds… Awful.” Derek shivered, appearing rather disgusted. “Fresh air is good for you, Stiles. We should go on a run sometime, together. Maybe with the boys?”

“Definitely!” Stiles nodded eagerly, happy to oblige Derek with something fun, even if it left his legs like jello later. “Besides, I don’t have the super werewolf genes, and I’m loathe to get flabby like my dad did. Like hell am I going to the unsexy one of the group.”

“Keeping up with two werewolf pups? I don’t think you’re ever going to have to worry about that.” Derek pinched at Stiles’ stomach, a firm, pale bit of skin, grinning at Stiles’ surprised yelp. “What about you? What did you do for fun?”

Stiles swatted away Derek’s hand, not about to let the bastard learn his ticklish spot. Yet. “Besides wanting to yank my hair out over my dissertation?”

“Preferably.”

Stiles didn’t take long to answer, an excited smile crossing his face. “Before I drowned myself in college and Scott… I obsessed over movies. Literally, any and all Saturdays in my high school, I’d drag someone with me to the movies. Re-watch them five or six times, and work on my obscene collection of DVDs. Memorizing every line, trying to predict the plot, and bitch over the shitty characters, or tired cliches. I’m like an unprofessional critic.”

“Is that why you can never keep your mouth shut when we’re watching a movie with the boys? Or why half your dad’s living room is nothing but DVDs?” Derek’s eyes flashed in realization, as though something had finally clicked into place.

“I don’t talk through the whole… Okay, yeah, I talk through the whole movie.” Stiles shrugged, what point was there in lying? “But yeah, seriously. Movies are my kryptonite.”

“Then we should go out more.” Derek beamed, a flash of excitement in his eyes. “I think we can manage a Netflix subscription, and a couple of movie nights. I’ve never been a movie buff, but my childhood wasn't exactly… Peachy.”

“I’d like that. I’ll start you guys off easy. We’ll start with the easy stuff, like Harry Potter, Star Wars, and Disney. Then we’ll get to the good stuff, just us two, when the pups aren't watching.” Stiles already felt a list forming in the back of his head. A long list.

Derek’s face lit up. “Oh, I almost forgot! Speaking of movies, while I was in the phone, Jax told me that Scott, Isaac, and Theo were invited to a birthday party. They’re renting out a movie theater and showing off superhero movies!”

“That’s cool, they’ll have a great time! Which pack invited them?”

“Actually, I forget the name. Though, I do specifically remember it was, a, uh…. a human party.” Derek couldn’t hold back his smile. Stiles, in turn couldn’t hold back his jaw dropping.

“You’re a freaking liar. Get the hell out of here.” Stiles spat.

“No, I’m serious.” Derek held back laughter, but bared a dazzling smile. “The human mother called
the house to ask permission, and to know if the pups had any special diets, or if there were certain 
movies werewolves might find offensive. From what I hear, she was very nervous about 
embarrassing her son’s “cool” friends, but didn’t want to offend us. Apparently Scott and Isaac are 
the most popular kids in kindergarten, and Jax says she must have been on the phone for half an 
hour, asking endless questions. The boys are beyond excited, and I told them it was okay to go, if 
Jax supervised.”

Stiles took a moment to sink in the gravity of the situation. A human, in Beacon Hills, inviting a trio 
of wolves to a birthday party. Around other human children. He sat up, crossing his legs and gazing 
off into the distance. “Derek, do you realize how big that is? How phenomenally big that is?!?” He 
laughed, yanking Derek up alongside him, with an uncontrollable grin spreading across his face. 
“When I was in school at Beacon, I was the ONLY human that hung out with the werewolves. I 
would have been bullied, if Danny and Jackson weren’t my best friends, and swore to beat the shit 
out of anyone else. Like, there was some HARD CORE issues back when I was there age, like, 
crippling fear and loathing. Human kids never wanted werewolves or the supernatural around for 
parties. They were “too weird”, or their parents were scared to death of them. This. Is. HUGE!”

Derek nodded, brandishing an equally vivid grin. “Really, if you think about it, a lot of shit is 
changing. You knew that Jackson was invited to speak at a Beta Symposium in a few months? I got 
the call from the Nevada State Alpha, who wants the Eclipse Survivor to speak at a 
Human/Werewolf Relations Panel for Law Enforcement. There’s such a huge divide in human and 
werewolf law, that the Police have a hard time making proper judgement. Jackson agreed to do it. 
Apparently, a lot of people are still clamoring to hear his opinion on things.”

Stiles’ chest fluttered, proud of his buddy for stepping us as much as he had in the last month. “Jax 
has a lot to say, as a werewolf, and as a human. I just don’t think he was ready to say it all at first, 
with reporters all in his face. All the hurt, all the pain he went through… I can’t even imagine.”

“At least he’s got peace, now.” Derek’s eyes glowed, a warm, proud hue. “Even for living as a 
human for so long, he’s adjusted well to pack life, and to being a wolf. He’s a great mentor for the 
teens, and a strong man for doing as much as he’s done for us. Actually, I caught wind that 
Jackson’s going to help coach the baseball team next summer, during his off duty time.”

Stiles’ stomach swirled in a refreshing warmth. He leaned over, resting on Derek’s shoulder. “Did 
Erica tell you that she’s going to have a kid with Boyd next chance she’s ready this Winter? Said 
she feels like the time is right. They’ve both been wanting this for years.”

“I knew they were going to try soon, once the house was done. I think we’re still on to have 
construction done before Christmas. Lydia’s crew already have the walls up.” Derek reached over, 
taking Stiles by the hand. “Which is great, because as much as I appreciate the remnants of Duke’s 
pack, I’m ready to have a place just for us, and let them rent the estate. I could also use a proper 
office.” He groaned, rubbing his forehead. “As Satomi said, my shamble of an office at the estate 
was “unfit to harbor confidence in the County Alpha’s authority, and reflects poorly on the State”. ”

Stiles cringed. “Satomi hasn’t given you any slack, has she?”

Derek shook his head. “After seeing my office, she ranted for an hour about me registering for every 
Alpha Symposium in the State to “learn from my betters”, so I didn't embarrass her with my 
“youthful ignorance”.”

Folding his arms, Stiles glared Derek’s way. “Satomi sounds like a hardass. Like, did you not save 
her wrinkly ass from Kali? Does she not see what all you’re packing here?”

Derek chuckled, patting Stiles’ head. “No, it sounds like she cares about our success. I had a similar
experience with WERE. The Drill Masters only beat the living shit out of the ones who showed any sort of talent. Fucking ran me through the wringer, and made me wish I was dead, one more than one occasion. Nearly quit five times. I think they broke my ribs at least once a day that first month, trying to weed out the weaklings.”

“Were you training to be a soldier, or just preluding to a career in masochism?” Stiles cocked an eyebrow. Derek rarely spoke about his time in WERE training, or about his “duty” to WERE. Or, anything about his past, really. For all Derek new about Stiles’ life before him, Stiles knew little to nothing about Derek’s family. Though, his mate was slowly, but surely, opening up with more details. Someday, maybe’d he’d learn more about the Hale Family, outside of Peter and Laura.

Derek reached over to flick Stiles on the forehead, playfully, to which Stiles yelped, and flicked his mate right back. “I respect Satomi’s input, and she’s not wrong. I'm strong, yes, but... Strength doesn't get you far when it comes to managing other lives. There’s a lot to learn about being an effective Alpha, especially for an entire County. But... For our pack? For our town? I’m happy to do anything.”

“See? Marshmallow.” Stiles reached over, prodding Derek’s stomach again. The Alpha giggled a bit, before tackling Stiles to the sand, and playfully nipping at his nose.

They goofed around for a bit. The tackle turned into a race down the beach-side, with Derek giving his prey an ample lead, before he gave chase. Derek caught Stiles down the way, grabbing him around the waist, and chucking him into the ocean.

Stiles retaliated, splashing up water towards Derek, and nailing his head with seaweed in the process. The Alpha darted after Stiles into the ocean, dragging both of them into the warm, rolling waves. A splashing war ensured, brought to an end a while later, when Derek spotted a deep reddening on and around Stiles’s face.

“You’re burning. Again.” Derek said, sputtering out water as he rose up out of the water. He moved closer to Stiles, touching the man’s face. “Oh yeah… About five minutes, and you’re going to be roasting.”

“Are you shitting me?” Stiles looked down on his pinkish tan, threatening to turn red. “I SLATHERED myself in sunscreen! Why the hell does my skin hate me? I blame my parents for this. Bullshit Polish genes.”

Derek chuckled, slapping Stiles across the butt. “Come on, let’s get out of the sun for a bit, while you take five and slather on again. I could use another drink, anyway.”

Sighing, Stiles nodded in agreement.

They gathered the plastic glasses they’d discarded earlier, heading back to the resort bar.

As they did, they passed several men and women, in various states of skimpy swimwear. Stiles scoffed. “By the way, you lied about the speedo. I’m very disappointed in you. I went out of my way to buy you one and everything!”

Derek glared at Stiles, incredulously. “You bought me a neon pink speedo, with a heart on each asscheek, that I could barely “fit” into the front of. My ass fell out of it. I’d be arrested for indecent exposure, or scouted for a porno. Neither are a good thing for a County Alpha’s Image.”

“Uh, babe, that was sort of the point.” Stiles shot a sly grin, waggling his eyebrows.

A light went on in Derek’s head, nodding as he wrapped an arm around Stiles. “You know… I
think I’m starting see little speckles of the person Jackson and Danny warn me about. Or the Remnant of the Terror of Beacon Hills. I don’t think he’s quite as dead as one protests.”

Stiles leaned into Derek’s side. A warm flutter of happiness spread across his chest, and throughout his body. He peeked up at Derek, and his warm, red eyes.

“I have a pack. I have a mate, who cares about me, and who I care about in return. We both want the same things in life, and he’s a genuinely good man.”

“What?” Derek asked, spotting Stiles’ glancing eye.

Stiles smiled, shaking his head. “Scott has a brother, a best friend, and a whole slew of kids that like him, with him embracing his heritage. Jackson’s free. Danny, Lydia, and all my friends are with me again. I’ve got Erica and Boyd. I have another son, who I love like I’ve known him my whole life. My dad’s getting married to a woman who cared about me since mom died. I’ve got a great job, doing what I love to do.”

Stiles stopped for a brief moment, glancing out into the distance, at the expanse of water, limitless to the eye, as birds flew out, becoming little more than specks on the horizon.

“Maybe… I feel comfortable being myself again. I mean… Look at the future we’ve got going for us. I guess I just feel… Hopeful. Like the worst is behind us, you know?” Stiles answered.

The duo stopped back at the bar, easing down on the seats far away from the rest of the patrons.

Derek leaned over, sharing a brief kiss with Stiles on the lips. “I think so, too.”

After placing another order of drinks, Derek grinned playfully as he slurped another tropical beverage. “Maybe I’ll wear it tonight, in the hot tub outside our balcony. Then you can look all you want.”

Stiles’ face flushed, glancing back to his mate. With his fingers, Stiles slowly teased the rim of his own glass, knowing well that Derek kept staring intently at his fingers. “If you think I’m just going to look, you sorely underestimate me.”

Derek stopped, choking on his drink at what Stiles knew was an unbearable scent of playful arousal.

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On the drive back to Beacon Hills, Stiles sensed something was… Different.

Traffic heading into the downtown area had been bumper to bumper, something nonexistent for the area, even on a Sunday. Hell, most of the supernatural community in Beacon didn’t even bother driving, they either ran, flew, or used some other methods to get anywhere they needed.

A lot of unfamiliar cars blocked off most of the parking spots all over town, and clogged up the few drive through restaurants in and around the town. Deputy Ethan was out directing traffic at a four way stop, where everything had backed up by a mile.

“What… The fresh hell is going on here? Farmer’s Markets don’t start until next month, and we sure as hell never had a crowd like this” Stiles yelled, pulling off on mainstreet. He watched as
countless people, most of which he’d never met before in his life, was gathering in and around cityhall. Half looked to be well dressed, upper crust members of society, while the other half appeared to be in little better than shredded rags of clothing from a decade prior. The former looking healthy, the latter... Like starved skeletons.

Derek stepped outside alongside Stiles, looking around at the mass of people in equal disbelief.
“Wolves. A lot of strange smelling wolves. Think I can make out a few other creatures, but… Mostly wolves.”

“Alpha Hale!”

Stiles turned in time with Derek, where Ennis Reyes jogged across the street to meet with them. A few pounds heavier than Stiles remembered him, and wearing much more casual, comfortable clothes. There was a bit of life in the man’s eyes, different than when they’d met at the Summit.

“Hey, Ennis. How are you doing? Did you get settled in here?” Derek asked, extending his hand.

Ennis shook Derek’s hand, bowing his head to the Alpha, eyes flashing blue out of respect. Like the rest of Kali’s Alphas, they’d all surrendered their powers to Peter Hale, who would appoint them to promising Beta leaders around the country. None of them, not even Ennis, wanted a shred of anything that had once been Kali’s.

“Wonderful! Thank you for asking…” Ennis beamed, unable to hold back his joyous smile. “My wife and daughter are out right now, at the grocery store, but… They’ll want to meet you soon. We really want to say again, how much we appreciate everything you did for our old pack, and my family.”

Stiles folded his arms, catching the sight of a few well dressed businesspeople following Lydia around just across the street. They seemed to already have blueprints in hand. “How’s the family?”

“Holding up well…” Ennis’s smiled faded, a tad. “My wife and my daughter flew over yesterday evening, and we’re getting situated at Erica and Boyd’s old place. Brett, his little sister Lori, and Corey, are staying with me, and I’ll be taking care of them from now on. Oh, Brett and Corey were the Betas that Erica met a while back. They’re… Doing better. Slowly, but surely.” Glancing away, Ennis dropped his head. “I… Just wish they had someone to go home to. A lot of kids are like that in our bunch, unfortunately. Everything they know and love are… Dead.”

Reaching into his pocket, Stiles brandished his professional card. He palmed it into Ennis’ hands. “If you need me, or if the kids need someone to talk to, don’t hesitate. I’m a licensed therapist, and a counselor at the high school.”

Ennis nodded, pocketing the card into his pants. “I.. I think they’ll need that. They were forced into doing things that… Nobody would ever be proud of doing.”

A huge group of teenagers ran past at mach speeds, all carrying sacks from the local grocery store.

“Come on, everyone’s starving! It took us DAYS to get here, and I would really like to crash sometime soon!”

“I’m coming, I’m coming! Would you hold on!? I’m exhausted too! We were harvesting until 3 AM when the news came!”

“Guys… Wait… For me!”
Derek rose and eyebrow, recognizing the faint smell of Kali on the teens that had run past. Yet, none of them visibly displayed a pack mark. “Ennis… Do you know why there’s so many people here, right now? Stiles and I couldn’t even get back to the house, the roads are so congested.”

“Oh! Well…” Ennis cleared his throat, biting on his bottom lip. “Many of the old Reed Pack heard about what you did for us, from the other Alphas that were involved at the Summit. Everyone heard about you shattering Kali’s Aura, and freeing us, without taking us into your own pack. Not many Alphas would turn down such an immense power. Or… Such a large labor force. You could have made yourself and your numbers… Truly great.” Glancing up, he looked on a Derek in a wave of awe. “After living under Kali… That kind of honor and kindness is… Overwhelming to us.”

Stiles noticed that several other wolves around the area had spotted Derek. Some watched in equal fervor, while others bowed as they passed by. The more ragged ones, that Stiles gathered had been members of Kali’s workforce, looked to be on the verge of happy tears. Yet, they all kept their distance, but seemed to be on the verge of running up and hugging Derek around the neck.

Uncomfortable by the attention, Derek rubbed the back of his neck, nodding alongside Ennis. “It was nothing. I was glad to help you all.”

Ennis grinned. “It wasn’t nothing, Alpha Hale. It was… Truly a sign of your capabilities as a leader, and shows everyone what kind of a man you are.” He expanded his hands, signaling to the wave of people mingling in the downtown area. “All of us are applying to live here, in Beacon County, pending your blessing of us forming our own packs and family units. We filed with the Alpha’s Clerk just yesterday, at City Hall. I think there’s a lot more that came in today.”

Stiles and Derek exchanged a swift, curious glare.

“How… Many?” Stiles asked.

Ennis thought for a few moments, scratching his chin. “About half of Kali’s old pack, which were a good couple hundred, the rest have gone elsewhere, to start their lives completely over. Though… It wasn’t just Kali’s pack that were inspired by you. There seem to be werewolves from around the country, who were stuck in situations as bad as we were. I met a few from New York, actually, who finally got sick of the Eastern attitude to werewolves, and wanted to live under a real Alpha, and in a peaceful region. A few from Maine and the Carolinas are moving their entire businesses out here, again, pending your blessing.” He hummed for a few moments, before finally shrugging. “I’d say… A few thousand? Maybe?”

“A… Few thousand?!” Derek’s voice went up an octave.

Stiles, too, felt the life drain out of his face. The County Population had only a couple thousand to begin with. Meaning, that in the span of a week, the population of Beacon Hills, the people the Hale Pack would be responsible for… Had doubled.

Which also meant, without any doubt, that werewolves would now be the dominate species in Beacon County. Despite the overwhelming urge to text that information to Mrs. Whittemore, Stiles wondered how the human inhabitants of Beacon felt about that.

Ennis grinned, unable to hold back his smile. “Yes, Alpha Hale. So many were moved by National Alpha Peter’s speech on TV last night, claiming that Beacon Hills, and your pack in particular, was the prime example of what life across the country should strive to be. Of course, I believe the world was just as shocked to hear that a human was the County Alpha’s Second in this region, and had
been an impassioned source behind Kali’s arrest. Even with so much blacked out about Kali’s coup, the two of you… Well, you’re heroes to so many people, human AND werewolf! My wife cried last night, Alpha Peter has quite a way with words, you know!”

Stiles glared in Derek’s direction. “I told you we should have watched that news report. But noooooo, somebody was too embarrassed to see himself on TV!” He smacked the broad side of Derek’s shoulder.

“I… Am going to kill Peter.” Derek’s forehead twitched.

“Get in line.” Stiles felt his face flush.

Suddenly, the way everyone in the surrounding area was staring at him and Derek… Well, it had a new level of awkwardness.

“Ennis! Hey, Ennis!”

“We’re done with the shopping!”

The awkwardness stopped, as Stiles watched two teenage boys rushing up behind Ennis, giving no mind to either Derek or Stiles. Based on their ages, it must have been Brett and Corey, the ones Ennis had spoken about earlier.

Brett and Corey were all smiles, arms full of shopping bags from a local deli. Corey was the first to speak, eyes shimmering an eager, bright blue. “We met some guys at the Deli, who are having a basketball game at their house. They invited us to come over, if that’s okay?”

Brett scoffed, attempting to seem “above” the excitement. Yet, his eyes shimmered just as blue as his friend’s. “He’s got a huge crush on the guy that invited us over. Like, instant, embarrassing crush on this Mason dude. I’m surprised you didn’t jump him then and there.”

“Shut up!” Corey slugged Brett on the shoulder.

Ennis chuckled, taking the bags of food. “Thanks for grabbing lunch, boys. Yes, that’s fine, you two go have a fun time. Be back by dark, or call me if you’re going to be late.”

“Yes, Alph… Er, I mean…” Corey attempted a salute, catching himself from what appeared to be an old habit. He flushed, clearing his throat. “I mean… Thanks, Ennis.”

“You’re welcome.” Ennis reached over, ruffling both sets of hair, before yanking both of them into a tight hug.

As they broke the hug, Brett glanced across the way, staring at Derek and Stiles. “Who’s thi…” Realization struck, as the teen’s face lost all semblance of color. “A.. Alpha Hale!”

Corey caught on quickly. “Sir! Alpha! I… Sorry!”

The teens bowed their heads, exposing their necks. They stood, frozen in a mixture of fear and awe at the Alpha before them. Both shook in Derek’s presence, eyes glowing as they stood ramrod still, in a respectful position.

Stiles wondered, quietly, how many times they’d been forced into that position. Or what Kali had done to them, to inspire such fear out of something as simple as a greeting. Derek, of course, wasn’t having any of that, and Stiles smiled, watching as Derek approached the teens.
Resting a hand on each of their shoulders, he forced their bodies back into a natural position. “Nobody in my County has to bow down to me. So keep your heads high, alright? I’m here to serve you, not the other way around.”

Brett and Corey exchanged a brief, scared glance, but nodded at the overwhelming presence before them. Yet, they could smell Derek’s sincerity, and knew from the steady heartbeat that he wasn’t lying. The two rose up, offering a sheepish smile.

“Yes Sir, Alpha Hale.” they both spoke, in a more confident unison.

Stiles grinned, stepping up and bouncing on the balls of his feet. “Have you boys been by the school yet? We’ll need to get you registered for classes. If you’ll be living here, I’m afraid you’ll have to put up with me. I’m all about school spirit, and playing the part of the embarrassing counselor, but I’ll get you in some good classes, and I know my buddies Liam and Mason will be happy to show you around.”

An attempt at a more lighthearted conversation left Brett and Corey speechless. Stiles tried to read their faces, a mixture of disbelief and uncontrollable joy.

“We… Can go to school?” Brett stuttered out, mouth agape.

“Seriously? We can!? Ennis?!” Corey glanced back to his guardian, looking for confirmation.

Stiles’ chest froze. He rose his head, rotating at the crowds going on and about their business in the town. The number of children in rags, or with blue eyes. What all, exactly, had they been deprived of? Was it more than just basic decency, and their freedoms? Their educations, too, had been stripped from them? A chance at a childhood? Friends?

Looking at the teens, Stiles’ heart broke, trying to stare behind their blue eyes, and into the crumbling mess that probably lived inside.

Derek nodded, stepping forward for Stiles’ voice, which had failed to form a proper reply. “You two, can do whatever you want. The future is yours, now. On my honor as the Alpha, and Stiles’ honor as the Second of this County… We swear it.”

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With the mess of supernatural applicants wanting to move into Beacon Territory, and the gaggle of refugees in need of jobs, a home, and education for their children, Derek finally felt the weight of what being a County Alpha meant. The lives of others were, literally, on his shoulders.

Derek, and his entourage of pack members, carried multiple boxes inside the tiny office he’d been offered at town hall. No bigger than Sheriff Stilinski’s office back at the Sheriff’s Department, but had all the essentials they would need. Filing cabinets, a meeting table, a durable desk they’d brought from Mr. Whittemore’s office, and a computer system that Mason was busily typing into, getting connected to the Hale’s network back at the estate.

“Almost done, Alpha Hale! Just 12 percent to go, and you’ll be good to access Stiles’ database from home.” Mason beamed, giddy at the prospect of helping the pack.

Derek smiled, dropping a set of three boxes, filled to the brim with Deucalion’s old budget reports,
and pack minutes. “Thanks, Mason. I appreciate you sacrificing your Sunday.” The reset of the pack took to unpacking their own boxes of laptops, notebooks, and things from their first few Pack Assemblies. “Actually, thanks to all of you sacrificing your Sunday. We need to hit the ground running on this, or it’ll get away from us.”

“Our Pleasure, Alpha Hale.” Mrs. Hewitt nodded, already setup next to her son, and clacking away on her laptop, hooking into the network hub.

Mr. Hewitt was already rummaging through the Beacon County applications, sorting them out on Derek’s desk.

After ages of trying to get names right, Derek had finally come to recall Allen and Patricia Hewitt’s faces, and match with their names. While Stiles was his “official” Second, the Masons had come to assist the fledgling Second, and fill in the gaps when necessary. After serving Duke for over 15 years, they’d seen and heard everything in Beacon County, now serving as the Hale Pack bureaucrats, and Derek was grateful for their skilled help.

“There are currently 1,200 or so applicants pending for the County Alpha to review. These need to be reviewed by the end of the week, or their temporary County Visas will be expired. Of those 1,200, there are requests for 20 packs to be formed, the rest are all single family units.” Mr. Hewitt said, handing Derek a clipboard, with an Excel printout several pages long.

“Since Alpha Peter’s speech, I should also make you aware that multiple reporters have called the County Line, wanting to setup a press conference with you.” Patricia said, pulling out a notepad full of handwritten notes. “The City Council is still wanting your recommendation for the position of Mayor. Sheriff Stilinski says, and I quote, “fuck off Hale, I’m trying to retire in the next 10 years, find someone else”.”

Mr. Hewitt handed Derek another handful of papers. “Several citizens in the county have also issued petitions to you, most aren’t worth reading, about potholes, that we can handle at a later time, or throw to the City Council.”

Derek paused, raising a hand to speak, but silenced as Mrs. Hewitt shoved more notes into his hands.

“The School Board wants to know if you plan on enrolling all of the students into the school. They’ve informed me that they are already at capacity, and special funding would be required to accommodate the new numbers, as well as the salaries of teachers they would need to hire.” Patricia said.

More notes were shoved into Derek’s hands. “A few State and County Alphas have called, wishing for a face to face meeting with the man who arrested Kali Reed. Local Counties are looking to setup Alliance Requests, as well. Given that Beacon County hasn’t had an alliance since Duke took the Alpha Seat, this should be a high priority. I recommend sending Lydia, Jackson, and Stiles. The four of you are a sight to behold to many, and have good ties to our community.”

The endless verbal assault lasted several more minutes, and Derek could barely find the chance to cut into their endless stream of requests and concerns that were piling in around the City. He expected a flowchart to pop out at any moment.

“Hey, uh… One crisis at a time?” Derek said, peeking around the stack of papers obscuring his face.

Mr. and Mrs. Hewitt both flushed, reliving Derek of the mountain of papers, and apologized profusely. The rest of the pack laughed, helping organize the mess into more manageable piles.
Taking a deep breath, Derek rubbed his forehead. “Okay… So, first thing’s first. Applicants.”

Derek grabbed the stack of papers from his desk, and shoving them into Parrish’s arms. “Hate to do this already, but consider a favor owed to the Sheriff’s Department from the County Alpha. Can you run a background check on all of the applicants? If they’re clean, they’re approved, don’t bother to come back to me, just take them straight to the Hewitts. If any of them are suspect, bring them to me, or take them to the Old Man for his advice. Call our friend in the State Department to expedite all of this. Tell them Derek Hale is calling in his favor, and I want these done by Wednesday.”

Parris nodded, grabbing Jackson by the collar on his way out. “Yes, Alpha. My new partner and I are going to be thrilled to handle this. We’ll work overtime, a couple of 12 hour shifts or three. I’m sure the Old Man isn’t going to mind.”

“We’re what?” Jackson yelled, as he was drug out of the room and off to the Sheriff’s department.

Lydia rose her hand, waving in Derek’s direction. “What are we going to do about housing? The hotels and motels are basically booked solid, and some people are sleeping in parks, or in the woods. The Refugees don’t have much in the way of cash or food, if they were part of the labor force at Kali’s pack. I’d say shelter and food would be a pretty high priority.”

Derek nodded immediately. “Stiles, do we have the budget to make a makeshift campsite? Enough necessities for basic living?”

Stiles saluted. “Duke’s still got half of his County Budget left for the year, and we’ve got an emergency fund stashed away. Funds aren’t a problem, so long as it’s not a long term deal. By long term, I also mean this better be cleared up in three months or so?”

“Can you set something up? Use the Hale Land, away from the building grounds, for the campsite. I don’t want to wait on the City Council to meet. These people need food, and some semblance of a shelter. Though, they’re wolves, so the outdoors aren’t going to bother them as much as it would a human.” Derek ordered.

“I’m on it!” Stiles wasted no time in pilfering the County Alpha’s bank card out of Derek’s pockets, before waving it in Erica’s direction. “Come on Erica, I’m going to need your help. Call Ennis, and get his boys to help! Let Boyd know he’s going to need to buy some kitchen supplies, and tons of food. The world’s best Denkeeper is about to have one hell of an order.”

Derek turned over to Lydia, with a sympathetic, begging smile. “Lydia, how much would you need to build some apartments, if I can get the construction approved by the city? Maybe even some housing? I expect we’ll have more than just refugees, but we need both. The town isn’t built for this many people.”

Waving off Derek, Lydia laughed. “Sweetheart, if you get me the zoning, I’ll do it for free, and make it fast. I’ll make back the money in only a couple of years. Then that’s pure profit to our pack, and tax dollars for the city. Hell, I’ll give the refugees a job, if they need it. I could always use some strong arms, if they’re okay to travel.”

Relief flooded out of Derek’s every pour. “Can you take care of it?”

“Consider it done, Alpha. Oh, and there’s a lot of businessmen who want to expand our commercial district. Couple of VERY rich East Coast Wolves, who would VERY much like to meet you, and live in a more sensible region. Set some time for them Derek, and I feel like unemployment for the refugees won’t last very long. I’ll buy dinner, you smooth talk.” Lydia grinned, pulling out her cell phone and speaking in excited, hurried tones to one of her many contacts.
Derek nodded, leaning over to Patricia. “Can you get me the zoning? I… I don’t even know how to zone, or what our zones are.” He asked, with a meek smile.

The Hewitts nodded. “Yes, Alpha Hale. Leave it to us. We'll go over that with you later, when time isn’t so pressing.” They, too, found themselves on the phones, contacting several members of the city council, that Derek could recognize by name.

While Lydia and the Hewitts did what they did best, Derek rifled through the numerous petitions and phone messages he’d been left. Leaning back into his seat, Derek settled in for the day.

Though… Not before he set up picture frames on the edge of his desk. One of Scott, one of Isaac, one of their pack from the first full moon, a picture of him and Stiles from their beachside vacation, a picture of Laura and Peter from back East, and a picture of himself and Talia from the cabin, all a whole lifetime ago.

Derek smiled at the many faces that counted on him, before plunging headfirst into the new world, and his life of acting as the County Alpha.

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A/N: Phew! Almost there! Next chapter will be nothing but pure fluff and happy family times with Derek/Stiles and their kids, as we wrap up the last chapter of Part I, and get ready to move on to part II! I'm very excited to start the next phase of this fic, and I hope all of you are as well! :)
In the span of a month, Stiles watched as his home, his family, and their lives changed around them, in ways he could have never imagined. A fledgling little town, little more than a dot on a map, now home to countless werewolves from all walks of life.

Stiles wished that everything could have been transitioned with ease, and that everyone could have their happy ending as soon as possible. Unfortunately, the real world had a bad habit of making things… Difficult.

Crime spiked in the city for the first time in a decade, with several of the more desperate refugees resorting to burglary, and mugging the weaker members of the community. Jackson and Parrish were forced into several fights that neither wanted to be a part of, and Derek was left with no choice but to banish the very people he’d attempted to protect.

Schools became overcrowded, and the PTA practically glared at Stiles anytime he walked the halls. Bitter, angry complaints of the “uneducated masses”, and the fear of test scores plummeting, and ruining the school’s State funding. Not all teachers were as “accepting” of the slower students as others.

Of course, with such sudden changes to a once “equal” population, several groups of humans took insult with everything Derek did, regardless of who benefited. Protests outside the City Hall were daily, with some going as far as to throw rocks or vandalize the construction of the Hale Pack House. Despite attempting to meet with the protesters to hear their end of things, all Derek ended up doing was meeting with a werewolf hate group, and earning himself a sleepless night. After a while… Some were arrested for damaging public and private property, which only sent to throw more protests, and more fits of anger.

Despite the best efforts, some people went hungry and cold. Wolves too proud to take charity, and who lived on park benches, with grumbling stomachs as Autumn’s change brought one of the coldest Septembers on record.

The media were the worst. Constant requests for interviews with Derek, never leaving Derek’s sights, and always up his ass. Everyone wanted the “truth” about what happened with Kali Reed, and pestered everyone involved with the summit to get said truth. Of course, when Derek rejected their requests, he could always expect a “glamorous” reporting of the many issues plaguing Beacon Hills. Satomi visited him on a regular basis with her “concerns”.

Yet…

Despite the bad… Despite the despair and struggle that came with the change…

For every one bad seed, there were 10 flowers blooming, working hard to make real changes to the community, many coming of them outside of the County Alpha Pack.

The Sheriff’s department were bombarded with volunteers for neighborhood watch groups, from the Refugees that were appalled by their former pack’s behaviors, and stopped more than one robbery on their own. They spent cold nights protecting human and wolf homes, who had much nicer things than any of them did, wanting to protect their new ”home”, above everything else. Several were hired on later as security guards for the nicer neighborhoods, and others would see themselves applying for the police department. Crime dropped as soon as it had spiked, lower than it had started to begin with.
Mr. Whittemore, of all people, returned to Beacon Hills after his suspended sentence. Thanks to his multiple connections around the state of California, Beacon Hills found itself flooded with donations from the upper crust elite, used to buy temporary mobile classrooms for the schools, and to fund construction of new wings for each of the buildings to be completed by the start of the next year. Going beyond that, Mr. Whittemore dusted off his legal degree, taking many refugee cases, pro bono, as they attempted to collect damages from the Remnants of Kali’s estate.

Deucalion used a chunk of his personal fortune to fund new teachers to be hired into the school system, and personally saw to forming a tutoring system for the refugee children who’d been out of school for… Longer than they should have been. The old Alpha even volunteered as tutor, lecturing on world history each day after school, before being hired on as an actual instructor. Without cracking a book, the old Alpha could recite history from the beginnings of time, all the way through the modern era.

The teachers (who hadn’t been part of the complaining masses) at the local schools ran a “buddy” system, where families who wanted to volunteer could bring one of the many underprivileged families into their homes, giving them a place to stay and sleep. Local werewolves came out in droves to open their homes, and more than one pack was formed due to these arrangements. Formerly “lone” wolves in the city limits, were now part of a large pack.

Humans who had been part of the protests against Derek Hale moved out of the town, or found themselves on the receiving end of becoming a social pariah. Those who protested for no reason other than to hating werewolves found themselves losing customers in their businesses, or losing friends entirely. Protests stopped, after a few weeks. Heated heads cooled down, as the town saw financial growth for the first time in over a decade, thanks to wealthier werewolves from the East bringing in new money, and fresh businesses.

Media? Okay, well not everything was good. The media were dicks, and after a few got close to Isaac (scaring the poor pup), eventually Derek kicked the National Media out of his town, banning them for life until further notice. Ones that came to replace them were kicked out just as quickly. Only local reporters, or those who didn’t try to sneak through Derek’s trash, were allowed inside the County Limits. Satomi called on several occasions, congratulating Derek on “proper judgement”, sharing the complaints she’d gotten on his behalf from said media, and laughing them off.

So, day by day, the good overwhelmed the bad, and before Stiles knew it…

The refugee camps were torn down, unneeded thanks to the buddy system, and Lydia’s efficient emergency workforce bringing about plenty of new homes for the community. Unemployment, slowly but surely, bubbled down to only a few dozen, which Derek hired to rebuild the gardens, barns, and to cultivate livestock on the Hale land, for fair pay, and a cut of the foods they produced. Hale Ranch had been born overnight.

As September came to a close, and the scent of pumpkin spice wafted to the beginnings of October, Stiles walked through the halls of Beacon High, alongside Principal Finstock. The graying, aged relic, as energetic and spry as Stiles remembered him from his own high school days, slammed his arm on Stiles’ shoulder.

“You sure there’s nothing I can do to change your mind? Stilinski, you’re a treasure to the school. I hate to lose you.” Finstock said, with a deep, overpowering sigh.

Stiles shook his head, waving to a few of the kids he mentored after class that ran past him. “Sorry.. There’s just way too much I’d have to juggle. If they’re seriously sticking me as Mayor, I’ve got to drop some of my jobs, and I’m not going to stop being Second of our Pack.”
Finstock groaned, rubbing the bridge of his nose. “Fine, fine… Well… For what it’s worth, I’m damn proud you accepted the City’s petition. After all the work you did since the crazy boom in population, and for the school getting all these kids re-acclimated to education… The town would be stupid not to vote you in.”

Nodding in agreement, Stiles let out a short sight. Nobody wanted the position of Mayor. Aside from the taboo of being part of the Whittemore’s dark legacy, there were too many problems going on in the town for anyone to be stupid enough to take the mantle. The City Council, likewise, had no interest in promoting any of their members, wanting the responsibility of the mess. Because whoever stepped into the Mayor’s seat, was going to be sewn with nothing but problems, stress, and a vocal human community.

So, naturally, after Sheriff Stilinski turned down the offer (for the 50th time), he then promptly suggested his son at a town hall meeting. Which, the human population of Beacon Hills seemed to latch on to, having a lifelong local (and a human who had ties to the County Alpha), be at the helm. Wolves were just as supportive, knowing that the County Second would have their best interests at heart, just as much as he would the humans. Before he could even object, Stiles was on the ballot, unopposed, with only a few days until the emergency vote.

“The Old Man will suffer. Lest he forgets I control his diet in this damn town.” Stiles thought, bitterly. A low growl rose in his throat, not completely unlike that of his son.

“In any case, thanks for sticking out the rest of the semester. You WILL keep doing your therapy thing, right? The stories I’m hearing from these kids are pretty… Oh hell, they're fucked up.” Finstock gave a pleading smile.

Stiles snorted. “Of course, Mr. Finstock. After school, 4 PM. Anybody that needs to talk, I’ll be there for them, same place as usual. Therapy is free, as always, and serious cases can have my card for after hours appointments.”

Stiles and Mr. Finstock stopped just before the Biology classroom. They exchanged final pleasantries before Stiles knocked, allowing himself inside. Teens looked up from their homework, and the Biology teacher nodded, giving Stiles control of the classroom.

“Good afternoon! How’s everyone doing today? Enjoying me cutting your class short by 15 minutes?” Stiles grinned.

The classroom returned a short laughter, and a pleasant enough greeting back to the school counselor.

Stiles reached inside of his bag, pulling out a thick folder. He cracked it open, handing out papers to the first rows, instructing them to pass the papers around. “Great! Well, today I’m going to be going over, briefly, the PSAT examination everyone will be taking next week. Just a practice test, not the real thing, so I don’t want anyone worrying about results…”

Just as Stiles returned to the teacher’s desk, a tiny, squeaky explosion, followed by a puff of green smoke, detonated right in front of Stiles. The smell hit Stiles’ nose, a stench that would send even the deadest of the dead, under 6 feet of rock and soil, running for the hills. He coughed, covering his nose, and nearly falling backwards out of sheer disgust.

High pitched, squealing laughter came from the classroom, as well as from the Biology teacher.

Stiles hacked and coughed, his entire area covered in a fog of green. There was no mistaking it… A fart bomb. His old recipe, but… More stout, somehow. Yet, unlike his own, the smell, and the fog
disappeared before he could even collect himself. Little to no evidence would remain, as Stiles peeked under the teacher’s desk, and collected a small contraption. Fully automated.

More laughter, and even Stiles was unable to hold back his own, shimmering white smile. “Okay! Okay! Seriously… I’m too impressed to get anyone written up… That was… Worse than anything I’d ever made. Bravo!” He applauded, still hacking up a lung. “The Terror is dead, long live the new terror, whoever you are, you sneaky fart ninja!”

~

In the far back of the classroom, Mason shared a devilish grin with Corey, who eyed him incredulously. Mason chuckled, kicking a bag full of incriminating evidence under the table, that Corey could scent out easily.

“You didn’t…” Corey mumbled.

Mason shrugged. “What? He needed a laugh. Stiles has been stressed out, and I got a peek as his computer when I hooked up the network. Dude was a couple of bombs short of an anarchist.”

Corey grabbed Mason by the shoulder, pulling him close. “You just gas bombed the County Second, and the future mayor. No offense, but… Isn’t that a bad idea?”

Mason shook his head, avoiding direct eye contact with Stiles, who was currently opening several windows to fumigate the area. “Nah, he’s just Stiles. He’ll get a kick out of it.” Leaning back, Mason smirked, nodding in Corey’s direction. “Oh, by the way… You’re coming over this weekend, right? For the party?”

Corey cocked an eyebrow, watching Stiles dry heave out the window, still laughing the entire time. “Uh, yeah, dude… No way I’d miss that little pup’s party.”

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A nine hour flight, two taxis, and an Uber later, and Jackson finally made it back home to Beacon Hills on a Saturday morning. The Conference with Alpha Cunningham in Oklahoma had taken longer than they’d promised. After the one in Nevada, Jackson had found himself as a speaker in multiple law enforcement conferences, and a few Beta Symposiums. “LEO Perspective : Human and WERE, Perp Handling; A Unique, Dual Perspective”.

“You lived like a human, but were actually a werewolf. How did it make you feel, knowing there were two sets of laws that could affect you?”

“Which laws make you feel more comfortable. Human laws from the government, or Alpha laws, like you follow now?”

“Do you feel as though there should be separate LEOs for the Supernatural and Humans? Or do you think that there is value in keeping the ranks combined?”

Always told to answer “honestly”, Jackson did as best he could. As a young officer, he always felt like he didn’t know enough to be giving these kind of speeches. He didn’t even know why they
bothered with him. Was his perspective really all that important?

Yet, after each conference, most of the County and State Police in attendance came and thanked him for his time. Alphas and Betas, some outside of Law Enforcement, came to him as well, wanting to meet the Eclipse Survivor and hear his perspective on human/werewolf relations. State Alphas, especially, blew Jackson away with their appreciation for his time.

“We had no idea that departments could work together like that. We just assumed wolves would rather handle their own cases, and the humans handle their own.”

“Hearing that story about your childhood made me realize… Pups and kids aren’t that different from each other. I guess wolves and humans aren’t so different, either, if you could live like that for so long. I’m so sorry you had to suffer like that, but… I’m taking this back to my Department. Really, Deputy Whittemore, this has been an eye opening experience.“

“I’ll make sure and contact your Alpha, letting him know how jealous I am that he has such a strong, capable Beta in his hands. Thank you very much for visiting our state.”

Jackson yawned, stretching out as he finally made his way back inside the Hale Estate, completely transformed into something he’d never recognize as his old home. He took a deep breath of air, taking in the scents and sounds of his Pack. Tugging along his rolling suitcase, he was glad to be back in town again.

Not that he could miss today, of all days, but still… He might turn down the next conference, even if the Old Man paid him for the time on duty. Jackson missed his Pack, and was sick of leaving them for so long.

“Hey Jax!”

“Welcome back!”

“Play basketball with us later, Mr. Jax?! Please, pretty please!”

“Have you SEEN Boyd’s masterpiece yet? I’m already starving, and it’s an hour until the party!”

Jackson shared in more than one bear hug as he made his way through his childhood home, smiling and scenting his pack along the way. He’d never had a such a warm reception coming home before in his life. Though, to be fair… He’d never really had a home before the pack, as far as he was concerned.

“Jax!” Liam screeched, leaping off the second floor, and slamming into Jackson’s chest.

Catching the teen with relative ease, Jackson hugged the kid as tightly as he could muster. Liam hugged back with equal fervor. “Pack Brother. This must be what Isaac and Scott feel for each other.” A warm, happy swirl expanded out of his chest.

“Missed you, buddy.” Jackson plopped Liam back down on the ground, ruffling the teen’s hair. He
cocked an eyebrow, realizing that Liam had grown steadily in height and weight. More muscles, broader shoulders… Liam had clearly been hitting the gym, HARD, for his Sophomore year. “Damn… Look who’s gone and gotten ripped.”

Liam grinned. “Coach says I’ll be first string, so I’ve got to keep it up. I’m running circles around the Seniors, thanks to your help, and these babies…” He flexed, showing Jackson the results of his hard work.

“Awesome work. Can’t wait to see your first game. Come on, tell me what you’ve been doing the last week! How’s your cardio?” Jackson smiled, throwing an arm around Liam’s shoulders. The two walked into the living area, settling on a couch while Liam relayed his workout routine with Jackson.

After catching up on recent events, and de-stressing with the happy scent of Pack, Jackson caught an anxious whiff of air around Liam. The conversation lulled, with Liam growing more and more nervous with each moment.


Liam flushed, brightly. He gulped, peeking around each corner of the living room, looking for any bystanders. Liam’s ears twitched, and he finally settled, yanking Jackson closer.

“Okay, so like… I’ve been wanting to talk to you about this… I just… I didn’t…” Liam paused, as Parrish and Lydia strode through the hallway, each carrying a large, brightly colored present in both hands. As they left, he leaned back into Jackson’s ear. “So, like… How do you… You know… Talk… To a girl? Or, like… Ask them out? Not like, mating or anything, but like… A date?”

Jackson blinked, watching Liam’s face turn into a babbling mess of embarrassment. “You’re serious?”

Liam punched Jackson in the shoulder. He growled, flashing his eyes. “Jax! Shut up! Just… Just…. Answer the question, alright?”

Rolling his eyes, Jackson yanked Liam close, keeping him in a tight headlock. “Okay… This is very complicated, so I’m going to need you to pay me very close attention.” A smug grin crossed his face.

“Okay.” Liam focused his entire attention on Jackson’s words.

“You’re going to walk up to this girl that you like. That’s the first step.” Jackson threw his arm out, gesturing with his hand.

“Okay.” Liam nodded.

“Then… You open your mouth and say… “Hey, my name is Liam. Would you like to go out on a date with me this Saturday?”” Jackson nodded, wiping his hands of the situation.

Liam’s eyes flashed, and a new growl ripped in his chest. He slugged Jackson again in the shoulder, faux strangling him, as Jackson laughed through it all. “That’s it!? Come on, you’re bullshitting me!”

Jackson fought back, easily pushing Liam off of him, and head-locking him again. Though, he struggled to keep the teen at bay, amazed at how strong the kid had gotten. “Well, if she says yes, then you have a fun time on a date, and see if this is really someone you want to be around. If she
says no… Well, then it wasn’t meant to be, and you move on with your life. There are other wolves in the forest, you know?”

Breaking apart, Liam pouted, folding his arms and leaning back on the couch. “Fiiiine.”

“What were you hoping I’d say?” Jackson crossed his legs, eyeing Liam’s disappointed glare.

Shrugging, Liam turned to face Jackson, signaling up and down Jackson’s build. “I mean… You’ve… “Dated” a lot, right? The way you look, they way you act, and… I mean, I thought there was some kind of trick to it.” Groaning, Liam rubbed his forehead. “I mean… You’re… You. You’re like the coolest guy around. I hear Danny talking about you being the most popular guy at school, you had all kinds of girlfriends, and Stiles said you even dated Lydia for a long time! I just… I’m not like that, Jax. I’m a loudmouth jock who nobody takes seriously, because I’m not all put together like Mason is, and I’m not some great, super smart whiz kid like my parents are…. Like hell am I going to be able to be A doctor like they are, or a second like Mason is, or even a Beta at this point…”

Jackson caught Liam’s frustrated scent. He saw the bitter glare in Liam’s eyes, ones that spoke of “not good enough”.

Leaning over, Jackson wrapped his arm around the teen, patting him on the shoulder. “Actually, it was a lot of acting and trying too hard. All those “dates” I went on, and even with Lydia? They were all for show, and I was miserable in each of them.”

“Huh?” Liam’s face dropped, as the air around them changed, into a much more somber scent.

Jackson nodded. “For a long time, I tried to accept being human. My family was well off, I had a nice looking body, so… I tried to be the image of a confident, happy human, who could get anything and everything I wanted. All of that confidence, all of that outward image? Just a facade. A miserable, lonely, horrible facade.”

“S… Sorry.” Liam whined through his nose, leaning on Jackson’s shoulder. “I…. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to bring that up.”

Jackson smiled. “Don’t be. That’s all in the past now. I can be me, now. So why bother worrying about the old Jackson?” He prodded Liam in the chest. “Which is why, Li, you just need be yourself. Don’t put on some fancy act to impress a girl, or whoever you like. It’s tiring to pretend to be that something you’re not. Be the loudmouth jock that you are, good at sports, and super competitive and passionate with everyone you meet. If this girl doesn’t like that about you… Then why would you want to date her?” A low grin crossed Jax’s face. “Because trust me on this bud…. Sex is not that great, and not even remotely worth faking an image for.”

Liam flushed, growling as he shoved Jackson off him. He feigned ignorance, folding both his arms. “Alright, alright! We’re not having that kind of a talk, it was awkward enough with my dad!”

Jackson rose an eyebrow. He leaned back, pondering, momentarily, if he might actually need an “updated” talk. He cleared his throat, not at all that eager to ask his Alpha about that topic.

Hell, he'd just ask Stiles. Everyone knew he was having plenty of “experience” with Derek.

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The Stilinski residence was a ghost of its former self. Furniture, pictures, electronics, and everything in between had been moved out into Melissa’s home, or put into storage. A “For Sale” sign sat on the front lawn, with a larger “Sold” notice taped over it.

Sheriff Stilinski had been sad at first, putting his and Claudia’s house on the market, just as sad as Melissa would be when her own home was to be put on the market.

Yet, they were necessary evils. With them moving into the Hale Pack House in only a few months, with their own rooms, and the expectation of having their lives cared for…. It made little sense to pay for two unnecessary mortgages, when the money could go to the pack, and to other expenses.

The Old Man sighed, walking through the empty rooms, taking in the familiar smells, and running his hands one last time over Stiles’ height chart.

“You okay?” Melissa asked, striding through the home alongside her husband. She wrapped an arm around his waist, leaning over for a kiss. “I know you don’t like talking about your feelings, but… I know this has been hard for you.”

The Old Man shook his head, clearing his throat. “The new owners will be here tonight. Wolves, I hear, from New Jersey. They’re going to open up a business, too. Like, a coffee shop, or something. Derek was pretty pleased at their agreement on County Taxes. Nice young couple, wanting to start a family in a peaceful place for wolves and humans. They’re wanting to have a baby by spring.” He laughed, wiping a tear from his eye. “Amazing, huh? People actually coming all this way to live in our podunk town out in nowhere. I uh…. I'm going to have to hire some more bodies. Lot of people to keep safe. Lot to do…. Lot to do…”

Melissa leaned to card her hands through the Sheriff’s, a quiet smile on her face. “You and Stiles are so much alike. He rambles when he’s nervous or sad, too.” Playfully, Melissa prodded at the Sheriff’s cheek. “Come on, Konstantyn...”

“I’ve told you, Melissa… Never… Call me that monstrosity that I still haven’t forgiven my mother for. It’s K, Old Man, or Sheriff.” The Sheriff countered, in a playful, gruff tone.

Rolling her eyes, Melissa walked the Old Man through the home, stepping outside in the back yard. Scott’s toys, and several flowers from the garden had been removed, at the Hale Estate until they could be planted on the Hale Pack House. “Fine then, Hubby, I won’t, unless you really deserve it. Come on, now. Out with it. Don’t make me ban you from the dessert table at the party. I hear Boyd obliterated all standards of normalcy.”

“Damn.” The Old Man grimaced, plopping down on the steps that led to the backyard. He wrapped his arm around Melissa, pulling her close. “It’s just a house. I keep telling myself that it’s just a house, and I'm being stupid, but…” Sheriff Stilinski dropped his head. “I guess…. I had some grand dream of giving it to Stiles. Letting him and his partner live here, raise kids, or whatever they wanted. When he and Derek started sleeping over, I nearly gave it over to them then, and I’d take Derek’s apartment.” Laughter erupted from the Sheriff's face, wiping more tears out of his wrinkled face. “I was never a good provider, as a single father, and a Sheriff for a small town. Worked too much, never saw my own kid enough, and couldn’t get him the things he needed or deserved. Hell, I couldn’t even help my son when he needed me the most. Duke had to do all of that, and now…. He doesn't even need this place.”

“Oh, sweetheart.” Melissa gripped the Sheriff’s hand tightly.

“I guess…. This just hits home how much of a failure I am.” The Sheriff mumbled, reaching over and planting his hand on Melissa’s abdomen. “I don’t…. I don’t want to be a failure again.”
“You’re an idiot.” Melissa reached over and pressed a gentle kiss on her husband’s mouth. “You raised a boy, on your own, who went on to get a Doctorate, raise his own son, rally a pack of wolves together, save the lives of countless people who were under the tyranny of an insane Alpha, and who is about to be our town’s youngest mayor.” She gripped the Sheriff’s hand, nearly breaking it in half from her tight grip. “You are far from a failure, K, and….”

Melissa put her free hand on top of the Sheriff’s, over her abdomen. “I look forward to seeing how you father our children.”

A small bump had formed around Melissa’s stomach. To the untrained eye, some might just think Melissa had packed on a little extra weight.

“We’re going to have to tell them.” John smiled, rubbing the bump.

For the last year, the two had been attempting to have a child. With Melissa’s biological clock ticking down, it’d been a struggle to start a family so late, but… On their vacation to the beach, the latest little stick had finally turned positive, on the same night when the Old Man had just finished proposing.

Melissa laughed, nodding in agreement. “I know… Just… I hated to announce it when everything was such a mess. Or with everything horrible going on, or… With Isaac’s party? Okay, I’m just making excuses by this point, I suppose.” She chuckled.

The Sheriff brushed his hand over Melissa’s abdomen. “You’re starting to show. I don’t think you’ll be able to hide this for much longer. I saw Isaac sniffing around you last week, anyway. Pretty sure the other wolves are going to catch the smell here in a bit.”

“I know…” Melissa sighed, biting her bottom lip. “Is it wrong that I’m a little… Nervous?”

“Nervous? About what?”

Melissa shrugged. “They’ll be human. Two tiny little humans in a big pack full of werewolves. Oh, I don’t think they’d ever be hurt, or anything, but… I’ve seen how rough Scott plays with Theo, and those Warrior Princesses are nothing but warmongering warriors!”

**Two.**

The word still lingered in the Sheriff’s mind.

Sheriff Stilinski planned out everything perfectly, down to the last penny, on how they would handle a single child. Melissa’s income as a doctor helped, of course, but college was expensive, and they’d soon be living in a pack, giving part of their income each month to the Pack Fund. While some things would be taken care of, like food, and shelter, Sheriff Stilinski still wanted to provide something for his kids, all on his own. Cars when they were old enough, good birthday gifts, money to keep them from working through college. He hadn’t wanted things to be a repeat of his raising of Stiles, but...

Twins? Yeah, that threw everything out the window. Though, knowing his oldest child, it was good to know that the unnamed Stilinski twins would be just as unpredictable.

Though of all of the things he worried about, them growing up in a pack was far from any of them. “Melissa… When Stiles was a kid, he was around Deucalion’s pack all the time. Sure, not all of them were nice to him, but… Kids like Ema? Danny? They were more protective of him than I was. Guarded his life, and kept him safe. Hell, Deucalion supported Stiles all through college, and while he was in New York. That’s how protective wolves are of their human pack members.”
“Really?” Melissa asked, relief flooding her face.

The Sheriff nodded, standing up from the back steps, and helping his wife up from the ground. “Of course. Just look at how the Pack sees Stiles. Of course, they respect Stiles’s authority, and who he is as a person, but they recognize there are things he can’t do. They know that he’s fragile. Why else would they have an entourage surrounding him every time a pack visits?”

As the duo made their way through the house, locking the front door behind them, realization struck Melissa’s face. “Is that why Parrish and Jackson park their cruiser outside my house when other packs are in the area?”

Chuckling, the Sheriff nodded. “That’s also why Kira becomes my partner on patrols when other packs are in town, without my consent. County Alpha’s orders. I swear…. That Kitsune has gotten even more bubbly since joining the Hale pack.”

Melissa slid inside her vehicle, with the Sheriff taking the driver’s seat.

The Old Man glanced back one last time as his home, before buckling hims led him. “Melissa, our children are going to be fine. The Pack is going to love and care for them the same as they’ve done for Isaac and Scott. I know they will, because they’re already doing it for us.”

Reaching over, Melissa clasped her hand on the Sheriff’s knee.

Wordlessly, the Sheriff returned the touch of affection.

“Then…. I suppose it's time to tell them.” Melissa whispered.

Nodding, Sheriff Stilinski grinned. “You realize…. Stiles is going to be their big brother, right? The worst kind of big brother, who's going to spoil them rotten, and make us look bad.”

Melissa snorted.

“What?” Sheriff Stilinski asked.

Wiping away a happy tear, Melissa couldn’t stop the laughter. “Scott and Isaac will be older than the twins, but…. They’ll technically be their nephews.”

A low groan escaped the Sheriff’s lips. He really was an “Old Man”, now.

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9 tiers of chocolate cake. Flawless buttercream frosting, applied that could double as fondant. Swirling, intricate designs of ivy, thorns, and carefully crafted flowers of every variety. Like a colorful oasis in the desert.

“Happy Birthday, Isaac Hale” was written in neat, flawless script.

Boyd looked up from his work, wiping away the sweat from his brow on a spare towel. He'd been baking since 3 in the morning, and decorating for about as long. Boyd utilized every trick in his book, going back to the formal pastry training he'd learned ages ago.

Sure, it wasn’t a typical kid’s cake, like he’d end up making Scott in a few months… But it’s what
Isaac wanted. A “fancy” cake, like the ones he’d shown the pup in the cookbooks he’s picked up from his time in Indiana as a baker’s assistant.

After learning this would be Isaac’s first birthday party in his entire life…. Boyd wanted to put six years worth of love into each bite.

Though now as he looked up at the cake, nearly touching the ceiling itself, he let out a quiet sigh. “Maybe… I did a little too much?”

“Ooooh! You pulled out the big guns, hun! Looks great! Can’t wait to dig into that masterpiece.”

Boyd caught Erica’s wayward fingers waving around the edge. He rolled his eyes. “Erica, if you touch that icing or anything on that cake, I’m going to withhold sex for the next year.” He moved to the freezer, pulling out the last batch of iced flowers he’d made earlier that morning.

“You wouldn’t dare.” Erica gasped, covering her mouth in horror.

“Do I bluff?” Boyd smirked, flashing his eyes at Erica.

Pausing for only a moment, Erica growled. “Damn your poker face.” She gave up on attempting to sample the icing, instead hefting herself up on the kitchen counter.

“Did you get the pup’s present?” Boyd set the flowers aside, grabbing another piping bag to touch up a few spots around the cake.

Erica nodded, lifting up the massively wrapped present, with a shiny red bow. “Did I ever! The MegaJumboUltraBlox 5000 piece set! He can spend all day building whatever that adorable little guy wants to build. Plus, I know it’s something he likes to play with Theo and Scott. More adorable bonding for the cutest pups in all of Beacon Hills!”

Boyd smiled. Isaac wasn’t like most pups. Sure, Isaac liked to roughhouse every now and then, mostly playing tag, but didn't like wrestling or more physical sports. The pup liked to create, or watch, or do things that were calming in nature. Boyd was sure Isaac’s past had plenty to do with his calm temperament, but was happy to give the pup anything that helped keep him in a happy place.

“He’ll love it. Hope he likes this, too.” Boyd reached to a side counter, tossing a plain box to Erica.

“What’s this?” Erica jiggled the box.

“My gift to him. Can you wrap it while I finish this up? Party starts in an hour or so.” Boyd said.

“What’s in it? I thought we agreed on the Ultrablox Set?” Erica moved to the side of the kitchen, snagging the wrapping paper another couple had used.

Boyd blushed, unable to hold back a slow smile. “Quality apron. Got his name on it.”

Erica glared across the kitchen, cocking her head curiously.

“What?” Boyd ignored his wife’s critical gaze. “My apprentice needs something official. Besides, I’m tired of Stiles yelling at me about his stained shirts.”

Erica went back to wrapping the plain box, using a cartoon themed paper. “You’re really going to do it, then? Like, a legit apprenticeship? Isn't he a little young for that?”

Boyd nodded, adding several iced flowers along the cake’s edge. A testament of culinary art itself,
each budded rose looked like something they could pick outside, from the flower garden. “As long as Isaac wants to… I’ll teach him everything I know. Seems like he enjoys it enough. If he gets bored, we can stop. Though, with his nose…. Isaac could be a top notch chef. Better than me, better than anyone on the scene right now.”

“You’re serious?” Erica finished wrapping the gift, sticking on a bow and writing Boyd’s name on a tag. “You know… By any standards, you could be a professional chef. That last guy you studied under… What’s his face? Ram… Something or another? Didn’t he say you could be a Michelin Star chef, if you just had your own restaurant and advertised?” Tucking the gift under her arm, Erica strode across the kitchen.

Applying the last flower, Boyd wiped his hands off on his apron. “That’s phase two of our ten year plan. If you’re ready for it, let’s do it. Pretty sure we’re in a perfect spot for it.”

Erica dropped the present on the floor, mouth agape as she stared Boyd down.

Boyd smirked. “What, you’re surprised?” He sighed, washing his hands under the sink and stripping out of his apron. “I think we both know that Blue Moon’s days are numbered. This town is becoming more family friendly. A raunchy bar bordering on a strip club isn’t going to cut it for very long. Besides…. I’d like to run something to bring Isaac to, where he can see how the restaurant business really works.”

Running up behind her husband, Erica wrapped her arms around Boyd’s waist, leaning on his shoulders. “Yeah… Kind of embarrassing, really, compared to what the rest of our pack is doing. Didn’t the Hewitts say that we reflect on our Alpha? Yeah… We’ve got to make a change. Probably could make more money, too.”

Boyd grinned. “Let’s give it till the new year. Then… Let’s sell it to someone, and let them take it over. With our profits and our savings… Let’s make our real dream come true.”

“You… Really want to do it?” Erica bounced on her toes, practically squealing in excitement.

Nodding, Boyd twirled around, pressing his lips into Erica’s. “Red Sun. Our own restaurant. I think we’ve got enough experience now to make it work. We’re not some newbies opening a run down bar.”

“Bitch, I'm fabulous with finances. Don't even worry about it. Plus, there are plenty of people we can hire in town to help us out. Lydia can build the place. All of it can be ours!” Erica giggled, pressing kiss after kiss into Boyd’s lips.

“My own menu. No more peddling bar food and booze. A County Alpha who won't tax us into bankruptcy…. A business where we can finally have our own pup.” Boyd beamed, wrapping his arms around Erica and spinning her around. They both laughed in sweet, beautiful bliss.

“I love you, Boyd.”

“I love you, too. Erica.”

Boyd sat his wife back down on the floor. He clasped his hands together. “Alright, I'm going to wash up. Can you get the cake into the car?”

Erica tilted her head, eyeing the cake up and down. “Uh, Boyd? Question…. How are you going to move this? I think this is taller than our car. Or anyone’s car.”

Face melting into a puddle of horrific realization, Boyd slammed his head into the nearest surface.
“Fuck.”

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“Happy birthday to you! Happy birthday to you! Happy birthday dear Isaac! Happy birthday to you!”

The chorus of kids singing came to an end, with roaring applause. Derek applauded alongside the rest of Isaac’s kindergarten class, who’d all gathered at the City Park for Isaac’s birthday party.

The event was beyond what Derek had planned in the beginning, between the kids, the Pack, and strangers dropping by to pay their respects to the Hale Pack... Well, at least Boyd had cooked enough food and dessert for an army.

Isaac leaned over his massive cake, taking a deep breath, and blowing out the candles that lit up the front. More applause from the crowd, and Isaac blushed at all the attention.

The swarm of kids circled around Derek, half of them human, half of them werewolf. All scrambling for the bite of Boyd’s cake.

Derek sliced into the cake, giving Isaac the portion with his name, and one of Boyd’s massive flowers. “Here you go, pup. Eat up, and happy birthday.” He pressed a gentle kiss on Isaac’s forehead.

On the verge of tears, Isaac nodded, taking his slice of cake. “Thanks Papa! This birthday thing is really cool! Thanks for the party!”

Choking back the urge to cry, Derek ruffled his son’s hair. This would be Isaac’s first birthday party. He hadn’t even thought about the fact that Isaac had never celebrated a holiday, under Robert’s care. Thankfully, the pack had gone all out to make it a memory worth making.

Isaac had been all smiles, all day.

Derek handed out slices of cake to the mountain of kids surrounding them. Isaac waited patiently with his friends, before they all collected near the bump and jump Stiles had rented for the kids. They all wolfed down their cake, eager to get back to playing, all with chocolate smiles, and cheering over the “best cake of their lives”.

Smiling, Derek watched as the kids resumed playing. Bouncing up and down in the inflatable palace, laughing and enjoying every moment of the sunny Saturday, with just a hint of a chill in the air.

“Looks like they're having a lovely time.” Peter said.

Glancing up from the line of adults who'd come for their slices, Derek pulled back a plate. He growled at Peter. “No cake for you.”

Peter rolled his eyes, sighing. “Still haven’t forgiven me for giving you credit where credit was due? Come now, most wolves would preen at praise from the National Alpha.”

Derek growled.
“Have I mentioned how much I hate the media? They’re lucky I didn’t shove my boot up their ass.” Derek handed off the knife and plates to Stiles, who took over serving.

Father and son moved off to the sides, away from the crowd.

“Glad to see you handling the town so well. I was worried at first, seeing the influx of refugees.” Peter said, leaning back up against a tree.

Derek rolled his eyes. “I didn’t do much of anything. My pack and the community are mostly to thank.”

Peter nodded, chuckling. “The fact that you recognize that…. Puts you above many Alphas in this Country.” He sighed, watching the pups playing from a distance. “Still…. I’m amazed to see kids and pups playing together. Or rather…. I’m amazed that their parents trust you enough to bring their children around you.”

In the distance, Derek watched Isaac and Scott climbing back into the jump house. They helped their human classmates inside, and bounced around with them.

Of course, Scott being the goofball that he was, grabbed onto one of the hooks in the ceiling, meant for pups to play on. Using his feet to keep hold of the hook, and with his hands down, he swung Meredith, one of his closer friends, back and forth in the air, as she giggled through it all.

Isaac, by contrast, linked his hands with other friends, using his strength and agility to jump them both high into the air. Allison, on Isaac’s right, squealed in joy as they flew through the air. Even Theo managed some laughter, linked onto Isaac’s left.

In fact, most of the kids were paired up, human and werewolf, having the time of their lives together.

Parents had been nervous at first, and Derek had fielded more than one call, worried about what a werewolf’s birthday party would entail (one parent actually worried Derek would be taking the kids hunting for live game). Even at the start of the party, some had been concerned about the pup’s otherworldly strength. Which was quickly forgotten, as the other werewolf parents, and other pups, took great care in protecting the human children. Scott had shielded more than one human child from falling, or tripping inside the bump houses.

So now, with the party in full gear, it was just that…. A party. A celebration of Isaac’s life, and the people in it.

“Times are finally changing. I think people are starting to finally realize we’re not monsters. We’re just a race of people, who want to laugh, cry, and be happy, just like humans.” Derek smiled back at his father, groaning as he watched Scott and Meredith fall from the ceiling, slamming into the soft plastic below, with a wave of giggles, and apologies from Scott.

Peter nodded. “I hate to leave Beacon, especially now that things are so peaceful, but… Other matters require my attention. With the Reed fiasco cleaned up, onto the next disaster.”

“Oh…. Okay, then.” Derek dropped his head, sighing in relief. He honestly couldn’t handle
anything else in his life now. If Peter wasn't concerned…. Then Derek wouldn't be either.

“Enjoy your peace, Alpha Hale. It's well earned.” Peter clasped his hand on Derek’s shoulder, squeezing it tightly. “You've given a great deal of hope to a great deal of people. Don't let them down.”

Walking off, Peter swiped a piece of cake, moaning quietly at the gorgeous taste.

Derek took a deep breath, walking back to rejoin his son’s party.

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Scott felt sad as the sun began to set in the distance. Their friends left Isaac’s party, one by one. Adults and members of the pack, too, until only his daddy and papa remained.

“Bye Henry! Bye Leslie! Bye Ali! Bye Meri!” Scott waved to the last of his friends, turning back and pouting as he saw the bounce house being torn down.

Isaac yawned, rubbing his eyes as he rejoined Scott’s side. He smiled. “That was a fun party! Did you see the apron Boyd got me? I'm going to be a REAL chef now!” He puffed his chest out, beaming.

Nodding, Scott gave Isaac a thumbs up. “Yeah, that was cool!” Reaching over, Scott wrapped his arms around Isaac, hugging him tightly. “Happy birthday!”

Isaac giggled, with a warm smile. “Guess what? Theo says my birthday is before yours, so that makes ME the big brother. I'm six, and you’re still five!”

Something in Scott’s tummy surged. Something that always bothered him when Isaac was upset, or others fought. Like when Aunt Laura wanted to “eat” Isaac. Or when Isaac was sad and crying. An urge he couldn't explain. Like…. He had to protect Isaac. Be by his side. Never let anything bad happen to him. Make Isaac, Theo, Liam, Mason, Daddy, Papa, Paw Paw, Maw Maw, Meredith, Allison…. Make everyone smile, and be happy.

Scott released the hug. He folded his arms, pouting for only a moment. “Yeah, but I'm bigger than you. So that makes me the bigger brother!”

Isaac chuckled, nodding in agreement. “Okay! We’ll both be the big brothers!”

“Bigger than Theo, anyway.” Scott whispered.

The brothers giggled in unison. They both agreed that Theo could be their little brother. Under a pinky swear, just like Stiles had taught them. A promise to always be brothers, friends, and Pack. To protect one and other.

“Boys, come on, it's time to head home! Paw Paw and Maw Maw say they've got a big surprise!” Stiles yelled from across the park, waving at them.

“Okay Daddy!” Scott and Isaac yelled in unison.

They walked, side by side, through the park, back to their fathers. The moon began to peek in the
distance, in perfect symmetry with the sun.

A roar caught Scott’s attention.

Scott stopped, glancing out into the trees of the city park. Another roar, in the opposite direction. Scott shot his gaze the other way, in the thick of the forest. In the distance, he saw something….

Deep in the shadows.

A big animal. Something bigger than a lion, a tiger, and a bear combined, but with the face of a wolf. Shoulders as wide as his Daddy’s van. Red fur that seemed to glow, just like Alpha Derek’s eyes. Sharp red eyes, that didn't glow. They watched Scott in gentle interest, cocking its head.

Scott’s chest burned. A gentle warmth. He wasn't scared of the creature. Rather…. The creature smelt familiar. Like…. Him.

“Hi?” Scott waved to the beast.

The wolf beast…. Smiled.

“Whatcha looking at?” Isaac asked, glancing in the same direction as Scott.

“The big red wolf thing.” Scott pointed point blank at the creature, still sitting quietly in the woods. “He smells like me.”

“I don't see him. Where is he?” Isaac cocked his head, struggling to find what Scott saw. Which was weird to Scott, because Papa said that Isaac had the best nose and eyes in the entire pack.

“Right there! Right in front of us!” Scott pointed again. Nobody could miss the creature, not even his Daddy.

Isaac shrugged. “Nah, there’s nothing there. You sleepy, Scott?”

Wiping his eyes, Scott looked once more. As he opened his eyes…. The beast was gone. “I guess….”. Even the familiar smell had vanished.

“Boys! Come on! Boyd has a special dinner for the pack! He’s going to yell at Daddy if we let it get cold!” Stiles yelled, once more.

Ignoring the beast, Scott shook of the entire thing. Taking Isaac’s hand, he ran the distance of the park with his brother, ready to return home to his Pack, and the family he loved.

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A/N: Well, that’s it for Part I! Thanks for sticking through with me! Next week will start the next phase of this group’s life! See below for a summary of things to come! As always comments are always appreciated.

Part II Summary:
Beacon Hills, a metropolis of every race and species under the sun. A paradise of modern thought, and modern pack policies that is leading the Country to a brighter tomorrow. People the world over travel to the thriving city, to meet County Alpha Hale, Mayor Stilinski, and their Pack Council. Many believe it to be the future of the country, itself.

Not that any of that matters to Scott or Isaac Hale, Freshman at Beacon High School. They have their own troubles to contend with as they step into the next phases of their life.

Scott struggles to find his place in the pack, and what the future will hold for him. He’s unsure of why everyone seems to think he’s next in line to the Hale Alpha. Not when he’s so boring, ordinary, and woefully average in everything he does, especially compared to Theo Hale, the prime Alpha Candidate of the pack, or even Allison Argent, Huntress in the making, and stronger than him by a mile. His dreams of a gigantic, crimson red beast isn’t helping things, keeping him up all hours of the night, wondering what the creature wants with him.

Meanwhile, Isaac comes face to face with a dark remnant of his past, dredging up old wounds, and making him feel like a helpless pup all over again. Washing dishes at Red Moon to earn his “cred” in the restaurant industry, cooking dinner each night for the pack, and preparing his resume and skills for Culinary School. Are those simple things that much to ask for? Or is he destined to always be chained to the past, and never forget the nightmares of his childhood?

Not that Stiles and Derek are without their own battles.

With a blurred eyesight, Derek fears his days as an Alpha won’t last forever, and the time to start a successor is past due. Meanwhile, the pressure to take the vacant State Alpha position is mounting, with National Alpha Laura pressing every button he has.

Stiles finds himself weary of his father’s age, and the stress of the Old Man’s job, and raising two young kids, has on his weary heart. All while Stiles ignores symptoms of his own, that keep him worn out at the end of each day, and struggling to eat.

As the Hale Pack grows up, and the next generation of wolves begin to ascend, can they face against the struggles they face? Or will a miracle be born out of their adversity? One that could even stop evil, itself?
Chapter 20

The wailing of an alarm clock rang out in the third floor of the Hale Pack Home. A strong arm, with a firm set of muscles, reached out from a mass of blankets, slamming off the alarm on its bedside table.

Yawning, the bundled mass of a blanket slowly scrambled out, stumbling out onto the hardwood flooring, face-first. His legs flung into the air, as the blanket slowly slid down his bulky frame.

Groaning, thirteen-year-old Scott Hale came to his feet, stumbling around in the dim light of dawn, eyes squinted, and rubbing his sore face.

Scott stretched out, yawning as he ran claws through his thick head of long, brown hair, that curled at his bangs. He stepped over game controllers in front of his shared TV, Isaac’s backpack, Theo’s dirty clothes, some comic books, and his football gear, before finally reaching the trio’s shared closet.

Aside from the size of their room, and the cabin styled walls and floor, Scott and his pack brothers had a typical, messy, teenage boy’s room. Nothing disgusting, but they tended to let a little clutter gather, until Boyd or Stiles yelled at them.

A pink winter sunrise colored his room from the clear wall sized window, shedding light on his roommates, while he threw on a pair of weathered jeans, and a thick sweatshirt, bundling for the November chill that filled the air.

On the opposite corner of the large bedroom, Theo groaned, reaching out to smother himself in a pillow on his own bed. The teen had a few inches on Scott, was faster, and hit harder, but lacked the bulk to be all that bigger than Scott. "Scotty, it's Saturday. Why are you up so early? We just went to bed like… Three hours ago."

Scott rolled his eyes, walking past Isaac, who was snoring like a train (as always), body skewed out on the bed, pillows and sheets in every which direction. Beyond his brother’s soft curls, angelic face, and lanky, awkward body, was a guy who could sleep through an earthquake, and not be bothered in the slightest. If Scott didn’t know any better, he’d swear that Isaac took after Stiles more than he did Derek. Poor guy.

“Chores. What else would I be up for?” Scott said, taking a moment to cover Isaac back up with blankets, as he noticed a chill run through his brother’s body. For someone that ate as much as Isaac did, Scott had no idea how his brother kept so skinny. He took the time to set a pillow under Isaac’s head, as the teen seemed to relax into the warmth, and fall into a calmer slumber.

Theo groaned even louder, bundling himself in a quilt. "Of all the shit you could have picked to work on for your Pack Responsibility... You work in a barn with those gross animals, sweeping their shit, and letting that annoying little Goat follow you around. Weirdo."

Walking past Theo, Scott reached over and patted his pack brother on the head. "Love you too, Theo."

“Get the hell out, you morning person trash, and let me sleep like a normal person.” Theo spat.

Scott chuckled, rolling his eyes as he made his way through the West Wing of the third floor. Like the rest of the Wings of their Pack Home, he strode through the naturally scented hardwood floors and walls, taking in the scent of their home forest, where Lydia had acquired the lumber all those years ago. Walking through the hallway, he heard the rest of his family stirring around each of the
wings of their cabin-styled mansion.

The top floor was saved for the Alpha’s family. He could smell his Pops and Dad still snoozing in their bedroom, while Maw Maw and Paw Paw were speaking in soft, muffled tones. Deucalion, as always, kept to himself in the study, and was already up and flipping through pages of one of his books. He heard his little uncles arguing over cartoons in their room, with a minor scuffle, after passing the Pack’s Assembly Room.

Scott stopped briefly on the second floor, where the Betas in the pack lived. He waved to Erica and Lydia, who sipped tea on their floor’s landing area, watching the morning news and speaking animatedly as Mr. and Mrs. Hewitt brewed coffee with the Dunbars.

As he made his way down the spiral staircase, holding onto the rails, he arrived on the bottom floor. The first floor was the heart of the pack activities, dinners, and relaxation, where their family spent 90% of their time on the massive lounge-style couches, and spacious dining area to fit a couple hundred, easy. He spotted the rest of the early birds like himself, mingling in the front foyer, strapping on their shoes.

Uncle Jackson, the Sword of the Hale Family, the County Alpha’s right hand man, and lead Beta of the pack. Known the world wide as the Eclipse Survivor, a recently certified member of WERE (after years of personally training under Derek), and currently ranked 25th in the North American Continent. A sharply dressed man, who always had a slew of “admirers”, both male and female. Of course, not that Scott cared about any of that celebrity crap that every blathered on about. He was just Uncle Jackson, the guy who’d shown Scott how to hit a baseball, and coached all of the little league games for their family up until high school.

By Jackson’s side was Liam Dunbar, recent graduate of the Police Academy, and newest Deputy of the Sheriff’s Department, with dreams of enrolling in WERE training someday, to follow in Jackson’s shoes. The hothead of the family, and Scott’s cousin. He’d gotten quite a name for himself in the college baseball league, before turning down a professional career, in order to return to Beacon Hills, as a Beta for his Pack, and Deputy for his home. Recruiters continued to show up on occasion, throwing money Liam’s way, before Jackson or Danny threw them out on their asses.

“Seriously?  5 AM?  What kind of bullshit shift is this?” Liam huffed, as he strapped his belt on, holstering his gun, cuffs, and wide array of supernatural tools that the Department had developed over the years.

Jackson rolled his eyes, smacking Liam upside the head. “Quit complaining. Newbies get the short straw, and that’s all there is to it. Besides, I’m the one who had to take an earlier shift, because I’m stuck with the greenhorn as a Partner.” He strapped on his own belt, yawning as he stretched out into the air.

Liam dropped his head, clearing his throat. “Uh… Thanks, by the way… For… Doing that.”

Reaching over, Jackson slammed a hand on Liam’s shoulder, shaking the young man in the process. “Like I would leave you in anyone else’s hands?  Please.” A soft smirk crossed Jackson’s face. “Besides… When you screw up, and I have to scream in your face, I’ll do it with love, and I know you’ll take it oh so much better.”

“Asshole.” Liam spat, smirking right back in their usually playful banter.

Reaching the bottom of the stairs, Scott laughed, catching both their attention. “First day as Deputy, and you’re already fighting with your boss?  Not a good sign, Li.  Should we call back those sports recruiters?”
“Shaddup! He’s not my boss, the Old Man is!” Liam countered, ruffling Scott’s hair as he joined them.

“Liam’s right. As Derek put it with me on my first day… I’m more like Liam’s babysitter, until he’s somewhat useful. We all go through it.” Jackson reached over, pulling Scott into a hug. “Morning, pup.

“Like I said… Asshole!” Liam ruffled Scott’s hair. “Morning, Scotty!”

“M’not a pup anymore!” Scott countered, pushing Jackson off him. He was THIRTEEN, for God’s sake. Pups stopped being pups when they hit their teens. Embarrassing.

“You’ll always be the adorable little runt in my eyes, Scotty.” Jackson chuckled, folding his arms. “Helping with the harvest this morning? Or are you tending to the livestock again?”

Scott pouted, huffing quietly to himself. “They won’t let me on the machines to help. So I’ll be tending to all the animals today, while they’re busy. Ennis asked me to handle the stables, and check on the herd. Just what I do every morning, but a little extra.”

Laughing, Liam patted Scott on the shoulder. “Buddy, trust me, I get it. I was 13 once, too. Sucks not being able to do the adult stuff, but you know… They trust you a lot with the ranch. Way more than they trusted me with anything, that’s for sure. I mean, you basically run the stables yourself.”

“That’s because Scott’s a responsible kid, who doesn’t break windows.” Jackson snuck in, as Liam slugged Jackson on the shoulder.

Scott felt a smile grown on his face. ‘I guess.”

Jackson nodded, grabbing Liam by his uniform, and tugging him out of the house. “Come on, Li. Scott’s got work to do, and we’ve got work to do. Chatting the morning away doesn’t help anyone, and doesn’t change the fact you have to face roll call with Parrish.”

Scott followed behind them, stepping out on the front porch of his home. He took in a deep lungful of winter’s crisp air, eyes gazing over the acres of land surrounding their home. A shame that the fields of flowers were dead from the cold for the year, but he could still picture the rainbow of color that would bloom come Spring. How Lydia had preserved Grandma Talia’s beautiful lands was nothing short of a miracle over the years.

In the far distance, and headfirst into the final harvest of the season, Scott could see the ranchers tackling the biggest portion of their wheat and corn, with the low roar of farming equipment.

On the opposite end of the acreage, a massive red barn took up a great deal of space, with the buzz of animals whinnying, whining, and mooing in the distance. Surrounding the area was a thick white fence, with cattle grazing on the hay and grass in the enclosure. A few smaller barns, for the very few pigs and chickens they raised, had steam rolling out from their heated units.

Jumping into his boots, Scott jogged the distance between his home and the main ranch, only a ten minute run, tops.

Opening the gate to the barn, it wasn’t a few seconds later when a baby white goat bleated, hopping the entire distance of the barn, running in circles, before finally ramming repeatedly into Scott’s side, in a fervent attack for attention, nibbling at his jeans.

"Hey Billy.” Scott said, scratching the goat’s head, before stopping at the stalls near the end of the barn. The horses were already whining for their own head scratches, and to be fed breakfast. As he
passed, Scott gave each a tender pat on the head.

Stopping at the feed station, Scott took a handful of grain into a bowl, placing it down at Billy’s side. With the hose, he filled up his buddy’s water bowl. Most kids had dogs to feed, but Scott was plenty happy with his pet goat. (And Isaac thrilled with the ability to cook with goat’s milk.) “Eat up, ya runt. You’re looking skinny.”

While Billy ate on his bowl, Scott tended to the rest of the animals in the barn. After feeding, watering, and sweeping out the mess in each stall, Scott tackled his extra chores with their herd of cattle. He refilled their hay feeders, let the calves run up and bump heads with him, and took the pain from a bull that had a slight gash on his side, sealing the wound with a special gel Ennis had developed with a local pharmacy group, a miracle of modern veterinary medicine. The dairy cows didn’t take all that long to milk, and Scott stored the contents for the ranchers to process later.

The sun fully rose by the time Scott returned to the barn, and taking the opportunity to bond with the chickens, and collect the latest batch of eggs.

From the distance, Scott spotted Ennis riding horseback, from the harvest fields. The former Reyes Alpha, now a Beta in the Hale pack, was also head of the Ranch, in charge of around 20 employees. Thanks to his hard work with growing the gardens, livestock, pantry, and the ranch as a whole, (and Lydia’s contracting with solar panel companies), the Hale Pack had been self-sufficient for years.

Beaming, Scott waved at his boss. “Hey Ennis!”

Ennis dismounted the horse, handing the reigns over to Scott, while he wiped a beads of sweat from his brow. The horse snapped at Ennis, ready to rear up and hit him, held back by Scott, who calmed under the teen’s hand. "Can you brush her down, wash her, and get her fed? Betsy had a long morning, and is pretty cranky right now. We’ve been running up and down the fields, trying to make sure they drive the harvesters straight on the lines. I’m taking Chase for the rest of the afternoon.”

“Yes, sir!” Scott patted Betsy’s grey spotted flank, guiding her with ease to her stall. For such a “cranky” horse, she nuzzled on Scott’s neck, taking each of his orders with ease.

Ennis watched Scott tend to the horse in awe, and the calming effect he had on her. "It's funny... You've got such a way with animals and plants. Like our own little nature whisperer. Which doesn't make sense… Most of our livestock spook around our werewolf employees.”

Scott grinned, running a brush up and down Betsy’s coat. He wasn’t sure why, either, but animals were naturally drawn to him. Dogs, cats, goat, mice, and even birds would approach him with ease, despite him having the genes and claws to turn them all into dinner. Plants he grew would thrive in comparison to what other people would grow in the fields, and everyone had long since put Scott in charge of all the tomatoes and vine planting. Either way, Scott had become a good friend with most of the ranchers, and helped them any chance he found, since everything they did came naturally to him. Though Theo thought it was weird, Scott just enjoyed nature and the outdoors, about as much as Isaac liked being in the kitchen. Like, he could feel comfortable in his own skin.

"Yeah, its weird. Here lately, I thought about... You know... Being a vet or something.” Scott grinned, running his hands through Betsy’s mane. “I’m awesome in Biology class, and like working around here. Maybe work on the ranch, or open my own clinic someday? I think I'd be happy just being around animals, you know, and Beacon Hills just has Dr. Deaton.”

Isaac had the dream of being a world class chef. Theo dreamed of joining WERE, and being a Beta for the Hale Pack. Was Scott so weird for dreaming of being around animals?
Ennis rose an eyebrow, as he finished saddling Chase. He chuckled. "Really? Funny, I thought you'd be more interested for the Alpha Academy. I mean…. Everyone knows you're going to be Derek’s successor. There’s no doubt about it!"

Betsy nuzzled Scott’s neck, as the young wolf’s face strained, hand balling on Betsy’s shoulder. The joy he’d felt in his chest moments ago, fell flat, into the pit of his stomach.

“Why?” Scott thought.

Dropping his head, Scott thought about the amazing wolves in his pack. Jackson, a were graduate, and the most reliable person anyone knew, was the natural choice, and deserved the title of Successor above anyone else. Though Boyd would never accept it, with the Red Sun being his only passion, his love and caring for others made him a top pick. Or Parrish, next in line to be Sheriff of Beacon Hill, and a strong candidate thanks to his commanding leadership skills. Erica, the heart and soul of the pack, and guardian of the young, who managed the MANY pack businesses, and knew more about finances than anyone. Isaac, who had the best grades out of all of the teens their age, and tended to the pack just as reliably as Boyd did, if they were looking for someone in the younger generation. Theo, who was in RK9, the WERE training program for high school students, would someday be one of the strongest members in the Pack.

Out of everyone amazing to choose from…. Why would his Pops, the greatest County Alpha in the Country, or his Dad, Beacon Hills’ most popular mayor in three decades, such amazing, talented men, so vastly superior to him in every way, pick…. Him?

Scott had average grades, and struggled with math. He wasn't strong like Theo, only having the basic of basic training in combat from his Pops. Hell, he wasn't even first string on the football team. He was woefully average in everything he did. Ordinary, among wolves.

So why everyone gossiped about him being the successor of the Hale Pack, including Jackson, and Erica, and even Boyd at times, was beyond him.

Scott eventually rolled his eyes, laughing off the idea, as he always did. "I'm not Alpha material, Ennis. I'm Rancher material, at best."

Mounting Chase, Ennis grabbed his reins, and trotted out of the barn. “You're too modest, Scotty. Everyone here relies on you, and knows what a good person you are, just like your dads are. We all know you're going to do great things.”

When Ennis was far enough out of reach, Scott leaned forward, wrapping his arms around Betsy. He laughed. “Yeah, right.”

As he finished tending to Betsy, and started on his way back home, a flash of red caught his eye. He spun around, glaring back at the barn.

Just a few feet in front of him, was the Red a Beast. The monstrous, overpowering image of a fully shifted werewolf, in all its beastly appearance. A soft red glow surrounded it, which made the naturally, non-glowing, blood red eyes,” all the more terrifying.

“You, again?” Scott growled. He swiped at the beast, watching his hand phase through it. As he knew, after trying a thousand times over, the thing wasn't real. Though, it was closer than it had ever appeared before.

The Beast stared, wistfully, into Scott’s eyes, head cocked.
Scott rolled his eyes, turning away from the creature, and away from the situation entirely. Unfortunately, the moment Scott turned his attention, the creature reappeared out of thin air, glaring at him, inches away from his face.

Squawking, Scott fell backwards, growling at the wolf, and flashing his golden eyes. “Leave me alone! For Christ’s sake, WHY do I see you!? People are going to think I’m nuts one of these days!”

When he was younger, Scott tried to explain about the “Red Beast” to Isaac, who could never see the creature, no matter how many times he pointed it out. Once, he’d told his Dad, who believed that Scott had seen “something”, but only looked worried, and admitted that he couldn’t see anything. A “nightmare”.

So, of course, Scott chose to keep this figment of his imagination to himself. Unfortunately, the Red Beast was showing up daily now, and haunting his dreams.

“Seriously! Go away!” Scott swiped at the Beast, his hand fazing through nothingness, once again. Unimpressed, the beast growled in retaliation. A mighty, soul shattering roar that forced Scott to scramble backwards out of fear. Gasping in and out for breath, Scott watched the monster grow bulkier in size, bigger, and bigger, until it dwarfed Scott in size. It's claws grew sharper, glow shine brighter, and its drooling, blood red fangs hung menacingly in the air.

The Beast opened its mouth. In a hushed, mangled tone, Scott felt the creature’s hot breath.

“Stop. Resisting. Me.”

Scott slammed his eyes shut. He gulped, hoping and praying for it to be gone.

As he opened his eyes, barely a squint, Scott sighed in relief, as the illusion was gone. The only thing in front of him now was his shadow, cast by the sun settling high overhead. He chuckled, rubbing his forehead. “Man… They think me, crazy, insane, totally about to lose it Scott, could be Alpha? Stupid...” Shaking off the situation, Scott shot up, running back towards his home, and for a well deserved shower.

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Stiles tried to recall how much energy he had before taking on the position of mayor, almost 8 years ago. Or rather, how much energy he’d lost since transitioning into his thirties.

Standing in front of the bathroom mirror, fresh from his morning shower, Stiles gazed in his tired eyes, the cropped haircut he'd transitioned to, and the softer stomach that lacked the finer muscle detail he'd once known. While he hadn't changed much from the man he'd been when he’d first taken over as mayor, he was now, without a doubt, an “adult”.

Stiles was never carded at restaurants when he ordered booze. His idea of a fun night out involved bed, Netflix, or something on TV to watch with the Pack, curled up with everyone on the couch. Though, being the father of teenagers, honest to God teenagers with sass, was far more telling of his age.

“You look tired.”
Stiles glanced around, spotting his mate (and more recently, husband, of three years), stepping out of the shower, and toweling off. The Alpha of the Hale Pack, and Beacon County Alpha, Derek Hale.

Like Stiles, age had started to show in Derek. Softer muscles, a gentler, wizened face, and just the softest touch of grey behind the ears. All from the stress of running and operating a thriving metropolis of werewolves, humans, and everything in between. A city that had grown six times over in the span of just eight years, and increased the city limits thanks to a thriving business and entertainment district. Number 14 in the Top 100 Best Places to Live in the United States. Not a small accomplished, by any means.

“From the guy that just got back from the State Council not six hours ago, and immediately crashed on top of me, snoring before he even said a single word. Not even a “hi babe”, just...” Stiles made an obnoxious impression of Derek’s snoring, chuckled, and wrapped his arms around Derek’s waist. He pulled him in for a kiss.

Derek hummed, linking their kiss for several minutes, unshaded by Stiles complaint. “Sorry about that. I was in the car with Danny for a four hour drive back. Great ambassador for us, great Beta, and excellent people person, but a God awful conversationalist. Needed you. Missed you.” He hugged Stiles around the waist pressing a kiss atop his husband’s head.

“Yikes.” Stiles cringed, at the thought of Danny and Derek, alone in a car together for hours. They didn't share many interests, to say the least.

Freshly showered and clothed in their comfiest weekend attire, both men collapsed into bed, switching on the news. Like most Saturday mornings, the pack knew to leave them alone. As the County Alpha and Mayor, they both had full plates, at all times. Saturday mornings were for them, and them alone, at least until noon. Disturbing them would be met with flung pillows, or walking in on them with a lack of clothing, and potentially life scarring scene.

Still, Stiles was curious about his husband’s week long trip. “So, what was the big major world changing issue, that State Alpha Laura couldn't have shared over an email?” He slipped into Derek’s arms, as they both laid against the pillowed headboard.

Derek sighed, running his fingers through Stiles’ hair. “The vote was finalized. Beacon is going to be the host to this year’s WERE National Finals and ranking tournament. First week of December. They want it at Signal Academy, and encouraged us to pretty up the town, and allocate proper security to civilian areas. WERE is paying for any additional manpower we need.”

Groaning, Stiles slammed his head back, thumping it against Derek’s chest repeated. “Did we not tell them that Beacon is NOT big enough? Yes, we’re growing, and yes, we’re a pretty town, but we have barely enough hotels for the participants and State Alphas who’d come. What are we going to do for all the spectators? The Media? What about the International Representatives? Traffic…. Don't even get me started on the freaking traffic. Christ almighty, I’m writing a complaint and shoving it up Laura’s ass this Thanksgiving.”

Derek chuckled, shrugging as he massaged his husband’s shoulders. “We've got a month. Probably will need to rent out the campgrounds in and around the County. We have a few favors to call in with the surrounding County Alphas, and I'm sure they'd appreciate the tourism to their hotels. This won’t be all bad.”

“Yeah, yeah. This is a wolfy matter, and YOUR headache, and YOUR budget, sweet cheeks. The town ain't paying for this shit.” Stiles patted Derek’s face, pinching them in the process.
“I’m aware.” Derek sighed, rubbing his forehead. “In other obvious news, Peter is announcing his retirement in a month’s time, at the tournament. He's already decided to appoint Laura as the next National Alpha. Not that anyone is surprised. My big sister has done miracles with this State since Satomi retired.”

Stiles snorted. They'd both known that for months. Peter would be handing over his powers to someone in the Hale’s East Branch, and moving permanently to Beacon Hills to train them in the next couple of days. His title, naturally would go to Laura, as he’d intended, with the idea of the #1 ranked WERE in the National Tournament ending up being Derek, Braeden, one of Peter’s men, or even Jackson, to support Laura’s claim. “So…. What did the State Council want? Just to deliver that news to the Counties?”

Derek sighed, shaking his head. “That, and for the council to stress the importance of me stepping up to be the next State Alpha.”

A strict, cold silence filled the air.

“What?!” Stiles shot up, glaring at Derek incredulously. “You…. You're kidding? I thought that Alpha Nanami was supposed to step up next?! What the literal hell!? We had a 15 year plan, did we not!?”

Derek shrugged, with a low, agitated growl caught in his throat. “That was the plan. I've only been a County Alpha for 8 years. I don't have the seniority, but… There I was, with my big sister and the Council of California Alphas, informing me of the appointment.”

“Well? What did you say?” Stiles felt his heart pounding. A low, stressful ball of anxiety that left a little pain to echo through his body. Nothing major, he felt it most days after a stressful week of work.

Derek chuckled. “I informed them that Alpha Nanami was next in line. They explained that my “image” was better for the state, and wanted the State Alpha’s Capital to be moved to Beacon Hills. I countered that Alpha Nanami in Los Angeles had far better staff, funds and experience to run the State. They explained that my staff was more recognizable and trusted around the entire Country. We must have argued for an entire two days, ending with me declining, but them unwilling to accept it at this time. I’ve been ordered to “reflect” on the decision I’m to make.”

“Fuck.” Stiles let loose a deep sigh, crawling into Derek’s laps. He pulled them both down, resting against the mess of pillows.

Derek shook his head. “I don’t want it, Stiles. I already told you, like I told Laura and Peter, I’m busy enough that I have a hard time seeing my kids when I want to. I’m not going to be even busier. Not at least until they’re grown and out of college, like we’d all agreed. Until that happens, I’m staying where I'm at.”

Stiles mentally groaned in agreement. In all honesty's sake, they were both too busy to be fathers of two teenage boys. Granted, they were home almost every night for dinner with the kids and the pack, but…. Occasionally, they’d been forced to miss an important event, game, or something they wanted to attend. Their kids understood, and Stiles would always make up for it, but…. The idea of taking on more than they already had was a terrifying thought. “Fine by me. I'm behind you on this one, Der.”

“Thanks. Laura and Peter are too, surprisingly.” Derek tucked Stiles under his chin, wrapping them both in a warm blanket. He hummed pleasantly. “How are the kids?”
Stiles grinned. “Good! Isaac keeps himself busy in the kitchen, making breakfast and dinner every day for the pack, or bussing tables at Red Moon. He’s got Boyd’s work ethic, so mostly I just see him working, or studying, or helping Alyssa with scent training. So… Always doing something.”

Derek nodded, his own happy smile forming with ease. “Our boy works too hard for his age. We should give him a few days off from cooking for the pack, and pay for him to have a bowling and movie night with his friends. How about pizza tonight, and let Isaac off the hook?”

“Fine with me!” Stiles nodded, knowing both of his boys worked hard enough for the pack to earn something as simple as bowling and movies. Actually, the Hale Pack (thanks to Lydia, Erica, Boyd, and the Ranch) had plenty of money for anything under the sun they could ever want, but Stiles and Derek had both agreed to give their boys responsibilities, to inspire a good work ethic, help provide for the pack, and not create a couple of spoiled brats.

Not that either of his sweet boys would ever behave like that, but… Didn’t hurt to build character early.

“How about Theo?” Derek asked, with an exasperated sigh.

Stiles frowned, growing in Derek’s chest. “Oh, about the same. His mother came back from the Senate on Wednesday, and they had dinner together. Of course, said dinner lasted 20 minutes, and left Theo coming home with glowing eyes for a week, but Scotty and Isaac helped him through it.”

“Well, that’s what happens when you lie to your child about their father being dead for three years, and work 65 hour weeks, leaving Theo by himself all the time. They grow to resent you.” Derek spat, angrily.

Theo had been a part of their pack since the earliest days. Jill and Theo joined the Pack around a year after Kali’s death. In doing so, Jill dedicated her life to Law, becoming a partner at her firm, and being elected to the Senate not long after. She threw herself into work, as a way to hush the town’s gossip about her family’s reputation, and her son.

She never did manage or allow anyone to tell Theo about his father, until Deucalion had to step in and perform that harsh duty, once Theo heard the truth on the playground in 2nd grade. Afterwards, Theo and his mother had been on…. “Turbulent” terms.

Hell, they were a Jerry Springer show waiting to happen.

Eventually, the relationship became little more than heated words, and broken windows, and Theo developed anger management issues. Deucalion obtained guardianship rights over Theo, and the Hale Pack as a whole adopted Theo, allowing him to take the pack’s name. Jill left the pack, and only returns to Beacon Hills once every few months to donate money to the Hale Pack, for the raising and care of her son.

Since becoming a Hale, Theo calmed down, taken martial arts at the dojo in town, gotten proper therapy with Stiles, moved in with Scott and Isaac, and become a prominent member of RK9 at the high school, and become an all around good kid.

“Anyway…” Stiles shook his head, rubbing his hand over Derek’s tense back. “Theo had the pups this week, helping them train, and being around Pack pups chilled him out. He even let my baby brothers join in. Wore them all smooth out, and the pups had a fun time with it.”

Derek snorted, cocking an eyebrow at Stiles. “Tyler and Xander Stilinski, worn out? That’s a first.”

Stiles grinned, chest bubbling with pride over his baby brothers. He still found himself recounting
the day he found out he'd be a big brother. At the time, he'd cried for what seemed like an hour, before hugging anyone in sight, and watching as the pack grew into nothing but smiles. Tyler and Xander were the first babies born in the Pack proper, and had never been without a friend or guardian since their birth.

“They've got Stilinski blood. They're an endless ball of energy, and made of pretty strong stuff. You know, we Stilinskis are pretty amazing.” Stiles bragged, beaming in Derek’s direction.

Derek scoffed in the face of his husband’s ego. He rolled them both over, as Derek pinned Stiles to the bed, nuzzling his nose in the crook of Stiles’ neck. “Really? I'd argue it's the Delgado blood, and Melissa’s raw determination. Head of Surgery, still writing papers, lecturing as Caduceus, going to training seminars, and lecturing to new interns? I don't know how she does it. She works as hard as both of us, combined.”

“That's my Mama Delgado, all right.” Stiles muttered softly. He glanced away, taking a deep, happy breath of air.

Derek eased down, smothering Stiles like a blanket. “Oh…. Can't forget Scotty. How’s he doing this week?”

Stiles tried his best to hide the worry in his chest. Derek, unfortunately, saw through it immediately.

“Stiles?”

Leaning up, Stiles sat cross legged in front of Derek, shaking his head. “Scott seems…. Distant lately. Or rather…. He’s not as talkative, and keeps to himself at dinner. I don't think anything awful happened, but…. I'm worried. The moment Scott isn't up for blabbering on for hours excitedly about a new movie, videogame, Allison, or about something on the ranch….Well, I worry.”

“Now that you mention it…. He has been rather quiet. Did something happen at school, maybe?” Derek asked.

“Not that I know of, and I asked Principal Finstock. He's gotten pretty good grades lately, and that math tutor has really helped out in that area, no more D’s since, and I think he’s got a solid B now.” Stiles cringed, feeling helpless that his son suffered through algebra so much, before finally coming for help. “I asked Theo, Allison, and Meri what was wrong, but even they didn't know. Though, Isaac agrees with me that something is off. Says that Scott smells weird.”

Derek growled, tapping his fingers worriedly along the bed. “Deucalion?”

Stiles shook his head. “Grandpa Duke is In the dark, too. Duke’s concerned, though. Says that Scott’s scent is… Changing. Agrees with Isaac, but he doesn't know if it's a good thing or a bad thing, but…. It's different.”

“Changing?” Derek sniffed the air, wrinkling his nose. “What I wouldn't give to have Isaac’s nose. I haven't smelt anything, to be honest.” He sighed, shaking his head. “Did you talk to him?”

“My son is too much like me.” Stiles groaned, rubbing his forehead. “Knows how to evade questions left and right, or talk for ages on something unrelated. In the end, he said everything was fine, and that he was just tired, and wanted to run out to the barn to brush down the horses. Wasn't lying, but…. I doubt he was telling the full truth, either.”

Derek nodded. “I'll talk with him. Take him on a run and see what's up. Can't lie to me.”
“Be gentle, Alpha.” Stiles said, prodding Derek in the chest. “Don't let this be a repeat of you trying to interrogate Liam about the scratch on your car.”

“I won't!” Derek rolled his eyes, playfully slugging Stiles right back.

Flailing backwards, Stiles stared up at their wooden ceiling, and the swaying of the curtains to the side. “Is this a wolf thing? I don't think there’s anything psychologically wrong with him, but… As a dad, I know something is making him upset. I just wonder… Is there something he's worried about, being a wolf and a human at the same time? Did a kid make fun of him for being a halfing, maybe?”

Derek flipped to Stiles’s side, glaring up at the ceiling. “We all go through changes, same as humans. Emotional and physical changes, like any teen would. Could be something as simple as teenage jealousy, or he's upset about something that seems like the end of the world. Maybe because he didn't make first string this year in football. If it's something wolf related, it might be something like his claws or fangs not being as big as other guys. Maybe he’s embarrassed about his partial shift. I know that was something I had to come to terms with.”

Stiles nodded, taking a deep breath and hoping it was something simple. Something they could all talk through, and not worry about any more. He managed a meek smile. “In the meantime, Scott’s football game is Friday night. We both need to be there, cheering him on.”

Derek nodded. “I'll make sure to have my meetings done early with Accounting, and we can get the Pack face painted, and some signs made. Just some budget questions, nothing that can't be handled on Monday.”

They sat in silence, planning out the embarrassing, supportive things they could do for the Beacon High football team, and the dinner they'd have afterwards for Scott.

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Thanks so much for reading! Your comments and support are always welcome!

Also, if you like this story, and my writing, why not try out my Sterek side-fic, Son of a Witch, the story of Stiles Stilinski, a new witch in the town of Beacon Hills, as he helps to rebuild the relationship of the Hale Pack, and bring an end to the misery that the Pack has suffered. Updates on Wednesdays!
“This is the most divine meal I’ve had in my entire life!”

“My compliments to the chef!”

“This was worth the three hour drive.”

Red Sun stood in the heart of downtown Beacon Hills, as the most extravagant dining establishment in the entire county, if not the entire state of California. A lively, cabin-styled decor, much like their own home, that complemented the steakhouse’s atmosphere. In the center of the restaurant was an iron-gated bonfire, magically tuned to warm the restaurant, and offer a calming sensation.

At full capacity, waiters rushed back and forth between the table, taking orders, delivering food, and taking care of the patrons, that ranged from finely dressed individuals on a business dinner, all the way to regular citizens, out on dates.

Which left the back kitchen area just as lively, with the fifteen-odd line cooks, and head chef Boyd, running around the kitchen, as flames blazed up from their industrial kitchen.

Lifting up his head from the high powered dish spray, Isaac Hale spun around, wiping wet hands against his apron. He smiled, setting another set of warmly washed dishes to the side, stacking them for the kitchen staff to grab with ease.

As the runt of the Hale Pack, and possibly the skinniest werewolf to ever exist, Isaac always heard the whispered rumors of him being “weak” by the adults of Beacon Hills. Unlike Scott, nobody ever bothered thinking for a moment that Isaac could ever succeed his father, and become Alpha of the Hale Pack. Some went as far as to “pity” him.

To which, Isaac would gladly shove his State Track Championship trophy up their asses, and dare any werewolf in the country to try and beat him in a scent or sight competition.

Sure, Isaac would gladly admit that he would always lose in a fight against Scott, Theo, or anyone else in the Hale Pack, he wasn’t built that way, and only took the base combat lessons from his Pops. He also hated the idea of being the Alpha, more interested in being Boyd’s successor as Denkeeper.

At the same time, however, he’d gladly boast that nobody else in the pack ever had a hope of catching him, and would likely starve without his and Boyd’s presence in the kitchen. He was far from “weak”.

A line cook rushed past Isaac, grabbing several plates as she ran past him, shooting a thankful grin. “Thanks, Isaac! Can you start wiping down the dessert glasses and prep the station? First dessert tickets are coming through!”

“Got it, Mimi!” Isaac exclaimed, making his way through the massive kitchen, weaving and bobbing through the line cooks, wait staff, and the rest of their crew. On any given night, Red Sun had a full dinner service, with completely booked reservations. Being Michelin Star rated facility brought people from all over the State, and all over the Country. Red Sun was a tourist draw for Beacon Hills all on its own, having been featured on Food Network at least 12 times over the past year and a half.
With quick precision, Isaac had their hundreds dessert glasses wiped down to a mirror shine, taking great care to lay out the chocolate glaze, and other prep items that the line cooks could easily take over at a moment’s notice.

“Isaac, can you sniff this? Am I burning it inside, because I know I haven’t cooked it long enough, but I’m getting a searing scent.” Tina, from the line, called out.

Running beside the cook’s shoulder, Isaac shook his head after a quick sniff. “Fifty more seconds, starting now. You’re smelling Tim’s, because he’s cooking too close to you.”

Tim stuck his tongue out, moving his pans over a burner or two, back on his section, where they should have been.

“Thanks, pup. Can I cut your nose off and put it on mine?” Tina asked, with her best attempt at puppy eyes.

“Pass.” Isaac chuckled.

A waitress ran through the kitchen doors, slamming a ticket on the line. “Isaac! We’ve got another tub coming in from the big table! Can you clear it!? Running low on iced tea, too. Ben is busy ass-kissing for a bigger tip, can you setup another brew for the lazy slob!?”

“On it, Katie!” Isaac yelled out, finishing his prep at the dessert station, before hurriedly jogging back through to pick up the busboy’s tub, and ram it into the industrial sink. He washed his hands quickly, before making his way to the beverage station, and beginning to brew another three pitchers of fresh tea. Soon after, he ran back to the sink, working quickly through the mess of dishes.

On his last couple of dishes, Isaac felt a heavy weight lean on his back. One of the line cooks patted him on the shoulder. “Hey, Little Remy, can you sniff out where I dropped my wallet? Need a couple of bucks to grab a soda. Long night. Need caffeine.”

Isaac rolled his eyes, smirking. “I’m not a rat, Tom, and this isn’t a Disney movie.”

Tom laughed, shaking his head. “Come on now, pup, it’s a compliment! Everyone’s waiting on baited breath for Boyd’s personal protege to join us on the line. Nose like that, and we won’t ever have to worry about burning a steak again!”

Flushing, Isaac dropped his head, unable to hold back a gleeful grin. Boyd and Erica had promised him a place on the line, after he’d worked dishes, waiting, and janitorial for a year, and learned how the restaurant worked, from front to back. He had to earn his place on the line, like everyone else. Which, he had no delusions that he worked harder than any other part-timer on the payroll, and would be on the line by his 15th birthday.

“Under the sink, I guess you dropped it when washing up.” Isaac said, scoffing quietly. “Oh, and you should really throw out that condom you’ve got stuck in there, it’s expired, and you’re not getting any action anytime this century.”

A low set of humored groans filled the kitchen, alongside a high-pitched cackle out of Erica from clear across the front of the restaurant. Boyd rolled his eyes, but chuckled at his place at the stove.

Taking on various tasks from the wait and line staff, Isaac worked himself into a frenzy. By the time his shift was almost up for the night, he’d worked up a noticeable sweat. He’d finished the final set of dishes when Isaac spotted Erica bursting through the door.
Not much had changed for Erica over the years, aside from a shorter haircut, and a noticeable change in style, thanks to her friendship with Lydia Parrish. Even after giving birth to Alyssa Reyes, she’d maintained her powerful presence as the Shield of the Hale Pack. She also worked as Head Host for Red Room, helped Lydia with the day-to-day of her Construction Business, and Hale Pack Finance Administrator. After his dad and pops, Erica worked the hardest in the pack, hands down.

“Just got a call from Jones! He won’t be in, puking his guts up, and we’re floored right now.” Erica yelled, clopping her heels across the kitchen and stopping beside her husband.

Boyd had remained stoic over the years. The same man that Isaac had met all those years ago, his Uncle Boyd was the same soft spoken individual he’d always been. Fame that came with running Red Moon, and his victory at Iron Chef America on Food Network, had done little to the man’s ego, Boyd as confident as always.

A gentle sigh left Boyd’s lips. He spun around, wiping his apron. “Isaac!”

“Yeah, Boss?” Isaac spun around, hustling to his Uncle’s side.

Boyd took a deep breath, rubbing his forehead. “Hate to ask this on a school night, but can you work an extra shift? I’ll give you time and a half.”

“Sure thing, Boss!” Isaac nodded, grinning. The extra money was nice, but the chance to watch his Boss, and the rest of the line cooks do their stuff? He learned more in the restaurant environment than he did on YouTube, cookbooks, and his home cooking combined. Little tips and tricks to help his skill were worth a lot more than minimum wage, even at time and a half. Sure, he had a chef’s nose, but he lacked the real experience to back it up.

Before he could rush back off to the sink, he felt Boyd tug him back. “Not so fast, pup.” Boyd pressed his finger into Isaac’s chest, smirking. “Take tomorrow night off. Have some fun with your friends, and don’t worry about this place.” Reaching into his pocket, Boyd pulled out his wallet, grabbing and then pressing cash into Isaac’s hand.

Isaac’s face skewed. “But… Boss, tomorrow’s Friday night! You guys are-”

Boyd shook his head, huffing quietly. “We are all adults with full time jobs and bills to pay. You’re a teenager who works too much, and while I appreciate your work ethic, I’m not going to let you throw away your childhood.” He shoved Isaac back to the sink, rolling his eyes. “Boss’ orders, and this is coming from your Alpha as well, Isaac. Tomorrow night, you’re off. Jones will make up his time and take your shift.”

Groaning, Isaac waved back, knowing it was pointless to argue. “Okay! Fine!”

“Oh! Isaac, before you hit the sink, could you clear off and bus table 9? Big group, and Ben is kiss-assing a group of businessmen for a big tip. I swear, that man spends half of his time flirting with anyone between 18 and 90.” Erica asked, rushing past him, as she ruffled the pup’s hair.

“On it!” Isaac ran a dishtowel over his head, wiping away the sweat from his head before rushing out with the empty tub.

He weaved through the restaurant, keeping a low profile as he reached a large, circular table, right next to the bonfire. With swift hands, he dumped the mess of plates, drinks, silverware, and everything in between into his tub. In the same flash, Isaac grabbed the disinfecting spray, and a clean towel from his apron, wiping down the wooden surface. In less than a minute or two, the booth was spotless, and replaced with fresh linens, silverware, and empty glasses, ready for the next
“Table 9 is ready.” Isaac muttered, barely above a whisper. He spotted Erica at the Host’s podium nod, whispering back a polite confirmation to Isaac, while gathering menus and beginning to guide a group towards the table. With an all werewolf staff, with sensitive ears and noses, it was easy to communicate to every part of the restaurant at all times. Which also had led to Red Sun having the quickest food-to-table ratio in the Country.

As he walked back to the kitchen, he stopped as a woman, probably in her later thirties, raised a hand.

“Yes ma'am? Would you like me to get your waiter?” Isaac asked, offering his best smile.

The woman brushed away her softly curled brown hair, tucking away her napkin from her matronly attire. “You are…. Isaac Lahey, yes? You look just like your father, and the picture I’ve seen in your file.”

Isaac flinched, as a cold splash of icy water ran through his skin, nearly dropping the dirty dishes over the floor.

Nobody had mentioned the name “Lahey” since he was a child. Most of his friends in school didn’t even know that Derek wasn’t his natural father, and nobody in his pack, except Derek, had ever met Robert Lahey. Only the adults in Beacon Hills knew about it, and none of them had the gall to bring up that asshole’s name.

Because Derek and Stiles were, are, and would ALWAYS be his fathers. Robert was little more than a sperm donor to him.

The woman extended her hand, with a gentle, non-threatening smile. “My name is Dr. Blake, though, you can call me Jennifer. I’m a feral psychiatrist with Caduceus, center for Werewolf Research and Development of Medical Sciences. Your father is one of my patients that was transferred to my care about three years ago.”

“I… Uh…” Isaac stammered, gripping the tub of plates tight in his hand. Frozen in place, the conversation entirely had taken him off-guard.

“I’d intended to find you later, I was going to contact City Hall, but… Well, this makes things all that much easier.” Jennifer smiled, clasping her hands together. “You see, Mr. Lahey, we’ve made great strides in feral treatment in the past five years, and I believe your father is at a point where I believe that a complete remission is possible. A complete rehabilitation, and a chance at freedom from his pitiable state of mind!”

At that point, Isaac dropped the tub of dishes, earning several odd looks from the customers all around him. Several of the wait staff panicked, rushing into the kitchen.

Jennifer, energetic about her cause, clasped her hands together. “His last wall is… You. I believe if he were to meet you, and you two have a long discussion, that he’d be more open to the psychological and medical treatments! Would you be willing to set up a meeting with me? Here! Have my card, I’ll need to speak with your foster family, of course, but I-”

As Jennifer extended her hand to present the card to Isaac, a finely manicured hand gripped around Jennifer’s wrist. Isaac glanced up, realizing that Erica had stepped in, eyes blazing a fearsome gold.
“Your dinner is on the house tonight. Please leave our establishment, and get the fuck out of our town.” Erica spat, in a quiet, controlled rage. Her claws erupted, making her point clear to the human doctor.

Jennifer gasped, stealing her hand back. She appeared insulted, and frightened by Erica’s presence. “I’m sorry… Ma’am, I’m a little confused… I’m speaking with-”

“You are speaking with one of my pups.” Erica put herself in between Isaac and Jennifer, jabbing a clawed finger just short of Jennifer’s jugular. Gasped erupted in the restaurant, and Jennifer shut her mouth in an instant. “You have ten seconds to vacate the premises, or you’ll be removed in two seconds in a much more violent manner. I then highly suggest you drive out of the County Limits, before I report you to our Alpha, who WILL hunt you down.”

“With all due respect, I am a State Official, and well within my right to-” Jennifer countered, reaching inside of her purse to grab a badge.

Erica stole Jennifer’s purse, slamming it into the woman’s chest, and yanking her out of the booth. “Five seconds.”

Jennifer scoffed. “With all due respect, I ask that you not threaten me. I’m trying to reunite a father and child, and-”

“Oh, bitch, this isn’t a threat.” Erica snapped her fingers.

As if on cue, Isaac watched as three waiters yanked Jennifer by the arms, practically carrying the woman out of the building, and throwing her from the front door. He heard an audible thunk against the pavement, the sound of a purse smacking against a car, and the roar of his co-workers running the woman off.

Erica turned to the patrons, flashing a pleasant smile. “Free dessert to all of our lovely customers this evening, as an apology for the scene that woman forced. I do not take kindly to anyone talking ill to our staff.”

A short round of applause by the customers at a free dessert followed, and Isaac barely felt Erica wrapping her arms around him, and guiding him through the kitchen, and out the back exit, to her car. “Isaac, I’m so sorry… I’m taking you home, right now.”

Back to his senses, Isaac shook his head, attempting (and failing) to fight her off. “N… No, Erica, I’m alright. She surprised me, that’s all. I’m-”

Erica shoved Isaac into the passenger seat of her car, before taking her place at the driver’s seat. She roared, slamming her hands against the steering wheel, and fully shifting in the process. Turning her wolfish face to Isaac, she reached over, hugging him around the neck. “I am taking you home, and I am reporting that woman to your fathers. She’s not coming anywhere near you again, alright? That… That monster isn’t coming anywhere near you, ever again.”

Reaching around Erica, Isaac let out a deep, shuddering breath. “Yeah… Yeah, I know.”

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The Hale House shook from the vibrations of Derek’s roar. The Alpha of Beacon Hills didn’t give a
damn about the noise complaint he’d likely get from half the town, or the cracked windows he’d have to replace on the third floor.

Derek paced the length of his study, completely shifted out of rage. His eyes billowed a hot red, as Erica and Isaac finished telling him about the events at Red Sun.

“Pops, it’s okay. I’m fine! Really, she just caught me off guard! You don’t have to go full apeshit, alright?” Isaac said, attempting a feigned laugh.

“This is not fine.” Derek growled, focusing his attention on Erica. “Call Jackson, Liam, and Parrish. I want that woman removed from my territory, and banned from approaching the city limits. Make sure the police know that this is an Alpha’s order! If she is found in Beacon County, the police are under my authority to arrest her, and escort her OUT of my land!” He slammed a fist against one of his many filing cabinets, leaving a notable dent.

“Already sent them a text.” Stiles added, waving the thin pane of glass in his hands. “Also sent one to my dad. The human deputies are going to want to help too, even if this is a werewolf issue. I mean, this is the Old Man’s grandson we’re talking about here.”

Derek nodded, a low growl still reverberating in his throat. He glared at Mason, executive assistant of the County Pack, just like his parents. The sharply dressed youth, the handsome college graduate majoring in political science, had been Derek's personal aid for over a year. He hated to say it, but… Mason was much easier to work with than his parents, and much less… Overzealous.

“Mason, I want the State Prison on the phone first thing in the morning for a teleconference. I want to know what idiotic, worthless, piece of trash released Robert Lahey into the custody of Caduceus! If Health and Human Services give you any lip, you have my authority to pull rank.” Derek screamed.

Mason nodded, taking several pages of notes in a pad. “Yes sir. I’ll drop Alpha Peter’s name and let them know it involves the National Alpha’s grandson. I’ll reach out to Caduceus, too. Mrs. Stilinski has several contacts there.”

“Good idea. Melissa will get you a list of doctors. Just run by her bedroom.” Stiles answered, nodding approvingly.

Derek huffed through his nose, glaring his eyes to Erica. “Get Jackson. Go find this woman and track her down. Make sure she doesn’t get anywhere near our house.”

“I’ll get the pike ready myself.” Erica salutes, spinning on her heel, ruffling Isaac’s hair, and making her exit with Mason. “Running to go on a woman-hunt! Won’t kill anyone, I promise! Mostly!”

Finally in a relative state of calm, Derek took a deep breath, walking to Isaac’s side, and wrapping his arms around his son.

“Pops…” Isaac muttered, dropping his head on Derek’s chest.

Derek hadn’t smelt Isaac in such a fragile state in… Years. His son had a strong will, a stronger heart, and he was proud of everything the “runt” had accomplished. Looking at the boy, an outsider would never think of everything the pup had been through. Yet… Behind the powerful facade, Derek saw the insecurities, and the fear.

Because Derek felt them, too. Even as an adult, he still felt the phantom touches around his neck, from his own painful past. He’d long since stopped being afraid of the pain, but… Forgetting them altogether was another thing entirely.
“I’m sorry, Isaac. I’m sorry you had to deal with this tonight.” Derek muttered, gripping Isaac tightly. “You are not going to have to deal with that woman again, I don’t care WHO she is or what agency she reports to. I’m an Alpha. I’ll start a war if I have to.”

Taking a deep breath, Isaac shook his head. “Pops, don’t do anything stupid. I appreciate you protecting me, and I’m happy that you’ll keep her out of this county, but... Really, please don’t go over the top.” A soft smile crossed his face. “Maybe just half of our staggering army of smartasses? Or, we could sic Ty and Xander on her. 15 minutes of babysitting, and she’d never come around us. Ever again.”

Derek found himself smiling again, with Isaac’s scent becoming lighter. “I’m sorry. I... I’ve lost my head. I’ll pull back the pack Beta army from storming Normandy.”

“...and the WMDs. Please don’t make Grandpa Peter come and hunt you down. Or Aunty Laura.” Isaac countered, chuckling.

Derek snorted, ruffling Isaac’s curls, resting his chin on Isaac’s head. “Fine. I could take them, though.”

“I dunno. You’ve been putting away the cake lately. Getting a little chubby, aren’t ya pops? Should I switch us to a vegetarian diet?” Isaac countered, leaning back with an incredulous grin on his face.

Derek sighed, rubbing his forehead, playfully growling in Isaac’s direction. “Hush you. Blasphemy. Deny me bacon, and I deny you a car in two years. Your ass can take the bus, or go with Theo.”

“Did I say vegetarian? Because I meant bacon wrapped bacon, deep fried in bacon grease.” Isaac chuckled, clasping his hands together in faux-prayer. “Anything but Theo!”

Stiles strode over, patting Isaac’s shoulder, and taking his turn to hug his son. “Don’t give your Pops a heart attack. Or your Paw Paw. Or me. Remember the cholesterol of the humans in the pack, or Maw Maw Melissa will pelt you over the head.”

Chuckling, Isaac nodded. “Alright, alright... I know, dad. Bacon wrapped green beans, instead.”

“Much better.” Stiles leaned back, taking a deep sigh. “Are you really okay, or are you bullshitting me? Come on... Be honest.”

Derek watched his son’s face crumble quietly, taking a seat with Stiles next to the study’s fireplace. Stiles had Isaac’s hand, holding it tightly.

“It’s stupid, right?” Isaac whispered, shaking his head. “I mean... I’m not a little pup anymore. I haven’t needed therapy in a couple of years. I know... I know he can’t hurt me. I know... There’s no way in hell that anyone would let him get near me, not you, not Scott, not Theo, but...”

Reaching up, Isaac clutched his chest. “Like... Like he was ripping into me again, his claws... Wrapped around my heart.”

Derek held down a growl, reaching over and grasping Isaac’s shoulder.

Stiles patted Isaac’s knee. “Pup, there’s nothing wrong with being scared. Even as a teenager, or even as an adult, you-”

“Isaac!” Scott burst through the door, nearly ripping the hinges off the edge. Theo was right behind, eyes shimmering gold, fangs poking out of his mouth. There was little doubting they’d heard from Erica what happened.
With little ceremony, Scott grabbed Isaac up from his seat, guiding him from the left, while Theo guided from the right.

Nothing had to be said, and Derek didn’t bother stopping them from stealing Isaac. Out of everyone in the pack, Scott took the most care of his family, ever since he’d been a pup. A natural Alpha, who put the pack above himself. Isaac, especially.

“Bro, come on. Let’s go watch something stupid on Netflix. Or play games, whatever you want.” Scott said, practically dragging Isaac through the room. He feigned his typically goofy smile.

Theo stopped at the edge of the door, bowing to Stiles and Derek. “Staying up past curfew tonight, and skipping school tomorrow. I mean, you could try to make us go to bed and stuff, but... Yeah, no. Wouldn’t recommend. Scotty would pull out the puppy eyes, and nobody can stop that. Nobody wants that. I’ll make sure the dorks get to bed, at a semi-reasonable hour.” He, too, took his leave, without waiting for a response.

Derek and Stiles exchanged cocked eyebrows, each shrugging and not willing to counter Theo’s argument.

“I’ll... Talk with Isaac later. After he’s calmed down.” Stiles said, leaning back into his chair. He sighed. “Damn. Well, this is... Awful.”

Derek growled, tapping his claws against the armrest of his chair. “Why didn’t I kill that bastard when I had the chance? Would have saved everyone a lot of heartache.”

“Because murder is wrong, and you were a good cop.” Stiles shook his head.

Reaching into his pocket, Derek grabbed his phone, tapping several texts to Laura, who could hopefully help Mason get the contacts he needed. Ideally, his older sister would kick the bitch out of the state. “You're a shrink. Is this feral bullshit treatment a real thing?”

Stiles shrugged. “Gentar Pharmaceuticals developed a prototype feral inhibitor. Supposedly, it suppresses the urge to shift, and when paired with psychological treatments, there are about 10 documented cases of feral remissions. Everything is in its infancy, and not a lot of long term study has been done. Though... The 10 treated patients have been living normal lives again, and all 10 have been released into the public.”

“You're kidding me?!” Derek raised an eyebrow.

“Nope.” Stiles kicked his feet up, landing them in Derek’s lap. “Gentar has been leading werewolf research lately. Lots of strides in analysis of the supernatural. Turning magic into science.”

“Huh… Guess I shouldn’t be surprised.” Derek muttered, rubbing Stiles’ foot.

“Not that we’re getting Isaac involved in any of that. Though... I am curious as to how exactly she wanted to use him. Any psychiatrist worth their weight wouldn’t traumatize one patient to save another. There’s such a thing as ethics...”

Derek opened his mouth to speak, stopping as he heard tiny footsteps hovering outside the door. He glared at Stiles, nodding to the door. “The Tiny Terrors.” he whispered.

Rolling his eyes, Stiles sighed. “We know you're there! Come on in!”

Two tiny squeals exclaimed beyond the door. A quiet conversation took place, before the door timidly creaked open.
Tyler and Xander Stilinski. They took after the Old Man’s features, with a darker toned skin, and sharp black hair. Their honey brown eyes matched Stiles’, just shy of a warm gold. At seven years old, and having grown up in a pack of wolves, they were as rambunctious as any pup in the pack.

Xander, the shyer of the two, poked his head inside. “Is Alpha Derek mad? We heard him yell really loud.”

“We didn’t break the vase! Gravity did! Like the apple thing that teacher told us about!” Tyler shouted, clamoring over his brother, pushing them both down, where they fell onto the ground in a heap. Unlike his brother, Tyler was much more vocal, and tended to inherit his older brother’s personality.

Derek sighed, glaring at Stiles.

“What vase?” Stiles countered.

Xander and Tyler exchanged a cautious glare, both gulping audibly.

Derek rolled his eyes. “You two have much to learn from your brother.” In the most menacing manner he could conjure, Derek wagged his finger, calling the twins forward. “Now… Why don’t you tell your Alpha about this “vase”.

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With the lights out in their bedroom, Isaac collapsed on Scott’s bed, with Theo and Scott curled around him. They pretended to watch shows on the TV, as each hour ticked on.

“So… We’re not going to talk about it?” Theo finally muttered, breaking the silence.

Scott glared at Theo, before sighing, and leaning on Isaac’s shoulder. “Do you want to?”

Isaac shook his head. “Nope. Heading on the denial train, and accepting the fact that Erica would rip his face off if he got anywhere near me. Or that Pops would break his face.”

“Oh, please. Scotty here would go full wolf and rip his guts out.” Theo shrugged, chuckling.

“Gladly.” Scott grinned, patting Isaac’s shoulder. “Dude, we’ve got pigs on the farm. They eat and digest anything. Bones, muscles, and everything in between.” He flashed his golden eyes, attempting his best maniacal laughter. Which… Fell flat on its face.

Rolling his eyes, Isaac shoved Scott off him, snorting. “Yeah, yeah… You cry at the ending of like every Disney movie, nobody is under any delusions that you’d actually feed someone to pigs.”


“Hey!” Scott shoved both Isaac and Theo, pouting at the duo. “Dude, have you seen those endings? They’re like… Happily ever after and shit.”

The trio laughed, taking turns to tease Scott, and soon, everything was like it was supposed to be. Isaac’s life… Was back to the way it was. Why he’d ever been afraid, made even less sense to him.

An annoying pack brother, Theo, who liked to act tougher than he actually was. His brother, Scott, who’d handle being teased for all hours of the night, just to make Isaac happier. Dads, who used their legal and political connections, to protect him. Erica and Boyd, who’d given him a job, and a start to a career he was passionate about. Countless others who had his back.
The cold chill of fear had ebbed out of him, replaced by the warmth of Pack. He laid back, taking a deep breath, and attempting to pay attention to the television.

“...Big… Bro?”

Isaac turned his head, watching light peek out through the crack in the door. He spotted Alyssa Reyes, Boyd and Erica’s daughter, peeking through the door. She took after her father, with a set of gentle, natural curls, and an innocent expression. A year younger than Tyler and Xander, she was the twins’ best friend, and partner in crime.

“Hey… What are you doing up? Isn’t it past your bedtime?” Scott waved Alyssa in, watching as Tyler and Xander snuck in behind her.

The trio clambered up onto the bed, as Alyssa jumped on top of Isaac, pouting as she curled up next to him, yanking a blanket over them. Xander sat next to Isaac, while Tyler rushed next to Theo (his “best friend”).

“...Mommy said you had a bad night. You smell sad.” Alyssa slugged Isaac on the head, growling at him, with her mother’s deadly glare. “You should have told me!”

“I’m okay, Alyssa.” Isaac offered a short smile, all the warmer as he was surrounded by pack. “You can hear me, right? Am I lying?”

Scoffing, Alyssa curled that much closer. “Of course not. My big brother doesn’t lie.”
Chapter 22

After a weekend of lazing around and goofing off with Theo and Isaac, to put the drama of Red Sun behind them all, Scott and his brothers returned to the hallowed halls of Beacon High early Monday morning.

Renovated about three years earlier, the state of the art facility catered to the city’s growing population, and the new age of technology. Digitally locked lockers, a full stadium for all athletic events, an Olympic sized pool, and classrooms finally brought into the twenty first century, with computers available for every student in each classroom.

Scott brought his fingerprint up to the locker in the Freshman Hall, and after a quick beep, retrieved his Electronic Reader, fitted with all of his coursebooks, stuffing it into his bag.

To his immediate right, Isaac did the same, yawning with his full body. “Damn… Think I stayed up too late last night. Stupid addictive video games… Hope Theo’s not too worn out. He’s got RK9 first thing every morning.”

Snorting, Scott shut back his locker, walking alongside Isaac, through the mob of students that overwhelmed the school’s hallways. Elves, a few dwarves, humans, wolves, and everything in between had gathered to Beacon Hills in the last couple of years. With a class of 500 Freshman, Scott barely recognized any of the kids he started classes with, back in Kindergarten.

“Your fault, Isaac. I told you not to start playing the sequel, but, noooo, somebody HAD to know how the story continued.” Scott waved his hands dismissively.

“Hey! I’m a night owl, and work my best after midnight. You’re the morning freak who’s snoring by 9 PM!” Isaac countered, nudging Scott in the side.

The brothers chuckled, taking several loops and turns through the school, until reaching their homeroom class.

“There you two are!”

Scott glanced to the edge of the class, on the back row, watching as a tall brunette, with a striking, strong build, and the warmest brown eyes in all the town waved to them. A small, contented smile crossed Scott’s face, as his entire body flushed.

Allison Argent, and her father Chris Argent, had been a friend to the Hale Family since they were all in Kindergarten. They’d spent Summer Vacations together, gone on Winter Ski trips, and had more slumber parties than he could count. While not an official member of the Pack (her father not all that thrilled with the idea of his daughter having a tattoo), everyone, all the way up to his Pops, treated her as such.

“Lazy bums skipping school. Probably playing video games in their underwear.”

Beside Allison, a petite, bushy haired, lanky teenager had her nose firmly in a book, not bothering to take her eyes away from it. She turned several pages in a row, within only a matter of a few moments, eyes flitting across the pages at mach speeds.

Scott rolled his eyes. Meredith Walker was… Well, she was one of Scott’s best friends, who was he kidding. A little enigmatic, a little strange, but… What Seer wasn’t? Knowing the future, especially given Meri’s remarkable talent, Scott wasn’t surprised Meri usually kept to herself.
“Hey now, there were pajama pants and everything! Nudity is only for the full moons, and when it's hot as balls.” Isaac beamed, plopping down in the open seat across from Meri. He waved to Allison as well, who chuckled at his joke. “Thanks for sending me the homework! I appreciate it!”

"Anytime.” Allison smiled, wrapping a hug around Isaac's neck.

Scott took his seat across from Allison, switching on his tablet, and logging into his computer, getting ready for History class. He tried to ignore Allison's continued attention to his brother. “Yeah, much appreciated!”

Allison dropped her head. “I’m happy to help. Especially after everything you…” She bit her lip. “I mean… Uh, Meri told me… She might have… Peered into the past. Just a teeny bit”

Raising a single finger, Meri shook her head. “We were worried. All three of you dorks were gone. Didn't call or give us a heads up. Assholes. Never a good thing, especially when Scotty’s involved. You all agreed my sight into time can be used in emergencies for any of you. No matter how embarrassing.”

Flinching, Isaac gritted his teeth, but nodded. “It’s fine. I would have told you all anyway.”

Allison strode to Isaac’s side, offering him a full bodied hug. “If you want, I’ll shoot an arrow in his knee. Or his balls. My Spark has got pinpoint aiming down. I'm very talented, you know.” Despite her bright smile, Scott could catch the determination in her eyes.

A Huntress in training, just as Theo was a WERE in training, Allison outranked both Scott and Isaac in terms of strength and ability, thanks to her Spark, an energy comparable to a wolf’s Aura. Hunters and Huntresses, humans born with a spark, could access great energy, putting them on part with any kind of Supernatural creature. Some artificially created, others born with the talent. So her threat of pinpoint aiming? Not a threat, but rather a promise of things to come, if given the order.

“If the time comes, I authorize the nut shot.” Isaac nodded, grinning.

“Doubt that Dad or Pops would let him get that close. Or leave his balls, if he did get that close. Sorry, Ali.” Scott added, chuckling.

"Kneecap it is, then.” Allison sighed, almost dissapointedly so.

“Alright, alright! Everyone quiet down! Class is in session! I hear another word out of any of you that isn't related to our topics at hand, and you'll live to regret it!”

In unison, each and every soul in the classroom shut up. Computers were logged into, stragglers reached their seats, and all eyes were shot forward. Even Scott felt his ears burn, instinct kicking in to know that tone ALL too well.

Walking confidently on a cane, the silver haired Tyrant of the West, Deucalion Reed, now History Teacher, and newly claimed Tyrant of Beacon High, took his place at the podium.

Scott smiled, watching his grandfather take his proud place as the best History Teacher in the school. Having passed on his Aura to another, unnamed Alpha, Deucalion’s aging had faded, leading him to the path of recovery, and an uncertain additional number of years. Still, the elderly Alpha was no spring chicken, but gave the students of Beacon High a run for their money. Nobody fucked with his Grandpa.

“Start up those confounded machines of yours and get ready to take notes. Today we’ll be discussing the end of the Great War. For those of you who have done the assigned reading, have
paid attention in class thus far, and aren’t a Seer who can see into the future, I’d like for someone to explain to me the cause of the Great War.” Duke leaned against the platform, flaring his misty grey eyes to the group.

Allison rose a hand easily, acknowledged by Duke. “The Great War started at the end of the Medieval Era, when Humans and Non Humans first came into contact with one and other. The Armies of the Human Kingdoms sought out to end those who were stronger than they were. Specialized armies trained to face off against the Supernatural, and those armies would later become the Order of the Hunters.”

“Very good, Miss Argent.” Deucalion nodded, with an easy smile. “Now… Who can summarize our lectures last week. How did the war fare? Who were winning, and who were losing?”

Scott rose his hand up, also acknowledged by Duke. “Neither side was winning. Humans had the advantage in numbers, but the Supernatural were far stronger than any human. Countless humans lost their lives at the hands of the Supernatural, and many Supernatural beings were slain by Hunters. All of the planet was engulfed in death and strife. Kingdoms fell, entire races of the Supernatural and Humans extinguished overnight.”

“Very good, Mr. Hale.” Deucalion beamed a little brighter at Scott, before turning to the class. “Which leads us to the turning point in the war, and how it was ended.” Reaching into a bag, Deucalion pulled out an old, dusty tome. He flipped to a marked page, raising it up for the class to see.

On two pages, two men, both dressed in tribal European garb of the ancient werewolf cultures, with gleaming red eyes. One emblazoned in the mark of suns, and one emblazoned in the mark of moons. “Alpha Skoll and Alpha Hati. Brothers of the first tribe of werewolves, blessed by Fenrir, after creating the new race of shifting creatures. They lead the charge for the Supernatural forces, banding together all of the races, hidden in the darkness, that charged against the light.”

Duke handed the heirloom tome to the front row, as they passed the document around, mesmerized by the sheer age of the book, and the original, cursive handwriting. A few murmured about the book belonging in a museum of History.

“Yet… Neither Hati or Skoll, the first sons of Fenrir, were born Alphas. Indeed, not a single werewolf, originally, was born as an Alpha. Alphas… Were not a creation of Fenrir, nor in the God Wolf’s original design.” Deucalion returned to his podium, glancing over his classroom.

“Wait… What?! What do you mean there were no Alphas?!” One werewolf asked, on the opposite side of the classroom. He scoffed. “Then where did the Alphas come from?”

Scott, too, rose an eyebrow. He met Duke’s gaze, whose lifeless, blind eyes seemed to stare directly into Scott’s. Of the many stories Scott had heard as a child, tales of history that Duke had shared with him all through life… This was one he hadn’t heard. Certainly, tales of the Great War had met his ears, but… None like this one.

Duke chuckled. “Surprised, are we?” He met the odd looks of many students, all looking at him in earnest. “Indeed. Alphas, and their Aura… Were created not by by Fenrir, but rather… By Skoll and Hati themselves.” Duke pointed to the book still circulating, which had found its way into Scott’s hands.

Looking down, Scott glanced once more over the pictures in Duke’s book. Of Skoll and Hati… The Alphas who had brought about the end of the Great War. The first Grand Alphas in History, who brought about Peace to the world, and the laws that would allow human and nonhuman to
coexist in harmony. Thanks to their treaties, Humans were subjected to human laws, and the supernatural were subjected to the laws of Alphas.

“Skoll and Hati were born human, and lived their lives as humans. Only when they were boys did they receive Fenrir’s blessing upon the God Wolf’s death, and grow up to be strong men, strong werewolves.” Deucalion smiled, turning to the human students in the classroom. “Only by clinging onto their human hearts, and the determination to survive the war did Skoll and Hati bring to light the world’s first pair of Auras. They became Alphas, the first to ever do so. We call these special beings, who become Alphas on their own accord, True Alphas. Harbingers of Ultimate Power, far stronger and more adept than Alphas who receive their power through Succession. They are the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end of power itself. The culmination of two races, both man and beast.”

Scott’s chest thudded. A deep, painful thud. Blood flushed through his veins, blazing like fire. He clasped his head, feeling an odd headache stirring within him.

“You mean… Alphas can be… Created?! You’re kidding, right?! I thought all Alphas got their powers from their successor?” The wolf from earlier asked, dumbfounded by the response.

A gentle chuckle left Deucalion’s lips. “Yes. All of the current Auras in existence were once originally the Aura of True Alphas, their powers weakened by each and every successful passing of power down the generational lines. Though a True Alpha hasn’t been born in hundreds of years. The last recorded incident was in the 1800s, with Lord Kowalczyk in Europe. Alas, it is feared that werewolves have long since lost the ability to produce a True Alpha. Their hearts, too far removed from their human selves to band together such a powerful instinct.”

Duke strode to the back of the room, taking back his book from Scott’s hands. “Though we’re getting side tracked. The point of that story is to lead into what ended the Great War. Many history books will claim that superior strength of the supernatural brought the war to an end. In reality, it was the Power of the True Alphas, Skoll and Hati, when combined, brought an end to the Great War. Skoll, who claimed the Kingdom of England, and Hati, who claimed the Kingdom of Denmark, all on their own. Thousands of men fell injured by their hand, but no lives were taken that day.”

“None?” A shy human asked.

“Not a one.” Duke nodded, turning his attention towards the human. “In a single day, the armies of both great nations brought to their knees by the monstrous strength of Skoll and Hati, but neither demanded anything more to an end to the conflict, and for their people to live in the light of day, unfearing of being hunted merely for who they were. Left with no recourse, treaties of peace were made the next day, out of fear and respect for the Alpha Brothers.”

The room stood enraptured as Duke continued his lecture. Never needing notes, and rarely stopping for much more than to answer a question, or give a question, Duke continued on for the rest of the hour, detailing the end of the Great War, and the effects it had worldwide. Dates and times, army leaders, and everything in between was mere recollection for the man. In the middle of a sentence, the school bell rang, cutting the old man off.

“Ah, it seems that will be all for day. Please read the next chapter, as we move into the Reconstructive Efforts that happened after the end of the Great War. Please be sure to prepare for the coming exam, this Friday. Two essay questions. Do not disappoint me. Conferences are in two weeks.” Duke snapped his fingers, as relief flooded the classroom. Only then did any soul dare to pack up, or begin chattering once again.
Isaac stretched out, yawning. “Well that was… As fun as ever. I love Duke, I really do, but he can go on and on and on forever…”

Scott smacked Isaac on the shoulder, glaring at his brother. How Isaac gave zero shits about history, or Duke’s stories, would be forever beyond Scott’s grasp. “Funny, I say the same thing every time you rant on and on about the crap you see on Food Network, and yet you still go on and on forever.”

Shrugging, Isaac shut down his machine, and hefting a bag over his shoulder. “At least my ranting leads to something delicious!”

Allison giggled at their bickering, while Meri shrugged.

“Allison?”

“Ready to head to English? I hear Mr. Wilkerson has a hangover, so it’s going to be a movie day!”

“You mean it’s going to be an Isaac on his phone all hour long day? Sweet!” Isaac too, grinned.

As the group finished packing up, and heading on their way, Deucalion snapped his fingers, pointing to Scott. “Scott, do you have a moment? This won’t take long.”

Scott waved to his group, promising to catch up soon enough, and start a session of group Scrabble for English. He strode over to the front of the class, standing across from Duke. “Yes, Grandpa?”

Easing down into his chair, Duke let out a deep sigh, bones crackling in the process. “Yes… Sorry to bring this up now, but you were busy this weekend, and I didn’t want to disturb you.” He took a deep breath, focusing his grey eyes into Scott’s. “Is there anything you’d like to tell me? Such as why you’ve been moping around the house these last few weeks? Or why your Fathers are worried about you? There’s an air of… Fear about you.”

Sighing, Scott glanced away. The one positive thing about Isaac’s bad run of luck had been that Scott forgot, for a couple of days, about the Red Beast that had been following him around. He didn’t have to think about potentially being the Hale Successor, or even about his future at all. Stuck in the present, and focused on video games and movies… Thinking had been the least of his worries.

“Scott? Come on now, pup, we know something’s the matter.” Duke poked his cane on the ground, huffing through his nose. “Nothing you say is going to make anyone upset. We’re a pack, and a family.”

Gaze focused on the floor, Scott didn’t look much above his shoes. “Well, Grandpa, I’m seeing an imaginary monster wolf, that nobody else can see, and apparently losing my grip on reality.”

Instead, Scott lifted his head, offering the best smile he could muster. “It’s nothing. Isaac had a rough weekend, and I’m worried about him. That’s all.”

Chuckling, Duke shook his head, a wide grin on his face. “Quite an exceptional lie. Your skill matches that of your Dad, and your Grandmother Claudia. They, too, had the ability to lie to me. Unfortunately for you, I long since learned how to read through this false truth.”

Scott groaned, folding his arms. He broke down his guise, and should have known better. Even if Duke was blind, the man’s other senses were tenfold stronger. Of course he couldn’t have lied to Duke. “You wouldn’t believe me if I told you.”

A silence hung in the air. Duke shut his eyes, fiddling with his can. “Scott, I have lived on this planet for nearly a century. I have seen many things, my boy. Things I find hard to believe, even to this day. Yet, I know them to be true.” He lifted his gaze, where a pale, meek glow of yellow faded
through his eyes. “I know, better than anyone, Scott, the difference between a truth and a lie.”

“I…” Scott took a moment, trying to open his mouth, to tell Duke the truth. Yet, as the words gathered in his head, he caught himself. The insane, stupid words. The figments of his imagination, that were probably just an accumulation of stress. “I can’t say, Grandpa. I’m sorry. If I can’t believe it, how on earth are you supposed to be able to?” He turned away, watching as the next group of students began to invade the classroom.

Duke nodded, sighing pitifully. “Very well, then.” Standing up, Duke hobbled back to his podium, stopping to put a hand on Scott’s shoulder. “When you’re able to believe in your own heart, come and speak with me. Or your Dad, or your Papa. They will be there to guide you.” Smirking, Duke then playfully smacked the back of Scott’s head. “Oh, and do your own homework next time. Miss Argent is kind, and Isaac’s events this weekend was tragic, but don’t ever let me catch you doing that again. Your words are much more entertaining to read.”

Ducking his head, Scott rushed out of the classroom, ignoring Duke’s booming laughter. He rushed through the hallways, dashing towards his classroom. Within just a few seconds, he caught sight of his friends, hovering outside their next classroom.

“There you are!” Allison said, waving to Scott. “I was getting worried. Usually Mr. Reed only keeps people behind to chew them out, or make them reconsider their life choices.”

“Yeah, is everything okay?” Isaac rose an eyebrow, glancing over his brother, carefully.

“No.” Scott thought. Instead, he grinned, passing by his brother and friends and into the next classroom. “Just fine. The old Tyrant was complaining about my homework. We’re busted, Isaac. Better not ever do it again.”

“Dammit.” Isaac groaned, following after Scott.

“I’m going to die, aren’t I?” Allison asked, paling.

“Probably. Or, at least, we’re all going to die someday. Some sooner than others.” Meri quipped, earning several blank, fearful stares from her classmates, and hungover English teacher.

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By lunchtime, Deucalion had exhausted almost all of his energy for the day. Sinking into his seat, he took a deep sigh. “Ah, to be young again. So wasted on these miscreants… Give me back my fifties, and I’d be happy…”

Reaching into his desk, Duke retrieved an old cell phone. He pressed several buttons into his phone, before bringing it up to his ear. In only a few seconds, an automated voice message picked up. More precisely, Derek’s, instructing him to leave a message after the beep.

“Busy again, today, I see… Not that I’m surprised. Stiles complained to me all weekend about the WERE National Finals taking up his city streets. I’m sure you’re busy with construction at Signal for the space accommodations. Just, don’t work too hard. Take things one step at a time, Alpha. You tend to overwhelm yourself.” Duke smiled, picturing Derek at Signal Academy, with Lydia. Knowing the Alpha Derek was, Duke was sure that Derek would be working from sun up until sundown, every week until the Tournament. Derek put his heart into everything he did.
Duke formed a quick frown. “Though, onto the topic at hand. Derek, I apologize, but I was unable
to get Scott to cooperate with me. As Stiles suggested, Scott is rather evasive about the subject.”
Leaning back in his chair, Duke’s ears perked up, hearing the sound of the Chess club members
heading his way. He didn’t have much free time.

“Though, if you would listen to an old Alpha’s advice, and a father to many… I would leave the
boy be.” A cold chill ran down Duke’s body, allowing a heavy sigh to leave his lips. “Trying to
control the feelings of those around you… Only leads to sorrow, and to another Kali. Be
supportive, but... I wouldn’t push too hard on the boy.”

A gaggle of teens, led by Theo, made their way into Duke’s classroom, chess boards under their
arms.

Duke stood up, turning away from the other students, and whispering in the phone. “Let Scott’s
heart take its own path. I believe that when the time is right, Scott will come to us for help, if he
really needs it.”

Stopping at the edge of his desk, Duke retrieved a framed picture. He wished to see it in detail
himself, but Stiles had taken care to describe it as best he could. The photograph depicted himself,
Scott, and Stiles, on the trip to the Reed homeland, visiting the tribal sites of their ancestors. Scott
and Duke were adorned in soft, flowing robes, face painted by the locals, while Stiles stood in
between them, grinning in tacky tourist attire.

A trip they’d all taken two years earlier, just the three of them. Duke’s favorite memory, in his
hundred years of life. His old pack, that had taken up the old Whittemore Estate, had long since
moved onto their own lives. Some left Beacon Hills, other started their own families, or joined other
packs.

Except for the few who remained in the Hale Pack, none of his family came near him, anymore.

Smiling, Duke set the picture aside, as tears gathered in the old man’s eyes. “Though I believe Scott
won’t need our help for long. After all, he’s no longer a pup anymore, is he? They grow up so fast.
At least your sons have grown up with a proper influence, and a good heart. Don’t worry about
either of your sons, Derek. I know in my heart that they can overcome any challenge.”

Deucalion ended the call, tossing his phone to the side. He hobbled to the members of the Chess
Club, glaring at them, and scenting out Theo, in the center. “Partner up, the lot of you, and get the
clocks set. The first District Match is in three weeks, and we won’t be the embarrassment that we
were last year, lest my name be soiled, and you all learn the true meaning of the word "Tyrant".”

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Gunfire, shattering glass, and the sound of bodies thudding against the floor rang throughout the
underground, dirt ridden tunnels of rural Europe.

Running through the tunnels like the wind itself, a woman in a thick red cloak, covered by a hood,
stormed through the tunnels, claws out, with several (unused) guns belted to her waist.

Men and women, armed to the teeth with bulletproof vests, guns, and crossbows, fired endlessly at
the woman in red, each bouncing of her body with a flash of light, hitting against an invisible barrier.

“Kill the Alpha, you fools! What are you waiting for!? Her Aura can’t last forever!” One of the
strangers said, cowering behind a crate of ammunition, before ducking out and firing several rounds
from a shotgun.

Vaulting over said crate, the Alpha slammed her heel into one of the attackers’ neck, sending him flying across the room. She jolted to the side, dodging a hail of bullets, and digging her claws into the abdomens of two more. The impaled two stopped twitching only moments later, as she tossed them to the side, blood pooling under them.

In little time, the cloaked woman dispatched the rest of those who assaulted her, most falling dead in their tracks. Sighing, she wiped the bloody claws on her cloak “That should be the last of the Dark Hunters. Murdering scum...” She paused, for only a moment. "Except… For you.” The Alpha muttered, in a fierce, deadly tone.

The Alpha walked slowly past the group of crates, past entire boxes of what smelled of wolfsbane, toxin soaked arrows, and enough guns and ammo to arm the entire state of Florida. Reaching the corner of the tunnel’s end, a cave like structure that had gone on for miles, the Alpha flashed her ruby red eyes on the final man still living in her path.

Dressed in a businesslike attire, with a tear soaked tie, and fine garments now soaked with piss, he looked like an ordinary citizen to the naked eye. Grabbing him up by the scruff of his collar, the woman in red brought him within inches of her face.

The Alpha’s pointed claws stopped just shy of the Hunter’s throat, forcing an additional evacuation of piss onto the floor. “You have one chance to live.”

Shaking, the man nodded, sputtering and sobbing like an infant.

“Who hired you to fund this ring? Who’s paying you?”

“I… I… I don’t know, I swear!” The man waved his arms, focusing entirely into the Alpha’s dark hood.

The Alpha threw the man to the ground, stomping her boot firmly to the man’s chest. She applied just enough pressure on the human to be mildly painful. “The leader of your little ring, who hired you to ensure this group was well arms. Don’t play me for a fool.” Reaching under her cloak, the woman produced a badge, stuffing it in the man’s face. “I’m here on behalf of National Alpha Colette Arc. I’m a Senior Member of WOLFE.”

“England’s… National Alpha?! You’re… You’re a member of WOLFE?!” The man lost all color in his face. As he should. The EU’s version of WERE, but more trained in the art of stealth, rather than intimidation and strength.

Nodding, the Alpha put away her badge, glaring at the man, forcing her eyes to glow menacingly. “Exactly. On that authority, I can take you in, or kill you. I’m sure you’re well aware that hunting werewolves, or any non human race is a crime punishable by death in these lands.” She pushed down harder on his chest, feeling the ribs begin to crack under its weight, ever so slightly. “Or rather… Maybe I should pay a visit to your family? See if they know anything? Let them know exactly what you've been doing on your Saturday afternoons? How about that son of yours? Only six years old, right? He’d hate to learn how much of a scumbag his father is, wouldn't he?”

Panicking, the man screamed, holding up both hands, face red from all the crying. “Okay, okay! I… I really don’t know who it is! The guy just showed up one day, and stuffed a check in my hands! I’m an arms dealer, not some psycho like his guys are! I don’t care about Hunting! I just… The money…”
Lifting up her boot, the Alpha gave the man a chance to breathe. “Give me a name, and you get to live.”

“Yes! Yes, of course!” The man eased up, managing a meager, hopeful smile. “Gerard! That’s all I know! His name is Gerard! I never met him in person, or saw his face! But I do know that he lives in...”

A gunshot forced the Alpha to recoil on instinct, dodging out of the way. She swore under her breath, realizing far too late that the gunshot had targeted her prisoner’s head. Looking away, she knew immediately that the man hadn’t made it, as his heart stopped on the spot.

Extending her claws, the Alpha turned backwards, meeting a half dead hunter she’d left behind, pistol in his hand. He laughed, a manic gaze in his eyes. “You’re the Slayer, aren’t you? The Huntress who hunts Hunters. WOLFE’s top agent, and the National Alpha’s Left Hand. England’s deadliest weapon. So... They had to pull out the big guns to stop us, eh?”

The Alpha perked up her head, flashing a pair of delicate, pinkish-red eyes.

Falling back against a crate, the man laughed again. “Red cloak, soaked in blood. Beguiling pink eyes. Too much strength for a single woman to hold naturally.” He licked his lips. “Just another Bitch Mutt, in the end. Think’s she so much more powerful, just because she was born a Bitch. So proud of that disgusting blood in your veins.”

Striding forward, the Alpha stopped beside the Hunter, knocking away the gun and pressing her face next to his own. “A bitch mutt that took down your cell of a hundred hunters. You think too highly of yourselves.”

Dark circles grew under the dying Hunter’s eyes. “We don’t matter, Bitch. None of us here matter, in the end. Your kind is done for! Lord Gerard will show you all exactly who the superior race is! We humans will-”

The Alpha stood up, ignoring the dying ramblings of a madman. The last of his breath escaped not a few moments later, anyway. Walking through the carnage, she exited the end of the cave, and back into the darkness of the night sky, illuminated only by the twinkling stars above.

“All done?”

Leaning against the cave entrance, the Alpha spotted her Second, Malia Tate. A woman, just entering her thirties, with a set of wild, unkempt, dirty blonde hair. Despite her slim frame, a depth of power hid behind her glowing, icy blue eyes.

“Malia, we’re leaving. We got what we came for. Confirmed that they were members of the Dark Hunters. Call for backup and have them clean up the mess. We have a name. Gerard.”

“Yes, Alpha.” Malia pulled out a radio, calling in for backup, and explaining the situation in detail, while she and her Alpha walked through the dense, unpopulated woods. Cutting off her radio, Malia sighed, turning to her Alpha. “How long has it been since we’ve been on this goose chase? Feels like... Forever.”

“Eight years.” The Alpha stopped, reaching the edge of a large lake. “Alpha Colette, after finishing my Alpha Training, asked for me to repay my debt as her Left Hand. She wanted the threat that these rogue, Dark Hunters, posed to Europe, dealt with.” Resting her hands into the lakewater, blood vanished from her claws, fading the water into a cloudy red color.

Malia plopped down next to her Alpha, crossed legged. “That’s a hell of a favor to repay.”
The Alpha removed her cloak, setting it to the side, and dipping it into the lakewater. “It became personal when I heard they intended to expand to the US. My family’s there.”

Taking in a deep breath, Malia reached into her backpack, offering a bottle of water to her Alpha. “Unrelated, but… I suppose you’ve heard they decided that the WERE National Finals…”

The Alpha nodded. “Of course they’d hold it in Beacon Hills. It’s the City of Hope, after all. There isn’t anyone the world over who doesn’t know about it. The only territory in the entire world to be ruled by both a werewolf and a human, side-by-side. Lovers, no less.” She dropped her head, glaring down at the mark adorned on her right palm. A red star, falling from the sky, engulfed in flames.

Malia rubbed her forehead. “The media is all over it, and so is our Boss. Not surprising, though. I hear that practically every member of the International Council is going. They’re going to meet the Hale Family, of course, and kiss Royal Ass. Rumor has it that Miss Laura’s going to succeed her Father, and that her baby brother is going to succeed her in turn. Lot of people VERY happy about that outcome. Then again, Laura and Derek turned California into a Haven, just like the North.”

“A new National Alpha.” Shaking her head, the woman sighed. “Only happens once every fifty years or so. A big event to crown the new Queen, to the North American Throne.” The Alpha balled her hand into a tight fist. “An easy target. Our Boss already has us planned to attend.”

Malia reached over, grasping the Alpha’s knee. “If… It’s too hard for you, I’ll go. I’m not an Alpha, but I’m your Second! I’m just as capable of fighting, I’ve learned plenty from you over the years.”

The woman sniffed, shaking her head. “Malia, it’s just you and I. A pack of 2. If you weren’t my second, I’d be bad at math.”

“IT’s your hometown. He’s there, isn’t he? Wouldn’t it be hard to go back?” Malia muttered.

“No.” The Alpha shook her head. “If I ran now, again, then all these years were wasted. Years of training, taming my instincts, and… Taking back my life? What was it all for? I’ve only just…” Heart shattering, the Alpha gulped, digging claws into her knees. “I’ve only just gotten to the point where I think… I think I’m finally in control. Of everything.”

A smile crossed Malia’s face, eyes glowing out of respect to her Alpha. “You really are an amazing Alpha.” Taking a deep breath, Malia gazed into the lake, catching sight of her reflection. “Spending 8 years to train as an Alpha, to hone your powers, and master your instinct… All while you save my life, and take pity on a homeless street urchin, abandoned since she was a baby. In those early days, I’m sure I was nothing more than a horrible burden.”

“You were never a burden. An annoying, whining, growly, snoring pain in the ass, but never a burden.” The Alpha smirked, as light began to shine from under her hood from the moon’s glow.

“Oh, whatever! You want to talk about a pain in the ass? You’re the one who leaves all her shit lying around the bathroom floor in all the hotels we travel to! Our Pack Apartment? A disaster! We can’t even have company over!” Malia scoffed, downing the last of her drink.

Off in the distance, the two spotted sirens blaring, rushing through the dirt pathway to reach them.

“The calvary has arrived. Guess it’s time for cleanup and forensics. Gahhhhh… I had the pervert on the forensics squad. Pain in my ass.” Malia groaned, forcing herself up, and stretching out in the moonlight.
Nodding, the Alpha followed suit, yawning loudly. Her red hood fell backwards, whipped by the blustering wind, and revealing a set of thick, brown hair, that curled around, down to her neck. A dark complexion, with a bright, sunny smile, like the sun itself, coated her face. “Say Malia… How about we make a promise to each other? Once we’re done with the mission in Beacon Hills?”

“Okay… I’m listening.” Malia asked, folding her arms, with a cocked eyebrow.

“You’re going to take the blood test, to help find your missing family, that I know you want to find, wherever they are…” The Alpha smiled, throwing her arm around Malia’s shoulder. “…and I’ll go see him. We’ll both… Face our fears.”

The pair walked back towards the entrance of the cave, where armed forces began descended in mass, tackling the cave’s entrance.

Malia, finally nodding, shook her Alpha’s hand. “You’ve got it… Ema.”
Hundreds of plump, fresh, ripe red strawberries lined the industrial sized kitchen of the Hale Pack House in the early dawn of Saturday morning. Cut and hollowed out, Isaac went by each and every strawberry, filling them with a fresh, thick cream from a piping bag. He worked quickly, with a meticulous nature that left the top of each one with a neat, identical swirl.

Isaac grinned, hovering over the hundreds of strawberries. “Now comes the fun part.” He wiped hands over his colorfully stained apron, taking care to wash them and retrieve a few decorating bottles, filled with chocolate, from the fridge.

Taking a deep breath, Isaac moved his way back to the impressive number of fruits he needed to decorate. More than any order he’d done before, his deadline was approaching fast, and he’d need to pound these out immediately. “Quick and fluid movements. Consistent stylings. Don’t think, just do. Let your instincts guide you.” He recalled his multiple practice sessions with Boyd. Countless evenings, decorating on cakes and desserts for the pack. Certainly, Isaac’s earliest works looked more like an arts and crafts project out of an elementary school, but in the last couple of years, he’d been told by many that his worked compared to Boyd’s impeccable, floral desserts.

It didn’t.

Not in the sheer level of beautiful, intricate detail that a trained chef like Boyd could do, but… To the common eye, not focused in the culinary realm, Isaac certainly wasn’t a slob anymore, and could be mistaken for someone with talent. In a few more years? Maybe he could honestly claim himself as Boyd’s true apprentice.

“You’re artistic, Isaac. One day you’re going to surpass me in everything I do, and when that happens, I’ll be very proud.” Boyd had told him, not all that long ago.

A big grin on his face, heart pounding at the task before him, Isaac sped through the strawberries in a blur of swift movements. In quick flicks of his wrists, writing with the bottle’s nozzle, he used his claws to help mold and guide the chocolate into a cursive “M.E.” on the front of each berry. After each set of letters, Isaac added a decorative, over-sized heart around them. One after another, Isaac finished in the span of roughly twenty minutes, using the last remnants of the chocolate to barely finish the final heart.

Not wasting any time, Isaac took the next set of bottles, with a white chocolate filling, he attempted with all his might to recreate one of Boyd’s classic floral patterns at the top of each berry. A rose-like pattern that surrounded each of the swirls, to accentuate the cream filling, and look like a flower truly in bloom.

By the time he’d finished, completely, Isaac spotted the sun peeking outside the nearest window. He’d been at his decorative tasks for hours, barely hitting the noon deadline.

Putting away the decorating bottle, Isaac wiped the sweat from his brow. “Didn’t even have to refill this time. Perfect portioning.” Isaac muttered to himself, running eyes over the work, with light pouring into his face.

They were, by far, his best work. Something he could see the pastry chefs at Red Sun serving to their guests. Sharp, neat, and elegant desserts. “I did it…” Isaac muttered, shooting both arms up into the air and having a quick celebratory dance. He grabbed his phone, snapping pictures of his work at various angles, for his growing portfolio. "Boyd's going to flip! I actually managed to do
over a hundred of his roses! A hundred!

Yet, as he snapped pictures, filling his phone and rummaging through his texts to send Boyd a shot, he caught sight of a single strawberry, that had rolled off to the side, crushing the lettering, and destroying the petals he’d worked so hard to make. Only then did he realize the berry was half the size of the rest, and his own decorations had forced it to fall to the side, ruining it in the process.


Isaac froze, focused entirely on that one, ruined piece. He picked it up, fingers shaking as he pressed into the supple flesh.

“Worthless.” Isaac heard, in a dark, terrifying voice he hadn’t recalled since he was a pup.

Staggering backwards, Isaac felt an invisible hand wrapping around his heart. Sharp claws, rubbing up and down his aorta. Waiting to crush it, once and for all.

“At least your brother has the balls to do something with his life. What do you do? You cry, like a little bitch. Worthless, crybaby bitch. That’s all you are, and all you’ll ever be.”

“My wife’s life wasn’t worth yours. Disgusting, crybaby runt. You’ll never be worth anything. Do everyone a favor and die, already.”

"Die, you worthless, pathetic, crybaby scum."

Gold flooded Isaac’s eyes, as he shifted in a flash of hair, crushing the strawberry in his fist, with a deep, angry growl. The stupid words he’d blocked out ages ago, had come back to haunt him in his dreams since he’d met his father’s Doctor a week earlier. They came at him out of nowhere, in all of the stupidest ways. Raising up a fist, he slammed the worthless berry even more. “Shut… Up. Shut up. Shut up!” He slammed his fist into the counter, splattering red over the kitchen, and over his apron.

Fangs bared, Isaac caught himself, hitching his breath as he saw the mess of red that covered him. He opened his palm, watching the red-stained cream roll down his hands. Dropping his head, Isaac sighed, wiping the mess away from his hand. “Dammit… Why do I let this get to me? So… Stupid.”

Isaac washed up the mess, stopping momentarily to glance over his work. “Worthless” ran through his head, eyeing over what he’d just spent the better part of five hours creating.

Was this really the most he could contribute to the pack? Was this all he was capable of? Pretty food? With Isaac’s nose and eyes, Theo’s RK9 coach had tried to recruit him since middle school, claiming he had the strength and talent to be a highly ranked tracker. Most of his teachers claimed he had the brains to be a doctor, or an engineer, and had tried to make him skip a few classes over the years.

Their faces… Every time he told them about his dream of being a Chef… They all had the same horrified, blank expression.

“Worthless.”

Isaac sighed, leaning back against the fridge, looking away from his work. “Scott can practically run the ranch on his own, and has the heart to be the next Alpha. Theo’s going to be a strong Beta, and probably join WERE someday. Pops is the County Alpha. Dad’s the mayor. Being a chef, is that… Really enough? Am I just pulling everyone down? My Papa did so much with his life, for
me... And... Is this how I repay him?"

A high, joyous squeal broke Isaac out of his dark thoughts.

Entering the kitchen, Lydia Parrish clopped through in a pair of stylish heels, attaching a pair of dangling earrings (that matched her sharp red dress), while she hovered over the strawberries she’d asked Isaac to create. “Oh my gosh! Isaac, look at these! These are everything I asked for, and MORE! Look at the hearts! Look at those rose petals!” She squealed again, rushing over to Isaac’s side, and hugging him around the neck. “These look perfect! Thank you so much, Isaac, these are beautiful, and I bet they taste even better!” Lydia reached over, pecking a kiss on the air beside each of Isaac’s cheeks. A dark, devious grin crossed her face. “I’ll waggle these under my investor’s noses, and while they’re savoring your flavor, I’ll snag the DeBeste contract and Martin Enterprises will be creating the new State Courthouse before you know it!”

Isaac flushed, rubbing the back of his neck. “I’m glad you like them. I, uh... I went with a basic vanilla creme, but the chocolate’s a little sweeter, so it balances out. Hopefully, it’s good.”

Lydia chuckled, ruffling Isaac’s hair. “Oh sweetheart, you forget that I have the pleasure of eating your cooking all week long. I know they’re going to be good.” Reaching into her purse, Lydia ruffled through, pulling out a wad of bills and offering them to Isaac. “Here you go. We never discussed payment, but I went off what Red Sun’s catering menu was. With a little bonus, for the rush job.”

Eyes all but falling out of their sockets, Isaac waved both hands, pushing the exorbitant amount of bills back to Lydia. “You don’t have to pay me, Lyd. I’m not a Chef for Red Sun yet. I-”

“Hush, you!” Lydia stuffed the cash into Isaac’s apron, pinching his nose and glaring him down. “Take that, and buy yourself a nice outfit. I’d be paying Boyd just as much, and believe me you, you saved my skin on this one. I barely had the time to hire a full catering staff on short notice, let alone the time to get a fancy enough dessert. That bastard DeBeste changed the meeting, not even giving me two days’ notice! Asshole.” She huffed, striding back to the desserts, and plastering on her best smile. “I’ll have Jordan come by and pick these up on his way there. Again, thank you, darling. Your work is sublime! Boyd couldn’t have picked a better, more talented apprentice. I can’t wait to see you in your prime.” She winked.

Isaac blushed. Lydia rarely gave underserved compliments. She said what she meant, and meant what she said. “Sugarcoat” wasn’t in her dictionary, which was why she was the nation’s most successful Construction Specialist, hailed as the most talented Architect and Interior Designer in the Western World. She made more money than the rest of the pack, combined, and re-invested it into Beacon Hills, constantly. "Thanks, Lyd." He managed to mutter, quietly.

“Momma?”

Isaac shot up, glancing behind Lydia, peering at three-year-old Ray Parrish, the most stylish (and shy) child in all the pack. Taking after his mother’s fair, delicate features, and soft red hair, Ray could have been easily mistaken for a human. Yet, Isaac’s nose caught the scent of cinder and ash underneath the boy’s skin. A Hellhound, just like his father, through and through.

“Oh, Good! You got yourself all ready!” Lydia rushed to her son’s side, adjusting his bowtie, and wetting down the prominent cowlick on his bangs. “Ready to go, Ray? We’re meeting your Daddy at the party for my investors, and need to get going.” She gasped, quickly, snapping her fingers. “About forgot the plans! Ray, I’m going to run upstairs and get them, you head on out to the car, alright?”
Ray nodded. “Yes, Momma.” He tilted his head, watching Lydia run upstairs. Once she was out of sight, Ray blushed, looking up at Isaac with his flickering, pleading orange eyes. “Izzack? Can I have one?” He pointed to the berries.

Snorting, Isaac couldn’t help but grin. Ray was the youngest in the pack, the source of everyone’s protective instincts, and Isaac had no hope of telling the tiny pup “no.” He grabbed one of the smaller strawberries, sneaking it to Ray under the table. He winked to the little tyke. “Don’t tell your mom.”

“Thanks!” Ray reached around, hugging Isaac’s leg, and blowing a kiss towards his face.

Isaac’s heart melted, watching Ray’s face beam from ear to ear as he bit into the berry, and little sparks of fire erupt out of his eyes, with a high pitched, eager giggle.

“So good, Izzack!” Ray jogged out of the room, mouth still savoring the sweet flavor, giggling the whole way.

Taking a deep breath, Isaac composed himself. His heart stopped throbbing, and the deep weight in his gut lightened. Isaac tore off his apron, taking care to wash the mess of dishes, bottles, and bags that he’d used that morning.

Elbow-deep in hot water, Isaac’s ears flickered, hearing a set of heavy boots hit the front door, and eager feet padding through the house. He smiled. “I’m in the kitchen, Scott!”

Sliding on the hardwood, Tom Cruise style, Scott came to a complete stop, before tripping and falling onto his face onto the kitchen floor. A low groan left the wolf’s mouth.

“Good to see you’ve still got Dad’s reflexes. Now I see why Ennis doesn’t let you around the big farm machinery.” Isaac smirked, poking fun at his brother.

“HEY! Low blow, man, low blow!” Scott shot up, eyes flashing a playful gold. “Anyway… Dude, my chores are done for the weekend. How about you?”

Isaac nodded. “Just finished. I’m off until tomorrow at Red Sun, and Erica’s feeding the pack tonight.”

“Sweet!” Scott raised up a few bills in his hand. “Ennis gave me my pay for the month! Want to hit the movies tonight? Eat out with the gang?”

“Sure. You call Allison, I’ll call Meri, and we’ll both drag Theo out of the house.” Isaac caught a glimpse at his disgusting state in the water, coated in sugar, cream, and chocolate. “I’ll finish the dishes, how about you go get ready so I can hog the shower afterwards.”

Scott waltzed into the kitchen, patting his hands together. “Nah, let me help! We’ll get things done a lot faster.”

As Scott inched closer and closer, Isaac’s noise recoiled, gagging at the scent of livestock, feed, and Billy the Goat. “Oh, my God, no! Scott, go take a freaking shower! You smell like shit and goat!” He ran to Scott’s side, pushing him as far away from the kitchen prep area, and Lydia’s desserts.

“You know the rules! You and Dad are both banned from the kitchen and sharp objects at all times! Out, out, out!”

Pouting, Scott shot a glare Isaac’s way. “Oh come on, it’s not that bad. See?” He sniffed himself, gagging, and immediately cutting himself off, having no means of countering Isaac’s accusation.

“Well, I mean… You’re no spring meadow either. You smell like….” He sniffed at Isaac, pouting
again. “Strawberries and chocolate. Oh, just screw off!”

Isaac rolled his eyes, playfully kicking Scott in the ass, and shooing him upstairs.

“Ew… What smells like a wet dog?” Stiles interjected, coming in from the opposite side of the kitchen, hanging up his winter coat on a hanger.

Isaac snorted, while Scott faux-growled halfway up the staircase. “Hey, Dad! Nothing, Scott just came in from the ranch.”

Stiles waved, leaning up against the kitchen counter, yawning from ear to ear. “Ah. Makes sense.” He stopped to marvel at Isaac’s culinary creation, sneaking one of the many strawberries for himself, and licking his lips. “I guess you finished Lydia’s little project.”

Knowing it was pointless to keep his dad away from dessert, Isaac didn’t bother stopping Stiles from examining one closely, knowing it was going to be eaten, regardless. “Yeah, it was an easy one, though. Nothing impressive. They came out great, though!”

A raised eyebrow and one particularly “dad-like” glare later, and Stiles scoffed. “Nothing impressive? Isaac, these look professionally made, like something I’d picture Boyd making at Valentine’s day. Don’t discredit your work.” Putting down the berry, Stiles went to his son’s side, reaching around and hugging the life out of Isaac. “Seriously, every day, I see you doing more and more of Boyd’s work, improving your technique, and I couldn’t be more proud. Not many kids your age would be so dedicated to a craft. When I was around your age, all I ever did was babysit with Ema, and make out on the couch. From what I hear, your Pops was busy beating up Juniors.”

Isaac flushed again. While Stiles was the opposite of Lydia, and complimented everyone under the sun, being the shrink that he was, it still brought a flutter to his heart. His dad never lied, so much like Lydia, Stiles meant exactly what he said. He really was proud. “Thanks, Dad. I’ve got a long way to go, though. Like I said, this was a simple project. Boyd’s going to show me how to mold chocolate flowers next weekend.”

“You’ll get there. I know you can do anything you put your mind to. You’re just that kind of a person.” Stiles added, leaning over and ruffling the pup’s hair. He yawned again, grunting as he rubbed a spot on his chest.

A rough spasm of muscles under Stiles’ skin caught in Isaac’s ears. “You okay, Dad?”

Stiles shrugged, rubbing under his eyes. “Just tired. I get sore here and there from having to scream all the time at your wiseass Papa. The little shit is trying to get the city council to approve use of the fairgrounds, and have the city put on a festival for the National Finals. As if we have the manpower or time to throw such a thing on short notice…”

Isaac snorted.

His Dad and Pops were Political Beasts. Certainly, they cooperated and worked together on 90% of any issue facing the area, but… Unfortunately, on the 10% they disagreed on, both were strong, vocal, and spirited individuals. Neither usually gave in, and eventually took the issue to a vote between the County Pack and City Council. Thankfully, they kept the political arena outside of their Pack Life, and tended to accept the outcome of the votes.

“I’m serious, Isaac! Your Papa is testing my last patience. Yes, trust me, a festival would AMAZING, but… Really, can you imagine the people who are already going to be coming and going from the fights? I’m thinking of traffic, and police manpower, and your poor Uncle Parrish
and Paw Paw K’s mental health!” Stiles whined, grabbing back his strawberry, and stuffing it down his gullet. Much like Ray, Stiles moaned at the taste, offering Isaac a huge thumbs up.

Isaac rolled his eyes. “Come on dad, it sounds cool. Like the Beacon Festival, but for all the fights?! Can you imagine getting to meet all the members of WERE, and have an excuse to eat really awful carnival food? That would be awesome!”

Stiles feigned his wimpy human growl, that just made Isaac snort even louder. “Do not take your Papa’s side. Remember who gives you your allowance! Remember who’s going to take you car shopping in a couple of years! Not your Papa. Does he know anything about interest rates? Not a chance!”

“Just saying…” Isaac went back to the dishes, finishing up the remnants. “The WERE National Finals is a big freaking deal. What town doesn't have a big, gigantic festival? Do you really want Beacon Hills’ National Finals to be the lamest in history?” He threw his head backward, shooting his Dad a knowing glare. “Besides, you KNOW you can get Lydia to pay for the whole thing, and plan it, and get vendors, and probably not pull a cent out of the city budget. She’s a goddess.”

“You're taking your Papa's side!” Stiles pouted, much in the same way that Scott did, waggling his finger.

“Would bring a lot of money to the city…” Isaac answered, in a sing-song tune, grinning from ear to ear.

“Stop it!” Stiles spat curtly, in the playful way he did when he knew he was beat.

With the last of the dishes finished off, and hearing the water getting turned off from upstairs, Isaac tossed his dirty apron into a hamper with the rest of the kitchen towels. “I've got to go get cleaned up. Movies, shopping, and dinner with Scott and the gang! See you tonight, dad! Just give up and beg for Lydia’s help!”

As Isaac ran off, Stiles rose his head, yelling. “I have only begun to fight, Isaac! Be home by 11! Don’t make me call Jackson to drag you home! Again!”

“One time, Dad!” Isaac echoed from far above.

“One time too many…” Stiles muttered, stretching out, and yawning once more. He rubbed his sore chest again, reaching into his pocket and running his hands over the letter he’d been sent earlier that week. He’d already opened it and skimmed through its contents, sighing loudly. “Wish it was just the festival I’d been screaming over, and not with that bitch, Dr. Blake… Discredit to our profession, everywhere. I told her not to contact us, and yet… Here it is…” He muttered.

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Downtown Beacon Hills has expanded over the years, nearly doubling in size, and creating a modern metropolis. Isaac remembered when all they’d had was a worn down movie theatre, a few
fast food joints, and antique stores. Nowadays, it looked like something Isaac would expect from a city like New York.

Like most weekends, people swarmed the downtown mall, a thirteen story glass structure that Lydia had created years earlier, with every kind of store and entertainment venue one could ever hope for. High school and college students from all over the region flocked in large groups during the weekend, making it the most popular spot in all of Beacon Hills.

Isaac and their crew kept to the food court, where their gang had taken advantage of the multiple restaurants, spreading a buffet to share between them all.

“Not as good as I’d hoped…” Isaac muttered, tossing an overcooked egg roll to the size, and stealing a bite from Meri’s platter of chicken nuggets.

Theo nodded, flicking a cold fry to the side. “Isaac’s food is way better.” He snuck a burger from Scott’s pile, chomping half of it in one go.

“Yeah… I’ve gotten really spoiled eating over at your place so much. Fast food just isn’t as appealing.” Allison shot Isaac a smile and a thumbs up.

Scott as usual, however, stuffed his face with curly fries and everything the rest of them hadn’t eaten. Isaac rolled his eyes, amazed at the lack of taste buds his brother had. Though, really, his Pops was the same. As long as there was food in large quantities, they didn’t care what it was.


Isaac scoffed. “Here I thought Pops was the only one with a bottomless pit of a stomach.” He waved Scott off. “I’m good. Because unlike you, I know what a normal portion size is, even for a wolf.”

“Shaddup!” Scott hopped up, grinning as he waltzed back to the food court.

Allison snorted, following after Scott. “I’m getting some dessert. You want anything Meri?”

Meri followed after Allison, eyes flashing white for a split second. “Anything without Pumpkin Spice. They’re out of Strawberry, and Scott’s going to pout the rest of the night about it. We should head that off, immediately.”

The girls followed Scott, leaving Isaac and Theo to nibble at their food.

“Still stressing about your old man? Your nerves are everywhere today.” Theo muttered, eyes focused on the tense muscles around Isaac’s neck.

Isaac’s eyes glowed, glaring at Theo. “You’re not Meri. You don’t get to use your training to spy on me. Stupid RK9 bullshit. You’re just like Pops…” He grumbled. Theo’s ears and nose paled in comparison to Isaac’s, but his pack brother’s eyes were far sharper. Well on the way into a WERE career as a combat specialist, like their Alpha had been, Theo could catch even the slightest twitch of the muscle.

“Come on. You were a zombie that night it happened. You fake you’re okay, but you’re more tense than I’ve ever seen you before. You’re good at hiding your emotions from morons like Scott, but shit at it from me.” Theo leaned on his head. “So, what’s up?”
“Can’t a guy have an existential crisis in peace?” Isaac groaned, shrugging. “So I’m having a rough time right now. Who doesn’t? All of us had a shit childhood, in some way.”

“Scott’s mom rejected him. Theo’s dad went on a rampage, and Theo’s mom basically abandoned him. Allison’s parents are divorced, after her sister’s accident, and the restraining order hit. Meri’s dad couldn’t accept her as a seer, or her ‘personality’. My mom died, and my dad tried to kill me repeatedly.” Isaac thought, fiddling with the straw in his hand. The truth was, their past tragedies had been what bonded them together.


Isaac’s nose twitched, catching Theo’s damp scent. A sad, pained scent. “Speaking of worrying… You doing okay, Theo? You seem a little… Mopier than usual.”

Theo shrugged, stealing a few more of Scott’s burgers and chomping them in half. “Mom keeps calling me, wanting to meet her for dinner again. Fuck that. Unless the Honorable Alpha Duke orders me to go, I’m not going to give her the time of day. Bitch.”

“Sorry, man.” Isaac frowned, patting Theo on the shoulder.

“I shouldn’t complain.” Theo huffed, rolling his eyes. “I can’t let her make me angry. Duke keeps telling me that it’s affecting my concentration in chess, and Alpha Hale tells me that it’s affecting my combat training. Stupid, all of it.”

“It’s not stupid.” Isaac rose a hand to argue, stopping as he heard a high pitched scream across the food court. He and Theo both turned, catching the sight near the information booth.

“How many times do I have to ask?! Is it not coming through that fat head of yours?! Riviera! Their Pack Lands were here not that long ago! I’m looking for the Alpha, Talia!” Screamed a woman, in her thirties, with a set of wavy black hair, tied off in a ponytail, all the way down to her rear-end. Dressed like someone Isaac expected to work at the Daily Planet, a large badge waved around her belt, where a slew of tools, notebooks, and pens poked out of.

“Riviera? Grandma?” Isaac thought, sharing an equally cautious glare with Theo. The two shot up, making their way off towards the information booth.

The teenager working the both rose up both hands, apologizing profusely to the journalist. “No idea who that is, ma’m. Beacon has been run by the Hales since I was a little kid. Never heard of these Rivieras. All the other packs are tiny in comparison, but there’s a lot of them! Maybe try the phone book?” He offered, meekly.

“This would have been a huge pack! One of the strongest, and oldest in all the land! How could you not know about them?! Riviera! Their Pack Lands were here not that long ago! I’m looking for the Alpha, Talia!” Screamed a woman, in her thirties, with a set of wavy black hair, tied off in a ponytail, all the way down to her rear-end. Dressed like someone Isaac expected to work at the Daily Planet, a large badge waved around her belt, where a slew of tools, notebooks, and pens poked out of.

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“This would have been a huge pack! One of the strongest, and oldest in all the land! How could you not know about them?!?” The Journalist reached into her back pocket, slamming a slew of papers on the desk in front of her. “See?! Alpha Talia Rivera! The last acting Alpha of the pack! I spent the last month in the State Archives! Why does nobody I speak with know anything about her?!”

Isaac stopped next to the strange woman, catching her eye. “Um… Sorry to interrupt, but… You’re looking for Talia?”

“Yes!” Eyes flashing a brilliant gold, the Journalist ran to Isaac’s side, shaking his hands fervently. “Oh my gosh, a boy with a brain! Can you please tell me where I can find Talia Rivera?! My name is Cora! Cora Jenkins, I work for California Lunar Press.” She presented her press badge to Isaac and Theo. “I’ve been looking for her all weekend long, and nobody seems to know anything about
Isaac and Theo shared a sad, sideways glance.

“Oh… That’s not a good face.” Cora muttered, paling at their expressions.

Theo bowed his head. “The Honorable Alpha, Talia Riviera, passed away about 30 years ago in an automobile accident. I’m sorry to tell you.”

Isaac watched the woman’s face crumble into little more than dust, head dropping to the ground. The scent of forming tears caught in his nose.

“I guess… That’s why.” Cora muttered, shaking her head. “I didn’t think to check in the obituaries. I mean… Wolves usually live so long, I… It never crossed my mind.”

Isaac nodded. He felt his chest burn, sad that he’d never gotten to meet his grandmother. His Pops talked about her all the time, and what a kind woman she’d been. Each holiday, they payed homage to Alpha Riviera, as she deserved. Derek shared as many stories as he could remember, of the sweet woman she’d been.

“I guess I’ll never know, then. Dammit… I’m going to get fired for this. Or lose all of my vacation time. My boss is going to be so pissed... Promised him a story about the Rivieras, and about Beacon Hills... Damn...” Cora rubbed the back of her head, shredding the papers in her hands, before shoving the remains into her backpack.

“Never know what?” Theo asked, raising an eyebrow.

Cora shrugged, folding her arms, turning away from the duo. “I’ll never know my mother. Or why she left me.”

“Mo… Mother?” Isaac hitched his breath, eyes going wide.

Nodding, Cora gripped her bag. “When I was little, something happened between my mom and my dad. I don’t know what, because my dad and grandparents would never tell me. Told me not to worry about my shameful excuse for a mother.” She huffed, letting out a deep, fervent breath. “My father passed away recently. When I looked through all of his papers, I found a name on a trust account, who’d been paying my father for years for my care. The account name on the trust was Talia Riviera. Didn’t take long to put two and two together.”

“Isaac…” Theo turned to face his pack brother, an incredulous glare on his face. “Alpha Laura is Alpha Derek’s only sibling, right?”

“Yeah.” Isaac felt his stomach ripple in ice. No way in hell would his Papa lie to him, he wasn’t that kind of man. Isaac knew all about Talia and Gregory’s affair, and the circumstances of Derek’s birth. So then… There would be no point in lying about another sister.

“Uh… Again with the creepy faces.” Cora mumbled, turning back to face the two.

Theo folded his arms, sighing quietly. “Lady, you’ll need to sit down for this one. There’s someone else who might be able to help you out with the Alpha Riviera.”

While Theo tended to Cora, Isaac already had his phone out, dialing his Papa’s number. The Alpha picked up on the second ring. “Pops… Uh… I think you need to get down here to the mall. Like, right now. I’m by the information booth.”
Not bothering with a car, Derek raced through town, faster than he’d run in over twenty years. Faster than he’d ran since the days training with WERE.

“A lie. This can’t be possible. Mother… Mother would have told me. She wouldn't’ have lied. My mother…”

Derek skidded to a halt in front of the Beacon Mall, sucking in and out for breath, before rushing inside. He wiped the sweat from his brow, eyes flashing a deep, painful red.

Immediately, he knew. Even without Isaac’s description, Derek knew.

Eyeing the woman up and down, Derek felt his heart shatter into pieces. Like looking into a photograph of years past, Cora was the spitting image of his mother in her youth. Her smell, even… Matched the air that drifted in the field of flowers, where his mother’s body laid to rest. There was no mistaking it.

Hesitantly, Derek stepped forward, catching the woman’s attention. As he approached, he watched her face tilt in confusion. “My name is Derek Hale. I’m the County Alpha for Beacon. I—”

“Yeah, I know who you are.” Cora shot up from the bench she’d been sitting at. Her eyes narrowed. “There’s not a wolf alive that doesn’t know you. The Alpha who stopped Kali Reed’s rampage, and created the City of Hope, itself.” She then promptly flashed a middle finger at Derek. “Oh, and you kicked my boss out of your territory eight years ago, and had one of my best friends arrested for “trespass”. Sorry, but you’re at the top of our shit list. Even if we’re wolves, have you not heard about freedom of speech, asshole?!”

Staggering back, Derek cleared his throat, intimated by the woman immediately. “I… Sorry, about that. I—”

“Did that little shit actually call the Alpha on me?! Goddamit!” Cora shouted, rubbing her forehead angrily. “Okay, listen, I’ll leave. No need for the fuckin’ cops, I’ll just… Go. I don’t want to spend a night in jail. I’d rather not—”

“My mother was Talia Rivera.” Derek spat out.

Cora stopped mid-rant. She shook, quietly, shaking her head. “That’s… Impossible.”

Derek dropped his head. Nearly a decade had passed since he last thought of his mother and father’s “sin”. Two mated couples, who’d snuck off and cheated on their mates, with Derek being the end result. While Gregory had been reprimanded by the Hales, and eventually divorced his mate, leaving him the Alpha of a smaller pack, Talia had disbanded the Rivieras altogether, also leaving her mate. Too young to know the grander details of it all, Derek knew little to nothing about the Rivieras, except that he’d been disowned by them, and told never to seek them out.

One of the few perks of his popularity as an Alpha, had been everyone forgetting about Talia’s "failings", instead focusing on Derek's many successes. Nobody had brought the subject up in years.

“My mother… My mother only had one child with my father!” Cora screamed, tears already building up in her eyes. She grabbed Derek by the neck, shaking him.
“That’s not a lie.” Derek sighed, glancing away. “My mother only had one child with your father. My other sister, Laura… Was the same. My father and her mother only had one child.”

Realization struck Cora immediately. “Oh my God… She…” Falling backwards, Cora landed back on the bench she’d been seated on. “She cheated on him. That’s why… That’s why I was taken away. Why dad and grandma never spoke about her… Why my birth pack disbanded.”

Derek nodded, reluctantly. He took a seat next to his half-sister, balling his hands into fists. “Laws are fairly clear on infidelity between a mated pair. The offending party is either stripped of their parental rights, or forced to have full parental rights, all up to the decision of their spurned mate.” He sighed. “My half sister, Laura, became part of the latter with my father Gregory. I supposed that would mean you… You were part of the latter, with my mother, Talia.”

The duo sat in silence, disbelief covering each of their faces.

Cora chuckled, slamming her fist against the bench and denting it. “I can’t believe this. I… I just assumed… They’d broken things off, or I’d been rejected, or she was thrown in jail, or went feral, or some… Something! I never…” More laughter echoed from her stomach, shaking her head incredulously. “I never thought a mated pair would do such a thing. Why? Why’d they do it? That's.. That's almost worse.”

“I wish I knew.” Derek leaned back, sighing painfully. “Talia died when I was a boy. I never had a chance to know the whole truth behind it all.”

“Damn.” Cora sighed, rubbing the bridge of her nose. “Fat lot of help you are.”

Derek’s face twitched. Somehow… He felt like he were speaking with Laura. Blunt, and strong-willed to a fault. She sighed, shutting his eyes. “Unrelated… Isaac told me that you’re new in town. Do you need a place to stay? My home is open.”

Taken aback, Cora nodded, surprise coloring her features. “I’d… Really appreciate that. I, uh… I don’t really have much to pay you. I’m a journalist, so i’m not really all that well off, but I-”

“Free of charge.” Derek chuckled, waving the thought off. “My husband wouldn’t hear of it, and there’s plenty of things I’d love to ask you about. If I knew I had another sister, I would have looked for you years ago.”

“Same here.” Cora extended her hand, offering it to Derek. “Wish it was under better circumstances, but nice to meet you. I suppose you’re my little brother, right?”

“Always the little brother.” Derek chuckled, nodding as he shook his half-sister’s hand. “Nice to meet you as well, Cora.”

They stood up, as Derek helped Cora with her bag, guiding her out of the mall, while he called up an uber to drive them back.

“I’d like to learn the truth about our mother.” Cora reached inside of one of her multiple pockets, and grabbing a notepad. “Anything… You can help me with. Or anybody who might know my mother, and your father… Why and how all this happened, I… I want to know the truth about my past.”

Derek spotted thousands of notes, scribbled in intricate handwriting on Cora’s notepad. It was clear that Cora had done plenty of homework on the subject. He didn’t hesitate to nod in agreement. “Me too.”
A/N: Ah, yes. Just as we learned more about the Stilinski family secrets in Part One, now the truth behind the Hale family secrets will be revealed in part II, as it ties together Derek’s family, once and for all. :)

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Chapter 24

Football, for the town of Beacon Hills, slowly took hold of the town’s once frantic lacrosse population. A sport that brought together an entire town every Friday night, and in the last few years, had only further cemented the bond between human and supernatural.

Scott loved the atmosphere, each Friday night. The smell of crisp autumn, and the damp field. Blood boiling from all parties, human and nonhuman, competitor and fan, and the screaming, voracious nature of each event.

Not that Scott was all that surprised. The Beacon Hills Crimson Wolves had been part of the State Finals, several years running. A tradition that their new coach, Chris Argent, intended to continue.

Standing tall, with a rigid, military build, Coach Argent hadn’t faded at all since his time with the Marines, or with his experience as a professional Hunter. If anything, the man in his forties appeared to be in his prime.

“Move it Greenberg! What are you doing?! OH my God, don’t give them that much yardage! What’s the matter with you?! JESUS CHRIST!!” Coach Argent screamed, stomping his feet in anger, and tossing a clipboard of plays up into the air.

Scott cringed, watching as their defensive line toppled backwards, against the Signal Sand Lizard’s buff offensive line. It certainly helped that Signal only allowed Supernatural Creatures on their team, while Beacon was a tad more… Open minded.

“Ow…” Greenberg hobbled off the field, benching himself, and a few other human players on the team.

Coach Argent sighed, coming to their sides, and patting each of them on the shoulderpads. “Good hustle. Next week, all of you are on weights.” He whistled through his fingers, pointing in Scott’s general vicinity. “Turner! Maurice! Hale! Get your asses out there! Don’t let them break the line! Especially you, Hale! Don’t be afraid to get physical!”

A few snickers from his teammates, and Scott smacked each of them on the back of the helmets, as they ran out taking the field.

“Whoo hoo! Come on Scotty!” Stiles screamed from the stands, up and screaming like an idiot with a intricately decorated poster..

“Kick their butt, Scott!” Tyler shrieked, holding up his own poster, jumping around just as eagerly as his father.

Xander and Derek both shied away from the obnoxious cheering, but both whistled and cheered, alongside the rest of the pack that had shown up for the night.

A flutter ran through Scott’s chest, amazed that a good chunk of his pack had shown up for the game. He flushed, taking his place on the line.

Glancing up at the linemen opposite him, Scott’s pleasant demeanor vanished. Dozens of growls, and flashing golden eyes on the other side set his instincts wild. His own eyes glowed gold, as fangs popped into his mouth guard, and claws met the tear resistant fabric of his gloves.

Signal hiked the ball, and the play was on.
Scott rammed forward, making direct contact with the teen opposite him, with a loud crash of pads. Both he and the other player growled in unison, struggling for dominance on the play.

“Bout time they took the human trash out of the game.” The other wolf growled, chuckling as his mouthguard fell out, revealing a set of thick, powerful fangs. “Not that it matters. They just replaced trash with more trash.”

Scott struggled to keep pace, pushing forward as hard as he could. To his horror, the other player began to overpower him, before finally shoving him straight to the ground. He yelped, back up on his feet and ready to give chase to the other player.

A referee’s whistle rang out, as the Signal Quarterback threw an incomplete pass, ending the play, and movement

Huffing, Scott stopped just short of the other player. “Bradley” read the other player’s uniform. He recognized the player as one of Signal’s biggest linemen, and part of the Bradley pack. They were known all over Beacon County as “Purist Wolves”, only allowing the members of their pack (full blooded wolves) to marry other full blooded wolves.

It showed. Bradley had a good foot on Scott, and about an extra hundred pounds of solid muscle. Clearly, a Beta in training.

Bradley scoffed, brushing past Scott, using his shoulderpad to make a stronger impact. “So… The County Alpha’s Halfie Human Bastard… This is all he’s good for?” The other player scoffed, unable to hold back a cocky grin. “Damn… If this is what the Hale Pack is going to have coming down the line as an Alpha… Our County is fucked.”

Scott rolled his eyes. “Is that the best you’ve got? Come on, my brother has better insults than that. No jokes about my half human dick? Your insult game is weak, dude.” The Beacon defensive line chuckled right alongside Scott, both human and wolf.

“Oh yeah?” Bradley bent down, getting ready for the next play. “Well, your human daddy? I hear he’s just a whore for werewolf dick. I get it though. Got him the Mayor Gig.” The cocky teen just laughed, alongside some of his other teammates. “Who wouldn’t suck a little cock, and take it up the ass for that?”

Scott’s blood boiled. His eyes burned a bright, boiling gold. The corners of his vision blurred in red, forcing his fangs to slash through his mouthguard, and bellow a low, deep growl. “Don’t you fucking talk shit about my Dad or Pops.”

“Fine with me.” Bradley licked his fangs, still laughing. “How about that sorry ass pack you’ve got? Humans, banshees, hellhounds… That fucker Raken? Is there any pathetic subspecies that you won’t take off the street and fuck?” More laughter from Bradley, accompanied by nervous, unappreciated glares from Signal’s other teammates. Signal’s other players clearly knew a line had been crossed.

Scott and his teammates snarled at the opposing team, all bending down and getting into position. A low, vicious snarl left Scott’s throat. “Shut the fuck up… About my pack…”

“Oh yeah?” Bradley winked at Scott. “What are you gonna do about it, Halfie Trash?”

“Accept me.”
Scott’s mind flared in a sea of red. Flashes of his pack, his family, his life… People he loved, one by one, came into his vision. This punk, this… Trash, saying shit about the Hale Pack. Some asshole who knew nothing about any of them. A piercing roar echoed in the back of Scott’s mind, which only served to thump Scott's heart into overdrive, pumping excess blood to all of his limbs.

“Don’t resist me.”

The tear resistant glove failed, as Scott’s claw ripped out, digging into the ground as he adjusted his position on the field, lowering his head. Dirt from the field hid the sharp red coloring of the nail.

“You can do it, Scott!” Derek cheered, having stolen Stiles’ sign and waving it in the air.

“Come on Scotty!” Jackson clapped in unison with several deputies from the Sheriff’s department. Liam, too, screamed louder than anyone else in the group.

“Come on Scotty!” Lydia screamed, in beautiful unison with Jordan and Ray. The latter of which shot flames from their mouths as they whistled in support.

“Don’t be a bitch!” Theo yelled out, from his spot next to Deucalion and Isaac, both of which screamed right alongside Theo.

Heat billowed out of Scott, steam rising from every opening in his jersey and pads, creating a warm fog all around the teen. Sweat ran down his face, and through most of his uniform. He glared back at the dickwad in front of him, barely realizing his growl had subsided, or that his body began to strain against the pads.

Scott paused for a moment, watching Bradley’s face slowly fade into a mess of fear, stumbling back from his position on the line. “D… Dude… Are you a… Wait… How are you… How are your eyes… They were gold a second ago!”

Signal’s quarterback hiked the ball.

Like a bullet from the barrel of the gun, Scott fired forward. His pads checked into Bradley and both players on either side of him, alongside an ungodly crack into the sky, that broke the opposing team's pads. Scott dug deep, slamming all three into the ground, leaving a trail of dirt behind in their wake.

From the opening, one of the other players on Beacon slammed into Signal’s quarterback, sending him flying, and leaving the ball fumbled. Another one of Beacon’s players grabbed the ball, and ran it back, to the chorus of screaming Beacon fans, for a touchdown.

The football field exploded in applause and cheer on Beacon’s side, met with quiet horror on Signal’s side.

“Thatta boy, Hale! THATTA FREAKING BOY! Whoo!” Coach Argent screamed, jumping up
and down, and hugging Greenberg’s neck, high fiving with the rest of the team.

All of which Scott failed to hear in the slightest. His heartbeat, and the heartbeat off Bradley was all he could hear. Blood rushed through every vein in his body, and Scott’s vision was painted a deep, scathing red.

Standing up, Scott stood over Bradley and the other players, staring them all down in the eyes, snarling through his helmet. “That’s what I’m going to fucking do about it, bitch.” Scott said.

A jolt shot down Scott’s spine, realizing that his voice had dropped about ten octaves. His words sent a wave of fear down his own body, which gave the world color again. He staggered backward, into a crowd of his fellow players, who were slapping his ass, and pulling him back to the sideline, whooping it up with him.

“I… Uh…” Scott glanced up, spotting his pack in the stands. They were still cheering, acting like lunatics, while Stiles kept screaming “that’s my son” to everyone he could see and reach within a mile radius. “Thanks… Guys…” He chuckled.

“He’s an Alpha! That’s cheating! Ref, he’s an Alpha, and he used his Aura!”

The fans, teams, and both coaches broke into an immediate silence as Bradley came to his feet, shaking.

Scott and his team stopped in their tracks, watching as referees began surrounding Bradley, speaking in hushed tones with Signal’s coach.

“Excuse me?” Coach Argent said, rushing the field, as he grabbed Scott by the pads, and yanking him off towards the conference happening.

Bradley broke through the officials, and his coach, barely restrained by any of them. “I saw it! That dude, Hale, he had red eyes, and was flashing them at me! That’s cheating! He’s can’t just use Aura to make himself stronger!” Bradley screeched, practically frothing at the mouth, limbs trembling as he pointed right at Scott.

Nervous, hushed tones broke out on both sides of the stadium. Scott glanced back, spotting both of his fathers up out of their seats, and running down from the stands, dashing to the nearest fence.

Coach Argent chuckled, shaking his head. “Young man… Scott Hale isn’t an Alpha.” He turned to Signal’s coach, slamming a hand on Scott’s shoulder. “Scott is Derek and Stiles Hale’s son. As far as I know, our County Alpha hasn’t abdicated his position. Especially not to his teenage son.”

Scott gulped, laughing. “Yeah, no… I think I’d know if I were an Alpha.”

“You’re a fucking liar!” Bradley screamed, held back by his coach from lunging at Scott.

Signal’s coach rubbed the mess of bear on his face. “Still… I don’t think Bradley would make something like that up.” He turned to the official nearest him. “With all due respect to the County Alpha and his pack… Could we please have a quick test? Can we see his eyes?”

The referee nodded. “I don’t see the harm. Argent?”

Chris shook his head. “No, there’s no harm. We have nothing to hide.”

“Very well.” The referee turned to Scott, offering a polite smile. “Young man, can you please flash your eyes for me?”
Scott nodded, removing his helmet. It took little time for him to flash his eyes, where a radiant gold bloomed in the dark night.

“Do you wear contacts, by any chance, young man? I’ve seen some kids these days wearing them for intimidation.” The referee asked.

“No, sir.” Scott said.

“I do believe that settles that.” Coach Argent said, folding his arms. “I wouldn’t allow an Alpha on my team. Though… In the heat of the game, I could understand how a player might mistake it. Probably just a trick of the light.”

Signal’s coach nodded, shaking his head. “My apologies, Coach Argent. Come on, Bradley. We’re getting you some water, and a breather.”

Bradley was less than amicable, as it took two other players and his coach to get him off the field. “He’s cheating! They’re cheating! They’ve got an Alpha on their team! I’m telling you, his eyes were red, and his Aura flattened me! I thought he was going to kill me!”

Scott walked back with Chris, as the referees blew their whistle, restarting the game, where Beacon would have a chance to kick for an extra point.

Coach Argent laughed all the way back to the sideline. “Crazy kids. They’ll come up with any excuse to get out of screwing up a play.”

“Yeah…” Scott nodded, waving to his dads at the fence, both of which seemed to be getting a play by play of the accusation from another official.

“Alright, alright, the Soap Opera’s over with!” Chris yelled, clapping his hands together. “Defensive line, get on out there, and Martinez, get ready to kick!”

Scott took a deep breath, walking back to the bench, until Chris yanked him from the back of his uniform.

“Hale? Where are you going? Get your ass out there!” Chris yelled, pushing him off to the field.

“Huh?” Scott cocked an eyebrow. “First string does all the kick plays.”

Chris chuckled, rolling his eyes. “Hale, you keep playing like that, and cracking heads, and I’ll bump you to first string.” He gave one final push to Scott’s back, shooing him off to the line. “About time you got over being afraid of contact.”

Scott felt his ears twitching eagerly, and a beaming smile cross his face. “Yes, Coach!” He sprinted to the front line, just in time for the play clock to resume.

Over the span of the first half, Scott saw more playing time than he’d ever had all year long. Something new, a primal instinct, grew in his stomach, and gave him the strength of heart to play defense. To smack the people in front of him, protecting his team, and his pack’s honor.

Not Bradley, and especially not anyone else on Signal, dared to insult the Hale Pack. Scott made that clear, play after play, as he continued to smash Bradley back, and into the dirt.

“That’s my nephew!” Tyler cheered after one particularly brutal play, earning several wild giggles from the crowd, and a smack to the back of the head from Melissa and the Sheriff.
Beacon claimed a decisive victory at the end of the fourth quarter, 35 to 10. Mostly due to Beacon’s amazing offensive line, and partially because Signal couldn’t ever get back Scott and the rest of the defensive line, forcing a punt almost each time Signal had the ball.

After the final buzzer rang, ending the game, and after each time gave their congratulations and “good games”, Scott and the rest of the players stripped out of their heavier pads, waltzing off the field, and towards the locker rooms.

Scott, of course, was met with a small army of his Pack, hugging, kissing, and ruffling his hair with hundreds of compliments peppered in between.

“You played a great game out there tonight, son. I’m proud of you.” Derek said, patting Scott firmly on the back.

“A great game?! Uh uh… Our boy was a freaking tank!” Stiles exclaimed, hugging Scott around the neck, beaming from ear to ear. “Scotty, I’m so impressed with you! You’ve worked so hard to get playing time, and it’s paid off. Keep it up, bucko! I’m so proud!”

Scott flashed a bright, white smile, as his chest raced happily. A majority of the pack came around, offering similar congratulations. Duke commented on Scott’s growth as a wolf. Tyler and Xander hung off Scott’s neck, both claiming they wanted to play peewee football when signups happened next. Isaac, Theo, Allison, and Meredith gave their congratulations, commenting on not falling asleep during a game for once (which Scott playfully joked the same about their events). PawPaw and Mawmaw hugged his neck, taking a slew of pictures.

Just when Scott had thought he’d gotten through everyone, a familiar, aged scent hit his nose.

“MY little grandson’s all grown up and playing violent contact sports associated with head injuries. Ah… I feel so old.”

Scott’s face dropped by a mile.

Peeking out from the crowd, Peter Hale waved sneakily from behind Derek and Stiles. Aside from a few more wrinkles, a full set of grey hair, and a softer wardrobe, Peter Hale hadn’t changed all that much since Scott had first met him, when he’d first moved back to Beacon Hills.

“Poppy! You came! You’re here!” Scott dropped his bag, slamming into Peter, hugging the daylight out of him, and preening at his grandfather’s familiar scent. Aside from Thanksgiving and Christmas, the National Alpha didn’t have much in the way of free time. This was the first game Peter had been able to make, since Scott had first started playing football. "When'd you get in?! I thought you weren't supposed to be here for another couple of weeks!"

“HEY! What about me!? What am I? Swiss cheese?!” Laura called out, popping out from behind Derek and waving her hands eagerly.

Scott squealed, releasing Peter and quickly rushing over to his Aunt Laura. Just as busy as Peter, the State Alpha rarely found time to make pleasure trips. “Aunty Laura! What are you doing here?!”

“Oh, you know… Coming to torture my baby brother with red tape. See if I can bribe Isaac to
make me that beautiful dessert of his… Watch my nephew knock heads and take names!” Laura pressed a kiss on Scott’s forehead, before glancing down at her nephew. “Good God, when’d you get so big!?”

“Huh?” Scott asked.

“You’re not kidding. Look at those guns!” Peter chuckled, unable to put his hand around Scott’s bicep.

Scott rose an eyebrow, taking in the sight of his upper body, suddenly realizing how tight his clothes felt. The athletic compression shirt he’d put on before the game had been loose on him, but now the fabric strained against his frame, probably a size too small. Sure, he’d been hitting the weights with the rest of the team, and working on the farm, but… He’d never had muscles like these.

“You really have been working hard!” Stiles whistled, just as taken aback.

Scott felt awkward as the pack poked and prodded his shoulders, laughing nervously.

“Alright, alright, enough guys.” Derek said, pulling Scott away from the group, and chuckling. “How about we go run and get dinner? I’m sure you’re starved.”

Scott nodded immediately, reaching down and retrieving his duffle bag. “Uh… Yeah, sounds good. Let me go change! I’ll be right back!” He rushed away from his family, feeling his entire pack’s eyes all on him. His stomach felt like a huge knot, as he looked up and down his entire body. Everything from his the soles of his feet, up to his thighs, all the way up to his neck, seemed… Bigger. Unnaturally so.

Ducking into the locker room, Scott ignored the rest of his team, taking the furthest corner away from the rest to dress down. With a deep breath, Scott peeled off his shirt, tossing it away to the side, and staring at himself in the mirror.

Scott felt his gut drop, reaching down and running fingers over his… Abs.

Abs which hadn’t been there that morning.

“You’re… Kidding me.” Scott’s eyes bugged out, and he attempted to rub away the sweat on and around them. They had to be a trick of the light, because even in his furthest shift, he’d never had muscles like that. Yet, as he took a second glance, the abs were still there, accompanied by a new patch of fur on his chest, and just underneath his naval. “W… What the actual hell?”

Hopping out of his football pants, Scott had to practically peel them off his body, seeing as they were glued to his thick, muscular thighs, and impressive calves. “No way…”

Taking the full sight in the mirror… Scott looked like he’d aged years in the span of one football game. Aside from the added muscle, Scott felt his body was a tad harder than it had been. Like nothing could possibly pierce it.

Lost in thoughts, Scott soon found himself gazing down at the last bodily part he hadn’t inspected.

“There’s… There’s no way.” Scott mumbled, laughing under his breath.

Scott took a quick peek at his “goods”, peeling away his underwear, for just a second. In an instant, he snapped his underwear back on, choking on air. “That… That wasn’t that big before. That was DEFINITELY not that big before!” He thought, unable to stop a bright red blush from blooming over his face.
Rushing to change fully before anyone saw “it”, Scott chucked gear into his duffle bag, and changing into casual wear. A sweater and jeans he barely was able to force himself into, but seemed to accentuate every curve of his muscle.

Sneaking out to dodge the rest of his team, Scott took the back entrance to the locker room. He gulped, taking a moment to let his body cool in the crisp autumn air. Steam continued to billow off of Scott, as he became aptly aware of how hot he felt, and the deep aches that continued up and down his body, in every muscle imaginable.

“What… What the hell is going on with me? What… What the actual fuck?!” Scott mumbled. As he spun around, searching for an answer, he stopped.

Out in the distance, behind the football locker rooms, and standing atop a hill… Was the Red Beast, and it’s intimidating, powerful aura that it radiated.

Only… The Beast wasn’t its usual self. Just as overwhelmingly power, but much smaller. More wolf, less monster, Scott would have mistaken it for a fully shifted werewolf, like he’d seen in some of Duke’s older stories. It glared in Scott’s distance, the wolf’s red eyes meeting Scott’s. The wolf’s muzzle curled into a sly smile. “Soon.”

Scott took a step towards the Beast. Something deep in his chest rose to the surface, the same sensation he’d felt before piledriving into Bradley.

“Hey Scotty! Hurry up, dingus! We’re all starving!” Theo yelled, casually strolling behind the locker room.

Jumping out of fright, Scott spun, meeting Theo’s gaze. “Y… Yeah! I’m coming! Just… Just a second!”

Theo rose an eyebrow, watching Scott’s every move. “You alright, man?”

Gulping, Scott offered the best smile he could gather up, given the circumstance. “Yeah! Yeah… Just, uh… Kind of wound up after the game, ya know?”

Theo laughed. “You are… About as bad at lying as your Dad is. Oh well, whatever. We’ve all got our secrets.” He rolled his eyes, waving as he walked back off to the football field. “Everyone’s right, though! You’re getting a lot more jacked! Let’s hit the gym together sometime soon! I’d love to get some gains like that!”

“Sure thing!” Scott yelled, stepping forward to run after his pack brother, but stopping as he felt a familiar aura appear, just behind him. HEe spun around, spotting the Red Beast, sitting on its hind legs, glaring into Scott’s gaze.

Silence echoed between them, as Scott’s eyes glowed a bountiful gold, with cracks of red appearing just around the edges. “What are you?” Scott’s chest burned, in a steady, warm blaze.

The wolf huffed, with what appeared to be a coy smile. He nuzzled against Scott’s leg, before vanishing into thin air, leaving a thin ray of red light in its wake. Reaching out, Scott caught a wisp of the red air, as it wafted up to his nostrils.

With a single sniff, Scott felt his stomach knot up, all over again. The Red Beast’s scent matched his own, perfectly.
After dinner, a short celebration on the first floor to welcome Peter and Laura back to their home, and helping move both of Derek’s relatives (and their massive sets of luggage) to the guest rooms, Stiles was beyond ready to finally crash.

Barely reaching the first floor couch, Stiles flopped next to his brothers, Ray, and Alyssa, all in the midst of fighting sleep, trying to watch TV, snuggled up next to each other under a massive blanket.

“Hey guys… Isn’t it past your bedtimes?” Stiles yawned, reaching out and prodding both Tyler and Xander with his finger.

“M’Not sleepy.” Tyler insisted, despite both eyes fluttering close, and a loud, open mouthed yawn.

“Mommy and Daddy said we would have a slumber party on the couch with Ray and Alyssa.” Xander answered, rubbing the sleep away from his eyes.

“Yeah. We’re big kids now, Stiles!” Alyssa insisted, as she let Ray fall asleep on her lap, and her head fell on Xander’s, moments away from snoring.

Stiles chuckled, reaching for a blanket at the edge of the couch, and curling up to the rest of the pups.

“Well… Then I think I’ll join you all. Big kid slumber party, alright?”

Tyler let rip another loud yawn, curling up next to his older brother. “Uh huh… That’s cool… Big… Bro…” In a flash, Tyler was out like a light, snoring lightly on Stiles’ chest.

The pups followed quickly, one by one. Before long, Stiles found himself being used as a pillow and source of warmth for the pups, as they sleepily drug themselves on top of Stiles. Not at all upset with the fact, Stiles grabbed another blanket or two, making sure each of them were wrapped up from the cold.

“The Pack is growing, I see…” Peter said, striding into the living area, from the Second floor. He grinned, peeking over Stiles’ shoulder and looking at the next generation of the Hale Pack.

“Yes. It’s only a matter of time until Lydia and Parrish pop out another one. Erica and Boyd are talking about another one, too.” Stiles answered, patting the seat next for Peter to sit.

Peter smiled, easing into the seat next to Stiles, playfully scratching the top of Ray’s head. “What about you and Derek? Thoughts on having anymore?”

Stiles snorted, letting out a deep chuckle. “When the boys are done with high school, we’re going to play around with the idea of a surrogate for Derek. Right now, though… We have our hands full with pubescent boys, who are about to become horny teenagers that are probably going to hate our guts.”

“Smart men.” Peter nodded, patting Stiles on the knee. “Sorry for waltzing in. I just wanted to peek in on the pups before I went to bed. Haven’t seen them since they were babies.”

Stiles laughed, rubbing the sleep from his eyes. “Yeah… Still can’t believe Tyler and Xander are so big already. Feels like yesterday, they were newborns. Sometimes, I feel more like the fun Uncle than a big brother. Ugh… They call me “old”, Peter.”

“Wait until you start getting called “Grandpa”, and then you can complain.” Peter rolled his eyes,
peeking over and spotting Tyler drool over Stiles’ blanket. “Out of curiosity, is Tyler still asking Santa to be a werewolf? How’s that going over with his parents?”

Stiles let out a deep, tired sigh. “Yeah, he still asks. Now he’s started doing it on birthdays, Easter, and when the tooth fairy pops up.” Stiles reached down, brushing Tyler’s hair out of his face. “Mom and Dad talked about it, and if he still wants it when he’s thirteen, they’ll let him test and see if he’s compatible for the bite. They’ll take him to Psychiatrist too, and make sure it’s something he really wants, and that it’s not a phase. Doctors say the middle of puberty is the best time for it, so… Gives everyone time to think about it. Especially Derek, since he hasn’t actually done anything like that since… Well, since Jax.”

“Xander?” Peter asked, glancing over the other Stilinski twin.

“Nah, not once.” Stiles smiled, glancing over at the “younger” (by about half an hour) of the twins. He snored in and out easily, not quite as noisy as either of his brothers. “Don’t get me wrong, Xander loves the other pups, and idolizes everything that Isaac does, and loves being in the Pack, but… I think Xander just enjoys being human. It feels natural to him.”

“Huh…” Peter tilted his head, curiously. “Why does Tyler want the bite so badly, then?”

“If I had to guess…” Stiles smiled, picturing his little brothers playing around not that long ago with his sons, when they’d just learned to walk. “Probably because he wants to be just like Scott and Theo. He worships the ground those two walk on, and think they’re the greatest thing since Nintendo.”

“Really, now?”

“Yeah, crazy, huh?” Stiles shook his head, chuckling. “Though, I think it’s more than that… Tyler’s an active kid, and loves to run around, climb trees, explore everything he can get his hands on. Theo and Scott were there with him, helping him all the way. He played around with Danny and Ethan’s kids, and grew up in a Pack environment, thinking that Derek and I were just as much his parents, as mom and dad were, because we’re the Alpha and the Alpha’s mate. In reality, he grew up like a wolf, so… It’s not a stretch to think he’d want to be a wolf, too.”

“Hmm.. Well, that makes a certain amount of sense.” Peter nodded, cooing over Alyssa and Ray.

Stiles gulped, rubbing the bags under his eyes. “Peter? Now that I’ve got you alone...”

“Mmm?”

Stiles braced himself, and the painful, icy pit in his stomach. “Why are you here so early?”

Peter froze, biting at the bottom of his lip. “Excuse me?”

Huffing, Stiles shot a dirty glare Peter’s way. “Don’t give me that crap, Peter. You’re not retiring until after the National Finals. You weren’t supposed to be here until the tournament started. Or Laura, for that matter. With the schedule between you two, there’s no way in hell that you two have the time for such an extended, personal stay.”

“Observant.” Peter let out a deep sigh.

Stiles shook his head, offering a short, victorious smile. “Nah, I just know you. You never do anything without a reason.”

Peter rested his head back against the edge of the couch, rubbing the weary wrinkles on his forehead.
“A contact with WOLFE suspects that a Dark Hunter cell might be active in the area. They speculate, based on intel they gained at a hideout in England, that the WERE National Finals could possibly be a target. One of their top agents, apparently, is coming to compete, so they can scour every possible angle.”

A sharp shiver ran down Stiles’ spine. “Peter… What does that mean? Dark Hunters? I thought those were just terrorists out in Europe?”

“It could mean nothing, Stiles.” Peter assured Stiles, reaching over and soothing a fussy Tyler, who began kicking in his sleep. “Dark Hunters are active across the globe. However, they’re so few in number, I doubt they have the manpower to pull off an attack at such a scale, but…” He pointed outside, to the trail of cars that were parked outside the Pack House. “As long as I’m here, WERE will be here to protect me. Laura’s here, as well, with her own forces, and a Second who might actually win this year’s title. A little extra security never hurt anybody.”

“Great.” Stiles shut his eyes. This wasn’t the first time Beacon had dealt with an undesirable group. Especially in the early days of Derek taking the County Seat, several groups had gotten violent, and left everyone in the Pack exhausted from all the drama. “Does Derek know?”

Peter nodded, immediately. “I spoke with him after dinner. He’s going to be allocating more funds to security, and allowing members of WOLFE to enter the territory to do a sweep while they finish constructing the additions to the stadium.”

“That’s a lot of manpower.” Stiles muttered, cocking an eyebrow. The Hale Pack was nothing to laugh at, with two fully trained members of WERE, Erica, Boyd, and the Mahealans. They also had the Sheriff’s Department, countless alliances throughout California, and had the support of every local pack within the city limits of Beacon Hills. Adding WERE, the National Alpha, the State Alpha, the State Alpha’s forces, and WOLFE into the mix? They practically had a standing army at this point.

Peter balled his hand into a tight fist. His eyes flashed red. “Beacon… Cannot fall. We have to protect it, at all costs.”

Taken aback by Peter’s display of fear, Stiles reached over, palming his hand over Peter’s fist. “Peter?”

The National Alpha let out a pained sigh. “The entire world will be watching the National Finals, Stiles. They’re going to watch the strongest wolves in this country, fighting for the right to be crowned the strongest wolf in North America, and see my daughter, the new Alpha of the North American Continent, be crowned.” Peter stood up, pacing back and forth across the first floor. “They’re going to be watching it happen live, in Beacon HIlls. The town of Hope, built by my son, and my son in law. The only place of true peace between humans and the supernatural, in terms of true equality. The only city in the entire planet ran by a wolf and a human.”

Stiles offered a meek smile. “Come on, Peter, you’re exaggerating…”

“Stiles…” Peter stopped in the middle of the living room, shooting a serious glare Stiles’ way. “Only in Beacon Hills, would I be able to watch a football team be coached by a Hunter, filled with human and non human players, who appeared to be having fun collaborating together. A sport, I might add, being watched with stands full of humans and nonhumans, cheering and celebrating their children, without conflict.”

Awe struck in Stiles’ head. It had been so long since he’d been in high school himself, that he’d forgotten that most sports way back when had been segregated between human and nonhuman
teams. He recalled fights over stadium space, and games being cancelled over the stupidest of arguments.

Scott had been lucky, growing up to experience playing and learning with children of all races.

Peter smiled, chuckling quietly to himself. “People look to Beacon for guidance. On how to run a County, both financially, and socially. You and Derek… I don’t think either of you realize that you’re both idols for people all across the globe. People want to live in your town, hear you speak, and emulate everything that you do.”

Dropping his head, Stiles let out a sizable gulp. In the past few years, both he and Derek had gone on several speaking engagements. Requests had been coming far more frequently alongside interview requests. Stiles hadn’t put two and two together, thinking people only cared about Derek, or were focused on the population boom. “I knew that we were popular… What with Derek and I being married, everyone idolizing him as the one that took down Kali, and us running the town together, I just… “I guess I didn’t realize HOW popular.”

“You are…” Peter paused, taking his seat next to Stiles once again. “A hot topic of conversation in International Politics. I’d be prepared to be hounded at the National Finals with plenty of vocal dinner guests, whose asses I’d highly suggest kissing.”

“Great. Lovely. Because I needed more stress in my life.” Stiles joked, as a web in his chest flexed, leaving his heart a little strained from exertion.

Peter chuckled, reaching over and putting an arm around Stiles’ shoulder. He took his spot on the couch, watching over the rest of the pups as he shut his eyes. “Just relax Stiles. On my honor as an Alpha… Nothing is going to happen. I won’t allow it to. All of this is just extra precautions.”

Stiles scoffed, wrapping his arms around the pups, and yawning loudly. “Better not, or I’m kicking you out of my house, and your wrinkly werewolf ass can find a hotel to mooch off of in your retirement.”

“I’m glad my son picked you for a mate. You’re such a charming man.” Peter joked, rolling his eyes, as he flicked a finger against Stiles’ head.

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A/N: Your comments and thoughts are always appreciated!

I’d also like to apologize for the lack of updates. November was crazy for me, as I fought off the flu, a case of pink eye, and a work week from hell. Thankfully, I'm back at full speed, and happy to say that regular updates should be returning! :)

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