All In

by myredturtle

Summary

Scott finally pulls a stunt so boneheaded that Stiles can't think of any way to get him out of it. Hoping to outrun the fallout, he packs up his father and they move to Canada. Unfortunately, nowhere is safe.

Notes

This is my first finished Teen Wolf story! Lots of thanks to Alinora for her great beta, and for Miriel for checking for plot holes!
Chapter one

Stiles' friendship with Scott went through its last death throes on his first trip home from University.

When Stiles made the decision to accept a full ride scholarship offer – rather than go to the local community college – he knew that it was inevitable that he would be excluded somewhat from the pack.

However, he had specifically chosen to study close enough to Beacon Hills so that it wouldn’t be too much of a hassle to go home if he was needed for emergencies. He had told Scott this.

Scott had insisted that he understood, and promised that he would consult Stiles before attempting anything magical.

After Lydia had declared that she no longer wanted anything to do with supernatural business before leaving for Stanford, Stiles was left as the sole competent researcher the pack had. He was also the pack member with the best magical contacts, since Deaton wasn’t considered pack.

The last thing Stiles had expected to discover when he came home for Christmas was that Scott had teamed up with Chris Argent, and that together they had resurrected Gerard Argent.

Scott came over to invite Stiles to join in with the pack bowling night, which was incidentally something that Stiles had already been planning to attend, since he assumed he’d automatically be invited. Apparently not, it seemed Stiles now needed the official invite from the Alpha.

When Stiles mentioned the lack of crazy supernatural action while he had been gone, Scott had mentioned – in passing! – that Gerard had been very useful since his resurrection.

“What the fuck, dude?” Stiles said, torn between shock and anger. “Gerard was resurrected? Who the hell did such a monumentally stupid thing like that? Wait wait, he’s been helpful? You did this? What part of ‘consult me before performing any magic’ did you not understand?”

“You were better off out of it,” Scott explained somewhat testily. “You should get out of this supernatural freak show while you still can. It was best to let you settle in, make ties elsewhere.”
“So, you decided that it was up to you to make these decisions on my behalf, did you?” Stiles was vaguely surprised there weren’t actual flames coming out of his ears, his anger was so red hot. “And while you were on such an epic wonderful decision making roll, you thought it would be a good idea to resurrect a genocidal maniac?”

“We needed access to his knowledge,” Scott said, his jaw set stubbornly. “I’m the Alpha, it was my decision to make.”

“Oh my god, can you even hear yourself?” Stiles yelled, feeling helpless in the face of Scott’s obstinacy.

“Chris made sure that his father will be kept under his control,” Scott went on, as if Stiles hadn’t said anything. “We were helpless against the Furies, and we needed answers fast. Chris was back in town, so we talked and agreed that Gerard was our best option.”

“The Furies?” Stiles gaped in shock. What the fuck had been going on while he was away? It was only his first semester!

“They killed Jono – the newest member of my pack, you never met him – and passed a message through Isaac that they would be performing a ‘more thorough cleansing’ at the next full moon,” Scott explained, although he looked annoyed at having to do so. “We needed answers in a hurry, and since Deaton didn’t have any I went to Chris.”

“Scott… what did you do to the Furies?” Stiles asked, not sure he wanted to know. He’d taken his role as pack researcher seriously, and used the opportunity of being at University to expand his database and become as knowledgeable about as many things that might be headed their way as possible.

There wasn’t much information about the Furies available, but pretty much everything Stiles had been able to corroborate had indicated that the Furies only turned up once or twice a century, and that while they left devastation in their wake, they only targeted the corrupt.

The majority of Scott’s pack would have been safe already, and the very presence of the Furies was a pretty clear statement that something was badly wrong. Something that needed to be righted, that wasn’t being taken care of.

“Gerard had the information we needed to banish them,” Scott said impatiently. “Look, this has all
been taken care of and I don’t want to have to go over it all again. If something was going to go wrong, it would have happened already.”


“Just from this plane,” Scott replied in long-suffering tones. “Deaton assured me they wouldn’t be hurt, they just wouldn’t be able to come back. Anyway, that’s enough. This conversation is over. Do you want to come along to the pack bowling night, or not?”

“No,” Stiles said, looking Scott full in the face, more furious than he had ever been with him. Which was saying something, considering some of Scott’s previous stunts. Right this moment Stiles hated Scott for pushing him into making the decision he knew he needed to make.

In the end, there wasn’t really much choice. Stiles knew what he had to do. He had his dad to take care of, and Scott had made it pretty obvious that he didn’t have any use for Stiles any more. “Dude, I’m clearly not part of your pack, so I won’t intrude myself on your little tea-party.”

Scott frowned. “That’s not what I meant, Stiles, stop over-reacting. Look, I don’t have time to deal with this right now, I’m already going to be late. I’ll see you tomorrow?”

“I’m spending tomorrow with my dad,” Stiles said, not bothering to feign regret. “It’ll have to be another day. Hey,” he called as Scott turned down the path, something pinging in his brain. “What did Derek say? About Gerard?”

“I didn’t tell him,” Scott said, turning back so that Stiles had a good view of him rolling his eyes. “He’s not pack, and he doesn’t even live here any more. It’s really none of his business.”

Stiles let Scott go, wondering if there was any way he could fix Scott’s latest fuck up. He’d gone and banished the Furies, arguably one of the pillars holding supernatural stability together. Banished them from this plane. And Deaton had helped him.

Well, that rather succinctly proved all of his vague suspicions and fears about the infuriatingly unhelpful vet to be correct. No one with the resources Deaton had at his command, and who was as dedicated to the balance as Deaton professed to be, could pull such a moronic move. Deaton obviously had a different agenda, and Stiles didn’t have a clue as to what it could possibly be. Just that balance and stability clearly weren’t desirable components.
Stiles pulled his phone out of his pocket as he went back inside. Regardless of what Scott thought, Derek needed to know that Gerard Argent was up and walking around again.

Fuck Scott and his 'I’m the Alpha' bullshit anyway.

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To say that Derek wasn’t pleased was a slight understatement. All right, a massive, fucking gigantic understatement. He retained just enough civility to thank Stiles before ringing off.

When Stiles tried that number again a few weeks later, it was out of service. Stiles tried to muster up the old anger, but it just wouldn’t come. He understood all too well the importance of keeping what you had left, safe.

It’s why he’d convinced his dad to leave Beacon Hills, despite the deep seated reluctance they both felt at moving away from the place where Stiles’ mother was buried.

It had taken some persuading, but in the end John Stilinski loved his live son more than he loved wallowing in the memory of his dead wife, and within a month they had both relocated to Canada. John pulled a few strings to get himself fast-tracked into a detective position in the city that Stiles had transferred his studies to.

Stiles no longer had that full ride he’d worked so hard for, but quite frankly, at this point money was the least of his worries. How crazy was it to be hoping like hell that your student debt would end up being something to worry about in a few years?

Stiles hoped, rather than believed, that he and his dad had distanced themselves enough from Scott and the Argents to escape the inevitable fallout of the stupidest decision since Fox cancelled Firefly.

It didn’t take long for Stiles to discover that he was right to be worried.

The first case of zombie-ism came a mere two weeks after Stiles and his father had gotten settled. They hadn’t even completely finished their unpacking yet.
That first shocking case made international headlines. Oh, they weren’t calling it ‘zombie-ism’, but Stiles was no fool and he knew what the symptoms added up to.

He immediately went to the nearest supermarket – despite it being the middle of the night – and stocked up on non-perishable goods, dipping into what was left of their savings to make sure he and his dad would be as well supplied as possible.

If he wasn't so worried, it might have been funny. The store was unusually full for that time of night, and most of the other shoppers conformed to a certain stereotype.

He met the eyes of male and female sci-fi geeks of all ages with a grim recognition. There were nods of camaraderie exchanged, but no one smiled.

Trolley after trolley of canned vegetables and meat, sacks of rice... everyone was buying in bulk. The shelves were emptying fast, and the queue at the checkout took forever.

By the time his father awoke the next morning, Stiles had already unpacked and repacked the jeep several times, trying to get as much into the limited space as possible.

Half an hour later they were on their way out of town.

victim-victim-victim

Less than a week later, the whole world had fallen to chaos. By then Stiles and his father were high in the Cypress Hills, barricaded into a sturdy wooden cabin that had been extremely cheap to hire, probably because it was the off-season. Not that money was going to matter much soon.

The last information they'd received from Beacon Hills was an email from Scott to Stiles’ old gmail account. Scott had sent it to notify Stiles that Lydia had taken her own life, the rising number of dead something she was unable to bear. According to Scott, Peter Hale had been found dead that same day, and while it grieved Stiles to know that Lydia was gone, he was viciously happy that Peter was no longer around.

It wasn't long after that that the internet went down for the last time and the phone lines went silent.
The old hand powered radio that John had brought along wasn’t picking up much either, but that didn’t stop Stiles from cranking it each day and sifting through the channels, hoping to hear something comforting.

The only things he ever heard were too garbled for him to make any sense out of them.

Then, three months after they had gone into the mountains, Stiles and his father cautiously made their way back down.

What they found wasn’t as bad as Stiles had feared, but not as good as he’d hoped.

There were still zombies roaming the streets, even if they were relatively few and far between, given the previous population. Worse than that were the many bodies in advanced states of decomposition.

Fire had consumed a lot of the city, and the buildings that were still standing showed unmistakable signs of forced entry and looting.

They made their way through the navigable parts of the city in near silence. It didn't take long for them to come to the decision that there was nothing for them here anymore, and they headed out of town.

Stiles and his father both carried projectile and bladed weapons at all times now.

Also, Stiles was becoming disturbingly competent at head-shots. Of course, it helped that his targets moved very slowly.

Slow but inexorable, that was what the zombies were. The best way to stop them for good was a head-shot, followed by decapitation. If you didn’t remove the head, they would continue on eventually, and if you didn’t go for a head shot first, there was a chance they would get a lucky swipe in while you got close enough to take the head.

The worst were the children.

Stiles chose not to think about it.
Both Stilinski men had become very proficient at slicing through fuel lines to collect petrol from abandoned vehicles. Using whatever fuel and food they could scavenge, they slowly made their way towards the cabin John’s cousin David had in Maine, a solitary place on the edge of Caribou Lake. David had been highly enthusiastic about making his getaway as self-sufficient as possible, and hopefully it was isolated enough to still be habitable.

John and Stiles had visited it once, not long after Claudia died. At the time they had wondered why weird cousin David had bought a place so far from civilisation, but now it was as good a place as any to head for.

They'd also appropriated someone's single axle caged flat deck trailer, which made life a lot easier. Stiles had hated leaving useful things behind due to lack of storage space. He thanked providence that someone in the past had thought to have tow bar installed on his trusty jeep.

They stopped in a small town halfway through Quebec, and that was when they came across the first other living person that they’d seen since they first headed into the mountains all those months ago.

Stiles was deftly removing the petrol from a car sitting in a carpark, while John checked out a nearby restaurant to see if there was any non-perishable food still available.

The sound of another vehicle approaching was as panic inducing as it was exciting.

Stiles didn’t know if he wanted the other driver to stop, or if he hoped they could avoid each other.

It was a split second decision, and Stiles decided to hide. He’d read all of the books, seen the movies. He was perfectly aware that the chances of the person in the approaching vehicle being a ‘good guy’ were slim. In the movies the hero always risked it, and it always turned to shit.

This might not be a movie, and he was sure as hell no hero, but there was no point in ignoring lessons in sensibility just because they were taught by fiction.

Decision made, Stiles moved quickly to where his father was just starting to come out of the restaurant.
“Did I hear-” John started, only for Stiles to hush him.

“We have no idea who or what that is,” Stiles whispered urgently. “I think it's better to hide. Come on.”

John followed Stiles back inside with a shrug, and they both peered out of the window.

It wasn’t long before a huge vehicle – that more closely resembled an armoured tank than a car – was making its steady way along the road, coming from the direction that Stiles and John were headed.

Stiles held his breath as he waited for it to go past. Surely the jeep looked like just another abandoned vehicle, left by one of the billions of victims of whatever had caused the zombie apocalypse.

The truck sped up, and then came to a screeching halt, right smack bang between the two in hiding and their only means of escape.

Stiles cursed under his breath, and checked his gun, noticing his father doing the same beside him. The seconds dragged by as he waited for the truck to start moving again.

Instead, over the sound of the engine, he heard his name called in a familiar voice, a voice that he’d never thought he would ever hear again. Around the side of the idling truck came a familiar figure, one he’d never thought to see again.

“Stiles!” that voice called again, and the caller then zeroed unerringly in on the restaurant and began heading towards them at a fast jog.

“Derek?” Stiles yelped, unable to take his eyes away.

Derek looked the same. Same black jeans, same leather jacket. Distinctly more scruff than the designer stubble he’d been wearing the last time Stiles had seen him, but still very recognisably Derek Hale.

Derek Fucking Hale.
It was obvious by the speed with which he was moving that he wasn’t zombie-fied in any way, so Stiles handed his gun to his father, in too much of a hurry to take proper care of it, and practically ran outside to meet him.

Stiles didn’t think he’d ever seen Derek this pleased to see him, and that included those times when he’d saved Derek’s life.

“Stiles,” Derek almost gasped out, and then Stiles was dragged into a hug that threatened to asphyxiate him. “You’re still alive, how are you still alive? And the Sheriff? Are the others here too?” Then the ability for speech seemed to leave him, and he ducked his head into Stiles neck, taking deep heaving breaths through his nose.

After a minute had gone by, Stiles was still enveloped in Derek’s crushing embrace. Derek’s nose was still buried in his neck and Stiles couldn’t get enough breath in him to answer, or speak at all really. He flailed his arms, hoping to convey the issue to either his father or Derek, only to hear his father snort.

“Well, Hale, it looks like you’ve hit upon a fool-proof method of finally shutting him up,” John said, his voice warm.

Derek finally lifted his head and released Stiles from his embrace, but only so that he could hold him at arm’s length, those big hands cradling Stiles’ shoulders. Their eyes met for a long, emotionally charged moment before Derek broke the gaze.

“It’s just us,” Stiles said, dragging his eyes all over Derek, cataloguing everything that was different, everything that was the same. “We left Beacon Hills months before the zombie apocalypse started. I honestly never expected to see anyone we knew from there ever again.”

“What about you?” John asked. “Do you have any companions you’re travelling with?”

Derek dropped his arms and looked away. The shake of his head was almost unnecessary, the rest of his body language was quite clear.

“Cora?” Stiles was hesitant to ask, but maybe it would be better to get it out of the way.
“Killed by hunters,” Derek said, his face blank. “About a month after we last spoke.”

“Fucking hell, Derek, I’m sorry.” Stiles exchanged a helpless glance with his father. “This might not be the best time to tell you that last we heard from Beacon Hills, Peter had died as well.”

Stiles hadn’t realised it was possible for Derek’s face to go even more blank. God, it looked awful. “We didn’t get much info, just that he was found dead the same day that Lydia...” Stiles broke off, unable to continue. It was all so fucking unfair.

“Lydia was unable to deal with the effect that so much death was having on her abilities,” John said gruffly, filling the silence. “She took her own life.”

“Peter was found dead the same day?” Derek asked, his body relaxing slightly, his brows drawing together.

“Yes?” Stiles answered. “That was pretty much the entirety of the information we got.”

“It makes sense,” Derek said eventually. “Lydia was the vessel that brought him back, once she was dead his passport expired, so to speak.”

“Good point,” Stiles said, considering it. He hadn’t really thought much about it. Lydia’s death was still a sore point for him, he couldn’t help but wonder if he could have helped her in any way.

But then Lydia had cut communication with him months before he and his dad had pulled up stakes, so even if he had stayed in Beacon Hills, there was no guarantee she would have even talked to him about it.

“I can’t believe that you’re both okay,” Derek said abruptly, giving Stiles and John thorough once-overs. Stiles even caught the flare of nostrils that meant that the nosey werewolf was sniffing them, albeit more discretely than Scott ever managed.

“We headed to the mountains to wait out the worst of it,” Stiles said with a shrug. “It didn’t take a genius to figure out the probable progression once that first case was reported. To be honest, I’m surprised we haven’t come across any other survivors. The supermarket was packed with geeks preparing for the apocalypse.”
“They might not have been quite so paranoid as you are,” John said dryly. He turned to Derek. “I was ready to head back down after a week or two, but Stiles insisted we stay at least three months.”

“That might have saved your lives,” Derek said sombrely. “It was a good two months before the worst was over. It turns out that werewolves are immune to the zombie infection, so being casually exposed won’t hurt us. Get enough of them in one place though, and even a werewolf can be taken down and ripped to pieces. We’re not invincible, after all. I discovered that one the hard way.”

Stiles winced, and saw his father doing the same thing.

“Are you going anywhere in particular?” Stiles asked, hoping that Derek would say no. It wasn’t as if he’d missed the grumpy werewolf, it would just be better to have another dependable person around.

Derek looked uncomfortable. “I’ve been feeling a bit of a draw from this direction, and since it’s not like I had anything better to do, I thought I’d follow it.”

“What kind of draw?” Stiles was not holding his breath. He was perfectly calm, and only asking to be polite. He had nothing invested in Derek’s answer at all, thank you very much.

Derek glared at him witheringly.

“Stiles and I would be happy to have you stay with us,” John interjected, sounding rather more amused than Stiles really appreciated. “If you want to. Right, Stiles?”

Derek hesitated, looking searchingly at Stiles, as if he was expecting Stiles to disagree. “If you’re sure?” he said, sounding so wary that Stiles hurried to reassure him.
“Yes,” Stiles replied. “Of course, we’d love for you to join us. I mean, it would be safer for all of us, right?”

“Whatever,” John said. “I hadn’t finished checking out that kitchen. Why don’t you two argue over transport and whatnot, and let me know when you’re ready to leave.”

“Derek and I aren’t going to argue,” Stiles said indignantly to his father’s retreating back. “We’re both sensible adults, and of course it makes more sense for us to take the jeep!”

“Excuse me?” Derek said, his earlier hesitance gone. “In what world does taking your jeep make sense? It looks like it’s held together with duct tape!”

“Look, it may be old, but at least we know how to fix the basics if it breaks down,” Stiles replied heatedly. “What the hell are we supposed to do with that rig of yours if something breaks down? Do you know how to fix it?”

“There are trucks like these scattered all over the place,” Derek argued. “At least if it comes to that we’ll have ready availability of parts.”

“Still no use if you don’t know what you’re doing,” Stiles said, enunciating the words slowly. He turned and began to walk back to where his jeep was waiting. “Look, we both know I’m going to win this argument, so why don’t you just give in gracefully? Now come and help me sort out how we’re going to stash everything.”

Derek gave a frustrated growl, before following after Stiles. “I don't know why I was so happy to see you. Obviously my memory was playing tricks on me, but it's all coming back to me now.”

Stiles felt like laughing. Maybe things were starting to look up?

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It was a little bit awkward at first, having his dad and Derek share so much time together. It didn't last though, and when it was gone Stiles had ample time to mourn the initial silence.
It wasn't long before John started asking Derek innocent sounding questions about the things that had gone on when Derek had first arrived back in Beacon Hills, and Derek didn't seem inclined to be cagey.

So all of those bits that Stiles had glossed over when he and his father had sat down to talk about things after the Darach incident were gone over with a fine tooth comb.

And once they got properly talking and forgot to keep things like arrest records between them, John and Derek got on great. Stiles had never heard Derek talk this much. He'd rarely heard his dad talk this much.

Stiles was not pouting. He wasn't.

He was pleased that his dad and Derek were getting on so well. He was delighted that they both followed the same sports teams – and since when was Derek a sports nut, anyway? And of course he was thrilled that they were both Star Trek TOS nerds, and could quote whole conversations of dialogue at each other. Why wouldn't he be overjoyed?

“Oh, don't be such a buzz-kill,” John said, when he finally noticed Stiles sulking. “Sue me for being glad to have someone else to talk to for a change. I don't know if you're aware of this, Stiles, but you tend to monopolise the conversation at times.”

Stiles sputtered in outrage, but was secretly charmed by Derek's attempts to stifle his sniggering. Until he spoke up, anyway.

“I think that's the politest way I've ever heard anyone tell Stiles he's a babblemouth,” Derek said, with a lame attempt at a straight face.

Stiles glared at him in the rear-view mirror, plotting revenge.

“Come on, don't be such a sourpuss,” Derek said with a smug grin, and Stiles had to laugh.

“Stop baiting me and get the map book out,” he said, wondering how they'd managed to get to this place of ease after everything that had happened, everything that was still happening. “I don't want to get stuck in any of the towns, so we need the best routes around them.”
It wasn't until Derek had been with them for nearly a week that he asked where they were headed.

“I've been waiting for you to ask that question,” John said, sounding amused.

“It doesn't really matter,” Derek shrugged, “I'm just curious.”

“It doesn't really matter,” Stiles repeated. “What if we were headed to Ecuador?”

“Then we've been going in the wrong direction,” Derek said blandly.

“My cousin has… had a cabin near one of the lakes in Maine,” John interrupted with an eyeroll. “It's always been pretty well equipped, and there's a water wheel that can provide electricity, so long as we can keep it working. It seemed as good a place as any. Now be quiet for a while, I want to see if I can get some sleep.”

They travelled in silence for the next half an hour, until John started snoring behind them.

“So, do our plans meet with your approval, Mr Werewolf?” Stiles asked.

“Sounds fine,” Derek said indifferently. “I'm just glad I'm no longer alone.”

“How long were you by yourself?” Stiles asked. He'd been wondering, but there never seemed to be the right moment to bring it up. At least his dad was currently asleep, and Derek must be used to Stiles asking awkward questions by now.

“Since not long after it all started,” Derek said quietly, staring out the window. “I fell in with another lone wolf briefly, but he got careless. He thought we were invincible, and liked to go into high density zombie areas just so that he could have a fight.”
“Right,” Stiles said with a grimace, remembering what Derek had said when they found him. “All it takes is one miscalculation, I suppose.”

“He was too far away,” Derek said, shoulders hunched slightly. “By the time I realised what was happening, I was too late to do anything about it. Just someone else I failed, I guess.”

“Derek, you can't think that his death is in anyway your fault!” Stiles said glancing over. Yep, that was the familiar pose of 'pretending nothing was wrong' that Stiles had gotten so used to seeing back when Derek was the Alpha and trying to keep his rag-tag pack together and alive.

Derek's silence spoke volumes to those fully versed in Derek-speak. Stiles liked to think of himself as an expert.

“I know nothing I say will convince you,” Stiles said with a sigh. “You've had so much bad shit happen in your life that I'm actually pretty impressed you're still up and moving around, to be honest. Just… cut yourself a break once in awhile, okay?”

Derek stayed silent but the next time Stiles glanced over his shoulders had relaxed slightly, the leather of his jacket losing that stretched look.

“Hey, how come you still have your leather jacket?” Stiles asked, his mind sidetracked for the moment. “The whole world burns, but the jacket survives? That's some epic shit right there. What if none of this is real, and we're all just characters in the story of the epic life of a leather jacket?”

“Shut up, Stiles,” Derek said wearily, and it was so familiar that Stiles had to stop himself from punching the air in triumph.

“No, come on, dude, think about it,” Stiles went on, feigning obliviousness. “The shit that's happened since I've met you is some bad ass fantasy/sci-fi shit. What if we're all just playing out the drama that another life form, a life form of leather jackets, is constructing to amuse itself? And Scott got a spin off, cause if you recall, none of that True Alpha stuff came up until after he'd started wearing leather on a regular basis!

“Or maybe this is all just revenge for being meat eaters? Maybe we're in all this shit cause it's really the antelope that control everything, and this is karma for enjoying steak! Or maybe-”
Stiles would have continued, but even he found it hard to talk with a hand over his mouth.

“Stiles,” Derek said, flashing his eyes at him. “Shut. Up. Eyes on the road.”

Stiles nodded and went back to watching the road, struck dumb by the fact that Derek’s eyes had changed again. Even after Derek moved his hand, it was a while before he felt able to make any kind of coherent statement.

“Your eyes!” Okay, so maybe Stiles still wasn't terribly coherent, but there were reasons, okay? “When did they change again? What does it mean?”

“It happened just before the zombies started appearing,” Derek said, withdrawing again. “It doesn't feel like the Alpha power though. I can't really explain what it feels like.”

“They didn’t go red, or blue, or gold,” Stiles said, fascinated. “They were the same colour as your eyes usually are, but it was like a light had gone on behind them, lighting them up. Do you have any new powers, has anything else changed?”

“I can still do both a Beta and an Alpha shift,” Derek said uncomfortably. “But the moon no longer calls to me, and my control is different. Things are less… primal? Simple?”

“If you don't feel the pull of the moon, and it doesn't make you change, are you even a werewolf any more?” Stiles' mind was turning over everything he knew about supernatural transformations. “Are you still susceptible to mountain ash and wolfsbane?”

“I don't know,” Derek was starting to sound irritated now, not that it bothered Stiles at all. “I've not really had the opportunity to find out. What does it matter?”

“Dude, don't you want to know?” Stiles asked. “If it was me, I'd definitely want to know.”

“Would you want to be treated like a science experiment?” Derek growled.

“Hey, back up, dude,” Stiles said, braking to a halt so that he could give Derek his full attention. “You are not a science experiment to me, okay? But sticking our heads in the sand and ignoring
something that might either help or hinder us later is not the way to go. Whether you want to find out or not, we need to know.”

Derek didn’t say anything, but his eyebrows went from glare level seven back down to three. Since his resting face was a glare, that was as good as Stiles could hope for, given the topic under discussion.

“Now, I believe it's pretty much your turn to drive,” Stiles said, unbuckling his seat belt. “Come on, switch with me. Dad's still asleep, so that means I get shot-gun. Truly, if you snooze, you lose!”

This time Derek's sigh was back to his usual Stiles-induced irritation. Stiles thought that he could probably count that as a win.

That night, they decided to have one of their infrequent stops, rather than continue driving through the night. Main highways and motorways were too obstructed by abandoned vehicles and decomposing bodies to be navigable, which meant a lot of time poring over maps to find alternative routes through back roads.

Sometimes those roads were narrow and unsealed, other times they needed to move large cars and trucks blocking the way before they could get the jeep through, and as a result they weren't making nearly as much headway as they would have if they were still able to drive the main roads.

With Derek's help, finding places to stay was much easier. Derek could not only tell if there were any surviving zombies nearby, his nose was also good for sniffing out things like candle wax so that they could have some light after dark, which meant that they could play cards. Derek had brought a pack with him, and had produced it almost shyly when Stiles was complaining of boredom one evening.

So, with the zombies rather few and far between, Stiles, John, and Derek, began stopping for the night with slightly more frequency.

Their hotel for the night was an old farmhouse. It had soft beds, warm blankets, and for the big score, a generator hooked up to the electricity.

Even as its loud clatter filled up the quiet with proof that it was still operational, Stiles was making plans to remove it and take it with them. All the travelling had whittled down their supplies so there might even be enough room for it without discarding anything!
“Right,” John said, turning to face Stiles and Derek. “I've seen a system like this before. If we light the fire in the wood burner, then that should start the water heating. It might take a few hours, but we should have enough water for a quick wash tonight, and more for showers tomorrow.”

“We could stay a few days and get some washing done?” Stiles suggested. “I know it's not a priority, but since everything we need is here-”

“We're not on any sort of timetable, are we?” Derek asked. “If we're going to stay long enough for me to process everything properly then I can bring in some fresh meat. It won't take long to set up a smoking pit, provided there's enough fuel around. Which is unlikely to be a problem, places like this tend to over-stock rather than under-stock.”

“Fine with me,” John agreed. “I'm not the apocalypse expert. If you're both happy with staying a few days, then I might as well leave ransacking the kitchen until later. Right then, get hopping. That wood burner isn't going to light itself.”

When it came down to it, Stiles wasn't happy with the idea of sleeping separately from his two companions. With a mental shrug, he pulled three mattresses off their beds and dragged them down the stairs and into the main room. It would be nice to sleep in comfort for a change.

After dinner and a rudimentary wash, they sat around the dining room table with their pack of cards and played poker for matchsticks. The candlelight cast a soft glow, and there were times when Stiles forgot about the zombies, and that they were some of the last people alive in the world.

He got caught up in the game, and the challenge of bluffing while playing a werewolf who was a pretty good lie detector. It turned out his dad was a bit of a card shark, and had counting cards down pat. And Derek was occasionally smiling.

Eventually, John shoved his entire stack of matchsticks towards the centre. “This is my last hand for tonight, I think. I'm looking forward to crashing on that comfy looking mattress. Consider me all in.”

Rather than deal the hand, Derek pushed John's matchsticks back and carefully put the cards back in the box. “I think we can leave things as they are. Who knows, we might want to play again tomorrow? Stiles and I can take watch tonight, you get some sleep. Stiles, come on. I'll show you around the perimeter. It looks different in the dark.”
John gave them the amused look he'd been giving them both lately, before saying goodnight and rolling himself into his blankets.

Stiles followed Derek outside. He knew perfectly well what his father thought was happening, and although he would definitely not be averse to having Derek fuck his brains out, he didn't think that Derek had any such intentions. Which was a pity, cause surely the end of the world and the fact no one else was around should be a good enough reason for him to want a piece of Stiles.

Unless Derek was interested in slightly more aged meat? Nah, Derek had never given any indications that he was attracted to Stiles' dad. Of course, even if he was, his dad was straight. They'd had that conversation years ago, when Stiles had tried to set him up with the man at the health food store.

“You know he thinks we've come out here to bang, don't you?” Stiles said as soon as they'd closed the front door behind them.

Derek gave him that look like he was insane, and Stiles tried not to let it ruin his good mood.

“Why would I have sex with you outside when there are still perfectly good beds in this house?” Derek asked, sounding baffled, and Stiles' stomach gave a lurch.

“That's not an 'I would never have sex with you, Stiles’,” Stiles said, his voice a bit higher than he would have liked. So much for sounding suave.

“Why would I say something so ridiculously untrue?” Derek said, sounding exasperated.

“You want to do it with me?” Stiles said, his voice still on the high side. “Since when?”

“That's not important,” Derek said impatiently. “I wanted to talk to you about your dad.”

“You want to bang my dad too?” Stiles asked, still fixated on what seemed to him to be a very important issue.

“Stiles, focus. Yes, I do want to have sex with you. No, I don't want to have sex with your father.
Stiles felt frozen in place. He hadn't exactly forgotten his father’s circulatory issues, he'd just been hoping against hope that they wouldn't be a problem anymore. It wasn't like they had access to the medication the doctors had started prescribing just over a year ago.

And most of the recommended ways to naturally lower blood pressure weren't really applicable right now. Once they got to David's cabin and could get started on growing some fresh vegetables then that should change, but first they had to get there.

“Stiles. Stiles!” Derek was shaking him. “He doesn't appear to be about to fall over dead any time soon, I just thought you would like to know that it's slowly getting worse. I think if we slow down a bit, take more breaks, try to vary our diet a bit, he'll be fine.”

“Would-” Stiles sat down abruptly and put his head between his legs, concentrating on his breathing until he felt a bit calmer. “If you gave him the bite, would that- Can you even give people the bite? Are you even still a werewolf? Oh god, I can't lose my dad, Derek. I can't.”

“I don't know if I can give the bite again,” Derek said, crouching beside him. “Even if I could, the chances of it taking drastically reduce every year over the age of thirty. If I tried to give him the bite, it's highly probable that he would die. I'm sorry.”

And he was, it was written all over his face and body language.

“No, don't make this another thing that you beat yourself up over, Derek Hale!” Stiles said, angry all of a sudden. “Like a lot of things that you take personally, this is not your fault. We've known about this for years now, since before I even met you. Why do you think I was so insistent that he not know what was going on?

“So now we know, and we can start taking steps, like you said. It's not like there's a deadline or something, we can take as long as we need to get to David's. First thing, we stay here until we're all rested. You can get the meat sorted, and I'll poke around and see what else is available.”

“Do you even know what's poisonous and what isn't?” Derek asked, rising to his feet and putting a hand down to pull Stiles to his feet.
“My mother knew everything there was to know about plants, thank you very much,” Stiles said, relaxing back into the friendly ribbing that had become so comforting. “She taught me a lot about how to recognise things that are edible, ways to check before I accidentally killed myself. Also how to harvest things sustainably, so that we do as little damage to the ecosystem as possible.”

“I bet you were a terror even then,” Derek said. “Come on, I'll show you the perimeter. It will be up to the two of us to guard it at night. John will do better if he can get some proper sleep.”

“God, I miss the internet,” Stiles grumbled as he fell into step beside Derek. “Okay then, show me our territory. And after that we can go back to the house and fuck like bunnies.”

Derek tripped over a tree root, and Stiles had to grin. They were going to make sure his dad was okay, and then he was going to get some hot werewolf action. Yep, all things considered, good day.

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“Oh my god, why haven't we been doing this for years?” Stiles gasped out, collapsing on the broad, muscled chest beneath him. “This is your fault, Derek. I would have been up for this pretty much two minutes after I met you.”

“You were underage, Stiles,” Derek said, his voice a satisfied rumble. “I was already in enough trouble with your father, I wasn't going to add the statutory rape of his only son onto everything else.”

“Wait, you wanted to nail me even then?” Stiles asked, gathering his strength to prop himself up so that he could glare down at his bedmate. “All that time everyone one else was doing the horizontal mambo, and I was being cockblocked by my own father?”

“I wouldn't sleep with anyone underaged, regardless of who their father was,” Derek said, and Stiles could feel the body beneath him tense up.

“Yeah, I know. Would have been nice to know that someone wanted me though,” Stiles said with a sigh, letting himself go boneless again. Heh, boneless. That wasn't going to last for long though. Yay for being twenty! Hopefully Derek would be ready to go too.

“Are you kidding me?” Derek said incredulously. “If I'd given you any kind of indication I found
you attractive, you'd have never let it rest.”

Well, that was true enough. Stiles liked to think he was self aware enough to know his own faults, and lack of persistence certainly wasn't one of them. If anything, his faults lay in quite the opposite direction. If Derek had given him even a sniff of hope, he would have been all up in his face at every opportunity.

Stiles imagined how that would have gone down in the climate just after Scott was bitten, and immediately started shaking with laughter. “Oh my god, can you imagine Scott's face?” he said when Derek made a soft interrogatory noise. “That would have been epic justice. Epic. All the drivel I had to put up with about Allison… oh god, it would have been worth it for that alone. He would have been ropeable.”

“Yeah, well Scott's an idiot,” Derek said, a smile in his voice.

“Can't argue with you there,” Stiles replied, his mirth draining away as he let himself fully consider the man who had been his best friend for most of his life. “Do you think they're still alive?”

“The zombies first appeared in California,” Derek said after a moment. “If he and the others were smart enough to stay away from the larger concentrations of zombies, they should have done fine.”

“Yeah, well Scott's an idiot,” Stiles parroted with a sigh.

“What-” Derek started, before breaking off.

Stiles could guess what Derek wanted to know. He'd yet to ask why Stiles and his dad had been living in Canada when things turned to shit. Stiles supposed that was tact at work, but personally, he felt that it was better to just ask the awkward questions and get them out of the way. Since Derek was still not terribly good at using his words, he might as well help him out.

“Aside from the completely fucked up decision to resurrect Gerard, something he did behind my back after promising he would run anything magical by me, there was also his douchebaggy assumption that it was up to him to decide what was right for me and what my choices should be. Not to mention his subsequent declaration that I should 'get out of this supernatural freak-show', no input from me required. If that weren't enough, he told me why they chose to resurrect Gerard.”
“Why was that?” Derek asked, the last of the sexy satisfaction gone from his voice, much to Stiles' disappointment. It was a nice sound. “You never told me.”

“Well, maybe I would have told you,” Stiles said, poking him in the side with his finger. “But you didn't exactly stay on the line long enough for me to go into details.”

“Forgive me for having a bad reaction to hearing that the man involved in the conspiracy to murder almost my entire family had been brought back to life,” Derek growled. “Also, that someone whose life I had saved more than once was the one responsible, and that he then didn't think it was any of my business.”

“Look, I told you literally five minutes after I found out,” Stiles replied, felling slightly indignant. “We've already agreed Scott is an idiot. Don't get all growly with me, wolfman.”

Derek deflated. “Yeah, I know. We're wandering from the point. Why did Scott want to resurrect Gerard? You said something about picking his brains.”

“Which is a really gross saying that I've come to regret ever using,” Stiles said with a grimace, thinking of all the times he'd seen birds doing that very thing since zombies had started appearing. “According to Scott, the Furies turned up in Beacon Hills, and sent a message that they were going to perform a cleansing.”

“Okay,” Derek said slowly, clearly waiting for more. When Stiles didn't oblige, he shifted them around so that they were lying side by side. “I'm not seeing the problem. Furies only go after the corrupt, so while it's a bit damaging to your reputation if they turn up, so long as you're pretty much morally upright there's nothing to worry about.”

“Right,” Stiles said, before sighing. He rolled onto his back, refusing to meet Derek's eyes. “You know that, I know that. Only, Scott decided they were a threat he couldn't deal with, and resurrecting Gerard was his, Chris Argent's, and Deaton's answer to the problem.”

“What did Scott do to the Furies, Stiles?” Derek asked, covering his eyes with his hand, his voice dropping an octave.

“Well, he, and Deaton, and the Argents, decided that best thing to do would be to banish them from this plane!” Stiles said in a bright TV-Presenter voice. “But don't worry, Derek, Scott assured me that Deaton assured him that they wouldn't be hurt!”
Derek sat up in one fluid movement, his eyes blazing. “This stupid zombie apocalypse is Scott’s doing?” The growl was fully back now.

Stile looked up at the man sharing his bed, one part of his mind committing the scene to memory, to be gone over lovingly later if it turned out that this was a one time deal. Perhaps he should be wary, sharing his bed with someone who could so easily rip him apart, but then Stiles had always been attracted to beautiful, dangerous things.

There was a delicious incongruity about the glowy eyes accompanied by sex-hair. Even with his obvious anger, Stiles wasn't sure he'd ever seen Derek look this dishevelled and unguarded. It did nothing to diminish the sheer power that he exuded.

Stiles gave a little shiver, and made a mental note to check all the bedrooms and bathrooms for proper lube. Intercrural was all well and good when your only lube was body wash, but Stiles wanted the full drill, and by all that was holy he was going to get it. So long as Derek was in agreement, of course. Regardless of his persistence issues, he wasn't some skeevy rapist.

“Stiles!” Derek growled.

Oh right. Apocalypse, Furies, Scott.

“I don't have any proof,” Stiles said, running his hand over that beautifully muscled back that he, Stiles Stilinski, was now allowed to touch. He felt himself smile as Derek leaned into his touch slightly. “But I mean, the timing is a bit coincidental otherwise, isn't it? Let’s just say that in the absence of other theories, my money would be square on – yes, Scott did bring about the zombie apocalypse. And just how fucked up are our lives that I can even say that and mean it? And you're not trying to have me committed?”

“I should have let Victoria kill him,” Derek grumbled, before heaving a sigh and getting off the bed, taking all that naked goodness out of Stiles’ reach.

“Pull the other one,” Stiles said, sitting up and stretching. “If even I couldn't predict a dumbass move like this one, there's no way that you could be expected to. And Victoria was a psycho bitch. Hindsight's always twenty twenty, Derek. If you want to go that way, all this is my fault for taking Scott with me to look for a dead body.”
“Okay,” Derek said with the faintest of smiles. “It's all your fault. You're such a pain in the ass, Stiles, always bringing about zombie apocalypses. Apocali. Whatever.”

“Yeah, yeah, laugh it up,” Stiles said, pulling on his boxers. It was a bit grungy, but there would be showers and laundry tomorrow. Quite frankly, he was far less concerned than he used to be about things like that.

Life was tough in the zombie apocalypse.

Oh my god, maybe if he said it enough he could finally believe it was all happening.

“Come on,” Stiles said fondly as he found his shirt. “Let’s go make sure dad hasn't been turned into dinner for some passing zombie.”

“He's fine,” Derek muttered as he followed Stiles down the stairs. “I'm surprised you can't hear him snoring from here.

As Derek finished speaking, the familiar strident sounds reached Stiles ears, and he grinned.

“You get used to it. Come on, dude, flip you for first watch.”

“Don't call me dude.”

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They stayed at that farmhouse a full week before loading up the jeep and moving on again. In that time Derek had gone hunting and brought two moose back and deftly processed them, along with a goat that they ate fresh.

Fresh stew made with fresh meat was incredible. Stiles felt like he wanted to weep, and he was sure he caught his father surreptitiously wiping a tear of gratitude from his eye. Okay, that was maybe a slight exaggeration. But only slight! It was like a religious experience. Stiles was expecting heavenly choirs at any time.
While the laundry was running – that generator was *amazing* – Stiles went foraging with his father, and while it was too early in the growing season for there to be a great deal available, they managed to find enough to give them some valuable nutrients. It was also a good opportunity to get some much needed exercise.

Stiles didn't find it necessary to inform his father about his and Derek's new habit of knocking boots. It might have been different if it was a romantic relationship, but neither he nor Derek had made any declarations of affection, and so Stiles was pretty sure that this was a friends with benefits situation.

Although benefits was a pretty tame word, really. Friends with hot, scorching, brain-melting, toe-tingling, spine-dissolving benefits. Hmmm. Stiles felt that description was still not quite grasping the scale of the amazingness. Still, it was something to ponder during those long drives.

God, Stiles wished he had someone to gloat to. He was finally getting the kind of action he'd fantasised about all those years, and the only person around to tell was his dad. Yeah, no.

Not that he thought that his dad was blind to what was going on. He and Derek continued to receive those amused looks whenever they went off alone, but Stiles couldn't find it in himself to care, or feel in the slightest bit embarrassed.

Regardless, they were back on the road again, and they'd all agreed that they wouldn't go any longer than two days in the car before finding somewhere fairly safe to stop for a day to recoup. It had been a great relief to Stiles when Derek told him that the break had done John's blood pressure good, and he'd thanked Derek profusely. And enthusiastically. Several times.

Stiles had the generator stashed in the trailer, well cushioned by some of the more threadbare blankets. The better bedding went in the back of the jeep, and it wasn't unusual for whoever was riding in the back to make use of it.

Judging by the progress they had been making so far, they only had another couple of weeks before they got to David's. Stiles was starting to feel optimistic that they would get there with no major mishaps.

Stiles cursed as he decapitated another zombie, taking the opportunity of the brief respite to check up
on his dad and Derek.

The roads for the last little while had been rather light on abandoned cars, and with their petrol supplies dwindling alarmingly, the three of them had agreed that it might be worth it to venture into one of the smaller towns to stock up.

That turned out to be a big mistake.

They'd found a nice grouping of cars, and had unpacked the various containers they were using to store the petrol until they were ready to use it. Several were already full, and Stiles was loading them back in the trailer when movement out of the corner of his eye caught his attention.

The petrol fumes must have masked Derek's sense of smell enough that he didn't notice the slow approach. As it was, zombies were converging on them from several different directions.

There were only seven or so, not a huge number compared to some of the hordes Derek had mentioned. Still, it was more than Stiles or his father had ever faced. And shit, there were more off to the right. And the left. Fuck.

Fighting against so many made each kill exponentially harder. Stiles not only had to avoid the attacks of the zombie in front of him, but be aware of any other zombies near him. On top of all that, he was trying to keep tabs on his dad and Derek.

John was methodically taking out the zombies nearest him, and Derek was like some force of nature.

Of course, being immune to infection Derek didn't have to concern himself with avoiding stray swipes and blows, and appeared to be concentrating on using his elongated claws for decapitation. In fact, his claws looked so long they reminded Stiles momentarily of Wolverine. Surely Derek's claws hadn't always been that long?

Stiles finished with the zombies around him and had just started moving to help his dad with his last two when it happened. One second John Stilinski was fully in control, aiming his firearm in one hand with his machete ready in the other, the next he dropped the gun and the knife, his body going into a spasm.

Everything seemed to slow down. Stiles felt his body move, felt the desperation to get there, but he
just wasn’t fast enough. The zombie moved forward, flailing its arms and connecting with John only seconds before Derek got there, ripping its head off its shoulders with one vicious motion. In moments the last zombie was taken care of too, and then time seemed to speed up again.

Stiles was still only halfway to his father.

“Dad!” Stiles called out, terrified out of his mind.

“Stiles?” John said, shaking his head, looking confused. “What the hell just happened? Derek? What-”

Derek had ripped off John's sleeve, and was licking his arm with some urgency, using quick motions that reminded Stiles of a cat that was pissed off or embarrassed.

“Fuck.” Stiles could only think of one reason for Derek to suddenly want to lick his dad's arm. Well, only one that didn't involve sex pollen of some kind. “It connected? Derek, did it draw blood?”

Derek didn’t answer, just kept licking at John's arm. But then again, that itself was an answer.

“Well,” Stiles said, his whole body clenching, like if he could just do something this wouldn't be happening. “But, that doesn't mean it's infected, right, Derek? We might get lucky.”

Derek wouldn't look at him. He stopped licking, and just rested his forehead on the arm in front of him. “I can smell it travelling through the blood.” The words were whispered, but fell on Stiles ears like a thunder clap.

“Oh hell,” John said softly. “I'm sorry, kid.”

“No,” Stiles said adamantly. “No. This isn't happening, okay? This is just a bad dream, like the one I used to have about my pet elephant squashing you in the night. I'm going to wake up, and this won't be happening.”

“Stiles-” John said, gently disengaging his arm from Derek's grasp so that he could pull Stiles into a hug.
“No!” Stiles insisted. “This doesn’t mean—Derek, what if you gave him the bite?”

“The infection works faster than the bite does,” Derek said standing up and taking a step back. “We would never even know if it took or not. Unless it somehow ended up creating a zombie-fied werewolf.”

“Stiles,” John said his voice so tender it almost hurt to hear it. “You were always going to lose me one day, you know. The alternative is too horrific to consider.”

“What alternative?” Stiles said through the tears that were choking him.

“I could lose you.”

The dam broke then, and Stiles clutched at his father the same way he had in those first days after his mother had died.

Stiles had no idea how long they stood there, he only knew that by the time he let go and moved back, Derek had single-handedly filled the rest of their petrol containers, stashed them in the trailer, and was now leaning against the jeep and studiously staring off into the distance.

“Stiles,” John began, before hesitating.

It didn’t really matter. He didn’t need to say anything. Stiles knew his father, knew what his next choice would be. And in a way, Stiles couldn’t blame him, he knew that if it was him, he would be determined not to harm his dad, to get rid of the possible threat as soon as possible. It was something that he’d considered ever since the appearance of that first zombie.

He would have done the exact same thing.

“I love you, kid. So much. And I’m so proud of the man you’ve become. I know that wherever she is, your mom is proud too.”
Stiles nodded, and choked out, “I love you too, Dad.”

“Now, I want you to sit in the passenger seat of the jeep, and I don't want you to move for anything but more zombies, okay?”

“Yeah,” Stiles said, doing his best to smile. “Okay.” He exchanged one last desperate hug with his dad, and then got in the jeep.

Stiles didn't hear what his dad said to Derek, but he could make a pretty good guess.

Derek’s eyes were dark, his face blank. He nodded silently, and after a brief glance at Stiles, followed John off down the street.

When Derek came back two hours later, he had dirt under his fingernails and all over his boots. Stiles didn't say anything, just stared numbly out of the window as Derek started the engine.

They drove for several hours in silence, before Stiles finally spoke.

“Thank you,” he said.

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When Stiles started properly paying attention to his surroundings again, he decided it would be best if they stopped for a while to reassess their plan. At this point, Stiles' enthusiasm for getting to David's place was pretty much non-existent, despite how close they were.

“Well, what's the point now?” he said when Derek queried him. “I was mostly concerned with making sure that we had a fairly comfortable place for when my dad got a bit older. Since that's no longer in consideration, I don't really care.”

“Is there anywhere you do want to go?” Derek asked.

“I suppose we could head back to California,” Stiles said after a few moments thought. “Might as
well see if anyone survived, since we've really got nothing better to do. Unless there's somewhere you'd like to go?”

“No,” Derek replied, sorting through the maps in their special map box, where Derek had insisted they be kept when they weren't in use. “As you say, we might as well check. If Scott's still alive, I think I'd like a word or two with him.”

“Yeah, you and me both, big guy,” Stiles agreed. “Right, so we can either go through some of the most densely populated States of the US, hoping not to have any accidents, or we can go back up through Canada and then down through Montana or North Dakota.”

They looked at each other for a moment.

“Canada it is,” Stiles said, pulling out the relevant maps. In the main, they were the ones he and his dad had used to cross Canada in the first place. They would be pretty much retracing the route Stiles and his dad had already gone. For the first third of the journey, anyway.

Even though John's death changed everything, they didn't talk about it. Stiles knew that it was probably unhealthy, but he really couldn't bring himself to care. As it was, he was holding himself together by repressing everything during the day, and letting everything out at night.

Extremely athletic sex did wonders for his ability to sleep. Stiles would have felt more guilty for how often he was turning to Derek if he wasn't pretty sure that Derek was doing the same thing. If there was a distinct air of desperation just after... after, then that slowly settled down until things were almost the same as they were before.

So they didn't talk about it with words, but Stiles still felt like a conversation of sorts had taken place.

The one thing he did make explicitly clear was that he held no blame for Derek. Poor Derek, who would probably have even more issues to deal with now.

And thank god for Derek. Without his steady presence, Stiles might have gone insane. Or well, more insane. Even though there was a lot unspoken between them, it wasn't a silence that cut, but a silence that comforted.

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At least by following the road already travelled they could be assured that there were no major blockages – except for that one time when a tree had come down across the road – so they ended up making much better time. Stiles had a pretty good memory for which cars they'd already drained, and so the trip that took nearly two months going east would probably only have taken one month going back west, if Stiles and Derek hadn't decided to stop every night.

They had still to see any other survivors, and Stiles quizzed Derek about it. Surely there were other werewolves around, even if all the humans had succumbed?

“I don't know.” Derek said with a shrug. “For all I know there's a big werewolf convention going on somewhere that I don't know about. If there ever were any multi-pack apocalypse plans in place, I never knew about them. My mother would have known, and possibly Peter. Or if he's still alive, Deaton might know.”

“We are not asking that dark wizard anything,” Stiles said firmly. “I refuse to believe that he had no knowledge on the Furies, which means he's as responsible as Scott for this mess we're in. More responsible, because I can't even bring myself to believe he didn't know the possible consequences.”

Derek was silent for a moment. “He was our Emissary, you know. For several years before the fire. He was part of the summit that my mother, Deucalion, and the others, were holding with the hunters. He was actually one of the driving forces behind it.”

“The summit that went to shit and ended up with angry Argents and the creation of the Alpha Pack?” Stiles asked dryly. “If he was your pack Emissary, why wasn't he more help to you and Laura after the fire?”

Derek said nothing, but his eyebrows telegraphed his initial uncertainty and then growing anger.

“Exactly,” Stiles said, just as if Derek had spoken aloud. “If Deaton's still alive, my vote is that we kill him.”

Derek looked at Stiles sideways. “That's a very… definite sounding suggestion. What if I think it's a good idea to kill Scott as well?”

Stiles' old loyalty struggled for a moment with his new indifference, and after a short battle the indifference won.
Currently, the only person Stiles cared about in the world was Derek. Derek, who had made his way across half the country by himself, drawn by a bond they'd forged without fully realising it. Derek, who held him when the night terrors woke him, who had made the pain go away, if only for a short while.

Stiles was pretty sure that back in the day this would have been called an unhealthy dependence, but really, what did it even matter any more? He and Derek were each other’s everything, and if Stiles sometimes wished that Derek was in love with him, that Derek had chosen him, then that was Stiles' business.

Being Derek's everything would have to be enough. There was no point in wishing, the world had shown him rather clearly that wishes were for losers.

Still, he sometimes pretended he could see love in Derek's eyes rather than the affection he knew was there. And when he slept he dreamed of a world before the zombies, before the fire, and even before his mother died. Dreamed of knowing without a doubt that Derek loved him.

They were halfway across Manitoba, skirting around the edges of Winnipeg when Stiles felt whatever it was hit him.

If he and Derek hadn't been standing back to back and fighting a small group of zombies at the time, Stiles might never have understood the significance of it, connected it with the zombies. Or, not for a very long time.

As it was, a wave of foetid air seemed to rush past, and as it touched them the zombies all fell as if they were marionettes with their strings cut.

Stiles stood there for a moment weapons raised in case this was some weird new trick. He was just feeling that it might be safe to lower his guard, when Derek spoke.

“The smell,” he said, and Stiles turned to see him flaring his nostrils cautiously. “They don't smell like zombies any more. Just, like dead bodies.”

“You'll forgive me if I want to be certain,” Stiles said, and began to systematically decapitate the unanimated bodies lying around them.
“Fair enough,” Derek said with a shrug, and moved to help him.

When they were finished, Stiles looked around, wondering what the hell was going on.

“Was that magic?” he asked Derek as they moved back to the jeep, carefully placing his machete where it could be easily drawn.

“Maybe?” Derek replied. “It felt wrong though, even more wrong than the zombies do.”

“You don't think it's out of the frying pan and into the fire, do you?” Stiles said, starting the jeep up and continuing along the way they'd been headed when they'd come across the small group of zombies shuffling around.

“Don't know,” Derek shrugged again. “I guess we'll find out, one way or another.”


As they drove, it became more and more likely that there would be no more zombies. Having missed the worst of it, Stiles had never seen the truly huge swarms, but there had always been at least one or two in more populated areas. Now there were none.

“Does this mean that the zombie apocalypse is over?” Stiles asked one night as they roasted a rabbit on a makeshift spit.

“It looks that way,” Derek said, lying on his back and looking up at the stars.

The seasons had just begun to turn again, and quite frankly Stiles thought the fact that they were heading back to a warmer climate was a good thing.

“What should we do if there's no-one left in Beacon Hills?” Stiles wondered aloud.
“Is there anything you want to do?” Derek asked, propping himself up on one elbow and looking over to where Stiles was fiddling with the spit. “Just leave it, Stiles, we don't want you accidentally dropping the meat into the fire again.”

“That was one time,” Stiles said, but did as requested anyway. He went over to where Derek was stretched out and dropped down beside him, leaning into his comforting warmth.

The stars were clear and bright, and Stiles felt like he could almost reach up and touch them. There was something reassuring in their changelessness. Nothing was as it should be, except for the stars.

\textit{Star light, star bright… all the stars I see tonight…}

Derek pulled him in closer, and Stiles realised he'd said that out loud.

“It's probably a good idea to winter in Beacon Hills,” Derek said after a while. “We know where everything is, and there are a couple of sealed food stashes my family left behind that should still be good.”

“Why didn't you use them before?” Stiles asked, thinking Derek's suggestion over. It made sense, really. They couldn't keep travelling forever, eventually the jeep was going to break down. The tyres were already starting to look a bit worn, by the time they got to Beacon Hills they would be well past their use-by date.

“Didn't need to,” Derek said. “My mother made it very clear they were for emergencies only, and were to replaced and replenished on a regular basis. There was always enough money to buy food, so why break into a stash?”

“Well, they'll be at least ten years old by now,” Stiles said, happy to hear that they had a guaranteed source of food, even if it was rather aged.

Derek didn't answer, but when Stiles looked over at him he was wearing embarrassed face number three, 'I don't want to betray my sentimentality so I'm going to pretend to be as stoic as possible'.

“Unless someone who has been in Beacon Hills since then has followed his mother’s directive and made sure they were up to date?” Stiles said, sure that his guess was right when Derek's ears turned slightly pink.
“It was logical,” Derek said stiffly.

“Right, Mr Spock,” Stiles said, his tone only slightly mocking. “I’m sure that’s what you told yourself even as you were doing it. You don’t have to hide yourself any more, Derek. I’m not going to use your feelings against you, you know.”

Derek was silent, and Stiles sighed. Really, it was too much to ask Derek to overturn over a decade’s worth of training in only a few months.

“Well, we can make plans about our future once we see what’s waiting for us in Beacon Hills,” Stiles said, and went back to looking up at the stars.

I wish I may, I wish I might...

v^v^v^v^v

“Have you noticed anything weird about the weather?” Stiles asked a couple of days later.

“You mean that it hasn't changed at all since Winnipeg?” Derek replied.

“Something is not right,” Stiles sighed. “Sure, it's been great that there haven't been any zombies, but I don't know what the rest of it means. Something bad, or my name isn't Gwiazdeczko.”

“Your name isn't what?” Derek asked.

“My mother told my father it was her father's name, but she told me later she just liked the sound of it, and the meaning,” Stiles said, smiling as he remembered that conversation with his mother. “She didn't realise how much trouble everyone would have pronouncing it. It was spelled completely incorrectly on my birth certificate, you know. The guy writing it got about halfway through and then stopped. And what he did write was wrong.”

“What does it mean?”
“Star. It means Star.” Stiles said. “I was given the correct name in my naming ceremony, so we pretty much ignore the legal aspect. Everyone calls me Stiles anyway.”

“I'd like to learn how to pronounce it,” Derek said abruptly. “If you don't mind.”

“I don't mind,” Stiles said, grinning as he imagined how amusing Derek's first attempts were likely to be. “But we're off topic. We were talking about the strange weather, and how it hasn't changed in ages. Do you think we might find the answer in Beacon Hills?”

“You want to pick up the pace a bit?”

“Maybe? I mean, part of me wants to get there and find out, and the rest prefers not to know,” Stiles tried to explain his ambivalence.

“We don't have to go,” Derek suggested.

“No, we probably do,” Stiles sighed. “I'd just be wondering otherwise. And maybe we can ransack the Argent library.”

“I know that Peter was building up a new archive,” Derek said after a moment. “I think it was on computer though. And then there's Deaton's collection.”

“Anything that was on hard disk may still be available,” Stiles sat up straighter. “We've got the generator, remember? And you know, I don't think Peter was the sort that was keen to store his hard won knowledge in the cloud where someone could hack into it.”

“It will be password protected,” Derek warned.

“Pfft,” Stiles said dismissively. “What exactly do you think I was doing at university, Derek, twiddling my thumbs?”

“I thought you'd be drinking and getting laid,” Derek said dryly. “Isn't that what University students
“There might have been a small amount of drinking,” Stiles admitted. “A slightly larger amount of getting laid. But the majority of my time was spent trying to think of ways I could be of more help to the pack. Building up my own database, researching weird and wacky things that might become a problem. Taking specialised lessons in hacking.”

“I thought that Danny was your go-to guy for that?” Derek asked.

“I like being able to do things myself,” Stiles replied. “So sue me, I'm a bit of a control freak when it comes to information. Which reminds me, we are going to be running tests on you over the winter.”

“Yes, Stiles,” Derek said, his tone so wearily hen-pecked that Stiles had to laugh.
It was October before they arrived back in Beacon Hills. By then the strange weather pattern had become impossible to ignore. It still hadn't rained, and the air wasn't moving much either.

It was hard to tell if the trees and vegetation were dying because winter was about to set in, or because of whatever else was going on. Regardless, Stiles didn't look on it as a positive sign.

It was so weird driving around the town he'd grown up in when it was deserted. Stiles wondered if the zombie apocalypse would have seemed more real if he'd been here when it started, if the zombies he'd had to kill had worn faces he'd recognised. It certainly seemed more real now.

As it was, even most of the decomposing bodies were either dried up husks or skeletal remains. The first time Stiles accidentally drove over one he had to stop and get his breathing under control, but after a while even that lost its horror.

“Where shall we head first?” Stiles asked as they made their slow way along the main street. “We should probably set up base somewhere before we go searching through the town.”

“Head out to the Preserve,” Derek said, looking out the passenger side window with a frown. “Most of the caches are stashed in that general area, and there's something...”

“I know, right?” Stiles said with a sigh. “It just feels eerie. And unsafe.”

Derek nodded, scanning the area with a watchful gaze.

As they approached the rebuilt Hale House, Stiles was surprised to see three buildings where previously there had been only one.

“Did you know about this?” he asked Derek, although he could make a guess based on the threat level of the eyebrows.

“No,” was the only response Derek gave.
“How did they manage to get builders to build without the proper permits?” Stiles wondered aloud as they pulled up in the centre of the triangle that the three buildings made.

Derek was looking at some symbols embedded in the stonework in front of the larger of the new buildings, his expression growing even darker. “They got Hunters to put this up.”

“Are you fucking kidding me?” Stiles yelled, smacking his hands against the steering wheel. “If I find out that Scott was responsible for this atrocity I will kill him myself! Who even *does* something this disgusting! Look at these buildings, Derek! Look at the ground around them. These must have gone up the minute I went off to Uni! I was out here the weekend before I went away, and they weren't here then. Fucking hell, I should have come out here last Christmas.”

“This isn't your fault, Stiles,” Derek said, getting out of the jeep.

“It fucking well feels like it is,” Stiles said angrily as he turned off the engine and got out too. “In some ways I've been as guilty as Scott of trampling over your feelings, but this is… aarrrgghhh!” He kicked the nearest tire, probably a bit harder than he needed to. The pain in his toes was steadying though.

“There is no way that any of this went up without Scott's knowledge,” Stiles said when he had calmed down a little bit. “Quite frankly, I don't care if he was manoeuvred into it by Chris or Gerard or Deaton or anyone. This is rank, Derek, really rank.”

“But it may turn to our advantage,” Derek said, his stoic shell firmly pulled around him. “If these are Hunter buildings, they might have useful information and weapons stored here.”

“Look, if I want to be mightily pissed off at people stepping all over your rights and your feelings and generally behaving like sub-human assholes, I will, okay?” Stiles said, but even as he said it his mind latched onto what Derek had said and started turning it over.

“I don't know if I like that look on your face,” Derek said, and at least he was trying, Stiles had to give him that. “Just, let’s empty them out before we blow the place sky-high, okay?”

“I wasn't going to blow them up!” Stiles objected. Well, not until he'd scoured them clean of anything useful anyway, and then checked and re-checked for hidden rooms and whatnot. But after that, what would be the harm in a few pretty explosions? “I was thinking that running those tests
might be easier than I had expected.”

Derek's face closed down even more.

“Not in their nazi-style torture cells, jeeze,” Stiles said, coming to stand beside Derek and bump shoulders with him. “But I want to see if you still react to wolfsbane and mountain ash, and they probably have some in there.”

“Do what you want,” Derek said before striding off towards the building they both recognised.

Stiles watched him go, wondering how he could have handled that better. He turned and frowned at the new buildings. One definitely looked like some kind of dwelling, and the other was long and narrowish and actually made Stiles think of Viking style longhouses. Hunters really were pretentious dickwads.

Mentally planning the best way to explode them – so he had done quite a bit of research on how to safely explode buildings that time he caught glandular fever, what of it? – Stiles grabbed his weapons, checked his firearm to make sure it was loaded, and followed Derek.

It was in the main part of the house that they found Scott. Or what was left of Scott, anyway.

The body was smack dab in the centre of the dining room table, of all things.

He'd obviously been dead for some time, and if it wasn't for the watch he was wearing Stiles might never have been sure it was him. But Scott loved that watch, and if a dead body was wearing it then Scott was also dead, whether he was the body in front of them or not. Since the body was also wearing Scott-style clothing, Stiles felt pretty confident in claiming that this was indeed Scott.

He stood there looking at the remains that had once been his best friend, and wondered why he didn't feel anything.

“I'm sorry,” Derek said awkwardly.
“I'm not,” Stiles said, still looking at the body. Someone had straightened it up and placed the hands like it was being prepared for burial.

“Stiles,” Derek said with a sigh. “He was your best friend for most of your life. It's normal for you to be upset, regardless of what happened more recently.”

“No, I'm just really not.” Stiles said, looking Derek straight in the eye. “I just... really can't bring myself to care. I mean, I don't feel happy that he's dead, but I'm not particularly broken up about it either. Is that weird? It's totally weird, right? I'm probably headed for a breakdown or something.”

“You're doing okay,” Derek said softly. “Well you're doing better than me, but that's not saying much.”

“That's a matter of perspective,” Stiles said. He examined the body with a slightly more critical eye. “Hang on, did he die of a bullet wound? He's was a werewolf.”

“Wolfsbane poisoning,” Derek confirmed. “I can smell it all over him, despite the effort to clean him up that someone has gone to.”

“Someone?” Stiles asked, looking around for signs of recent habitation. There was none, only a film of dust over everything. Their foot prints looked really out of place.

“The smell of wolfsbane is overpowering any traces of whatever scent would be left,” Derek said, heading for the kitchen. “Come on, this house was connected to a bore, hopefully that means that the water here won't have that taint to it.”

Stiles made a face as he followed after Derek. Something was tainting the water, and even his non-werewolf-enhanced taste buds could pick up the foul taste. It must be hell on Derek's sensitive palette.

Unfortunately the water here was no better. Still, living bodies needed water to function so they didn't have much choice. Although Stiles fully intended to ransack every store in Beacon Hills that might possibly sell bottled water when he had the chance.
Since Stiles didn't feel like living with the corpse of Scott in the same house, they decided to move him to the other house.

They dumped him on a couch, and then exchanged dining room tables. Even a Hunter’s table was better than one a dead body had been lying on for who knows how long.

The next day, after eating from some of the tins that were still in the pantry, Stiles and Derek braved the longhouse.

As with everywhere else they had been, there was no-one alive. They wandered through the ground floor looking at things, with Stiles making mental notes to come back and force open some of the locked areas before taking the not very well hidden entrance that Derek found that led to the basement.

Which, as expected was rather horrific. It wasn't covered in gore or anything as obvious as that, but Stiles remembered well his treatment at Gerard's hands, and compared to this place the old Argent cellar had been pretty makeshift.

Stiles felt himself walking as close to Derek as possible, and didn't know if the fact that Derek allowed it was for his benefit or if Derek was deriving comfort as well.

A hallway at one end led to what was clearly a prison area, with what were probably supposed to be cells, but looked more like cages, lining each side. Stiles felt sick when he realised that not all of them were empty, at least three holding the decaying remains of someone or something. In the one at the end, the body was small, either a very small adult or more likely a child.

Stiles threw up.

Stiles had always been slightly sociopathic in his ability – or lack of – to feel empathy for others. For those that he loved, for his family or chosen loved ones, he would do anything, suffer anything. Everyone else was pretty much on their own.

But… perhaps it was biological? Something ingrained to ensure the perpetuation of the species? Whatever it was, Stiles was significantly more affected by this one small corpse than he had been by finding Scott dead.
“These were all zombies, once,” Derek said into the silence, his eyes locked on that same small figure that had affected Stiles so much.

“Yeah, but were they zombies before or after they were put into cages?” Stiles said bitterly, heading back down the hallway purposefully. “I'm not going to leave these poor dudes here any longer than I have to. If I can't find a key or some other way to get these cages open, I'll bring down a hacksaw.”

The screeching of metal from behind him made him turn and look back.

Derek's muscles were straining, and he was grimacing with effort, but the metal was giving way. Stiles watched wide-eyed while Derek slowly yanked the door out of the cage he was standing in front of.

“Or, you could just hulk out and rip the doors off the hinges.” Stiles amended, walking back to where Derek was carefully picking up the small body.

They buried it outside under a tree that still had most of its leaves. Stiles didn't try to do anything as cheesy as hold a ceremony, but he did spend a few moments while resting from shovelling wondering about the afterlife, if there was one, and hoping that whoever this probably-a-child was that there was something better after. Or if not, that there was peace in the darkness.

“I picked up traces of someone alive,” Derek said the next morning. “I think it might be Isaac.”

Stiles raised his eyebrows. “Think? Can't you tell by the smell?”

“Okay, it is Isaac,” Derek said, rolling his eyes. “But there's something off about the scent. I want to track him, find out what the story is. You should stay here.”

“Hell no,” Stiles said emphatically. “We're a team, buddy. But, if you like I'll cover myself with mountain ash before we go.”

“That won't stop you being hurt if he throws a tree at you,” Derek said, sounding long-suffering. “It might stop me from rendering first aid though.”
“Nah,” Stiles said offhandedly, carefully hiding his smile. “Remember those cages that you ripped the doors off of? I found the building plans, and those were some A-grade latest model werewolf proof Hunter cages. If you were still affected by mountain ash you wouldn’t have been able to touch them.”

Derek’s eyebrows rose in surprise. “Well, thank you for eventually sharing that with me, Stiles.”

“Hey,” Stiles replied, “you’ve always made it pretty clear that I was the only one interested in whatever was going on with you, dude. Don’t get huffy with me just because you made it clear you didn’t want to know and I respected your wishes.”

“You only respect people’s wishes if it doesn’t inconvenience you, Stiles,” Derek said. “Protesting has never helped me before.”

“Then why do you still do it?”

“Habit, I suppose. Now are you coming with me or not?”

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Isaac was nowhere to be found that day, or the day after.

“He must know we're here,” Derek growled frustratedly. “His scent trail has crossed over top of ours several times now.”

“Maybe he's feeling shy?” Stiles said flippantly. “Look, he clearly doesn't want us to find him. Maybe if I was as strong and fast as you, and had a nose as sensitive we could coral him. But since you're stuck holding back it's easy for him to evade you. So why don't you come out alone tomorrow? See if that helps.”

“That's what I suggested in the first place!”

“Did you? I don't remember,” Stiles gave a cocky smile as he lied through his teeth.
Derek looked very unimpressed. “I want you to stay in the house, and I want you to be armed at all times.”

“Yes, mother,” Stiles said indulgently.

“I mean it,” Derek said his voice heavy with intensity. “You're all I have, Stiles. I need you to be careful.”

“Hey, hey,” Stiles said, coming closer and grabbing hold of Derek's face so he could look him in the eyes. “I get it, okay? I'll be careful, and I expect you to be careful as well. Okay?”

Derek nodded, and Stiles released him.

“Now come on, I'm getting hungry. If you don't find him tomorrow we'll have to take a break anyway and head into town to do some shopping.”

“Yes, mother,” Derek replied.

“Although, can it really be called shopping if I have no intention of paying?” Stiles asked as they started walking back to the house. “Gathering? As a gathering skill it's certainly a bit easier than what my ancestors had to do to fill their bellies.”

The next day Derek went out alone, and Stiles sat himself down with some of the texts they had found in the longhouse. Researching was a lot harder without the internet available, and having to write his notes out longhand was a bit of a drag too. His handwriting was terrible. And slow, so slow.

After an hour or so of laborious reading – the Hunters texts were so hideously biased and erroneous it would have been laughable if it wasn't so scary – Stiles got up to get himself something to eat.

He almost left his gun and machete in the lounge, but Derek’s voice in his head objected so strongly that he picked them up and took them into the kitchen with him with a beleaguered sigh.
Which turned out to be a good thing.

Something hairy with glowing golden eyes smashed through the back door and leapt at him claws extended. Reflexes honed by months of zombie killing took over.

Only moments later Stiles was looking at Isaac's body which was lying on the kitchen floor, quite separate from his head which had come to a stop by the kitchen door.

Which promptly flew open again, sending the decapitated head flying across the kitchen to smack into the opposite wall.

Gross.

“Stiles!” Derek said, sounding more terror stricken than Stiles had ever heard him.

Stiles was briefly concerned that Derek was going to accidentally stab himself on the razor-sharp machete that he was still holding, but it turned out that Derek was at least aware enough to take both gun and knife from him, placing them on the bench before sweeping Stiles into his arms like some Regency heroine.

Well, to be fair Stiles was feeling a little disconcerted. This was the first time he'd killed someone he'd known. And how nuts must he be that his mind went to 'first time' when it appeared there was no-one else around to kill?

Except Derek, and that was never going to happen.

“He must have spent most of the night laying a trail all around Beacon Hills,” Derek said from where he had buried his face in Stiles' neck. “The moment I realised what he was up to I ran here as fast as I could. It wasn't fast enough, sorry, I'm so sorry-”

“Hey!” Stiles said, blinking a bit as all his synapses seemed to connect again. “I did what you said and carried my weapons, and I was fine. Mind you, his attack lacked any kind of finesse. If he'd tried only a little bit of stealth he'd probably have succeeded.”
“He was feral,” Derek's muffled voice explained. “Smart enough to evade what he perceived as the greater threat, but not aware enough to consider that a human might be dangerous to him. It would be like hunting a rabbit and finding out too late that it's the Rabbit of Caerbannog.”

“Well, if he had any memory of me at all then that would only have reinforced his impression of my helplessness,” Stiles said sardonically. “As far as Isaac was aware, my only true weapons were my mouth and my brain. Or should that be the other way around? Anyway, I'm sorry I had to kill him. You were probably hoping to get some part of your pack back.”

“He's better dead,” Derek said, taking a deep breath and releasing Stiles. “Once a were goes fully feral, there's no hope left. He would always have been a danger to you, always.”

“That's why you didn't cut Peter loose, isn't it?” Stiles said, understanding dawning on him. “As much of a loose cannon as he was, at least there was always hope he could settle in properly, heal. But if you'd rejected him he would have gone feral, and then you would have had to kill him. Again.”

“Yeah,” Derek said uncomfortably. He hesitated for a moment before continuing. “That was my worry for Scott as well. He was already an Omega, and Omegas are only two steps away from feral at the best of times. He didn't deserve that kind of death, not when it was Peter's fault that he was a werewolf in the first place.”

“Let's place blame where it truly lies, shall we?” Stiles said, pulling Derek with him so they could both curl up on the couch. For some reason Stiles was no longer hungry. “Peter was driven nuts. Whatever he became as a result of the fire, however in control he may have seemed, he was bug-fucking nuts. Psychopathic Hunters were the ones who made him into that. The responsibility is theirs.”

Derek was silent, but it didn't feel like the silence of disagreement, so Stiles left it at that.

“I caught another scent while I was out,” Derek said about half an hour later, when Stiles was on the verge of sleep.

“Oh yeah?” Stiles said, and then yawned as he struggled back to awareness.

“Deaton has been up by the Nemeton.”
That shocked Stiles awake good and proper. He sat up and twisted to look Derek full in the face. Derek was frowning slightly, and his eyes were troubled when he looked back at Stiles.

“My vote is still the same,” Stiles said seriously. “I don’t know all the details, but I do know he was partly responsible for this. And have you noticed that his allies tend to end up dead while he continues on all la-di-dah? Highly suspicious, dude, highly suspicious. The fact that he’s been hanging around the Nemeton just makes me more sure.”

Derek still looked conflicted, and Stiles could understand why. This might be their last chance at company other than their own for the rest of their lives. But Stiles felt it deep in his gut, Deaton was bad news.

“Look at it like this,” Stiles said, sitting back a bit. “Knowing what we know, suspecting what we suspect, would you be comfortable leaving me alone with him for longish stretches of time? Do you think I would be safe?”

Derek’s frown deepened, but his eyes cleared and he nodded at Stiles. “You’re right. I don’t trust, him, can’t trust him.”

“So we kill him.”

“Okay. We’ll kill him.”

“You have to be sure about this, Derek. We can’t un-kill him if you change your mind.”

“What if we gave him one chance?” Derek suggested. “You do what you do best and try to annoy him into spilling something, anything. The moment he either threatens you or indicates that he did any of this on purpose, I’ll kill him.”

“Decapitate him,” Stiles said firmly. “It’s the only thing that we know for sure kills almost everything. Then we burn him and salt his ashes, just in case Supernatural had it right.”

“Right.”
“I wondered when you would come and find me,” Deaton said when Stiles let himself into what had once been the vet clinic.

He must have been expecting them, he'd arranged one corner of the waiting room into a laboratory of sorts, with rune carved branches of mountain ash interlocking to create a boundary separating the area from the rest of the room.

There was a piece that didn't look locked into place, and Stiles supposed that would probably be the door, or gate, or whatever you wanted to call it. Egress.

“I see you've barricaded yourself in there nicely,” Stiles said, continuing to eye up the fortifications. Was that silver dribbled all over the floor? What was Deaton expecting to turn up?

Deaton sniffed dismissively. “You might as well tell your puppy to come in,” he said, pulling several magical ingredients out from behind the counter and setting them out carefully. “I know he's lurking out there.”

“You're kinda looking a bit hemmed in there,” Stiles said as Derek came in, being careful to stay away from both the silver and the mountain ash. Even though neither of those things could hurt him. Oh, clever boy. He was going to get rewarded when they got back home.

“Yes well, a mage of my calibre doesn't get caught out very often,” Deaton said as he began to mix three of his items together. “I have no intention of letting either of you kill me, and I knew it was only a matter of time once you found Scott.”

“What does Scott have to do with anything?” Stiles asked, poking at the mountain ash runes with a finger. Nothing happened, and he looked up in time to see Deaton's surprise before it was masked.

“Don't play games with me, Stiles,” Deaton said patronizingly. “Or should I say Gmiaz? Names have power you know, and it wasn't too hard to get a copy of your birth certificate once you moved out of town. I have set multiple spells, all tied to your name. If I die, they go off and you die too.”

“You got my name off my birth certificate, and used it in these spells to get power over me?” Stiles said, holding Derek back even as he went to move. “That doesn't take Derek into account. If I die, he
“That pathetic excuse for a werewolf won't dream of harming me if it might mean your death,” Deaton said contemptuously. “You are the only one I need to be wary of.”

“So, by the looks of things you've had this set up for some time,” Stiles said. “It looks like you're the only one around, why the paranoia?”

“There was no guarantee others wouldn't come here,” Deaton said. “I'm prepared for all eventualities.”

“So you did it on purpose then?” Stiles asked cocking his head to one side. At his side he could feel Derek winding up, his muscles readying themselves. “Banished the Furies.”

“Of course!” Deaton scoffed. “It was brilliant. I knew Gerard would suggest it, for self-preservation if nothing else. He would have been the first on the chopping blo-”

His head rolled on the floor.

“That was a bit anti-climactic. I thought it would be harder.” Derek said. He'd leaped the bench in one graceful movement, a move the corrupt vet clearly didn't expect.

“Someone never read up on how to be an Evil Overlord,” Stiles said as Derek broke through the mountain ash barricade so that Stiles could enter the lab area. “Either that or he arrogantly decided to ignore it.”

“Well, that huge arrogance is one way to tell who the evil villains are,” Derek said, wiping his claws on the body. “That and the monologue and the evil voice. I wasn't going to wait for him to start smoking with an evil cigarette holder, or get sexier.”

“Do you know, you have just become even *more* desirable in my eyes?” Stiles said. “I didn't think it was possible.”

“Dad was a fan of Brit comedy,” Derek said, dragging the corpse outside into the parking lot and
emptying its pockets while Stiles found a supply of methoxyethane – what on earth was a vet doing with that? – in the dispensary cabinet. “I used to watch them with him, and I’ve been trying to keep myself up to date.”

Burning the body didn't take all that long really, and once what remained had been thoroughly salted, Derek offered to dump half in the nearest river and spread the rest around the Preserve.

So he did that while Stiles carried his weapons with him and went to raid Deaton's supplies. He was surprised at how little food the old schemer had stashed away, and was just pondering where else food could be kept when Derek arrived back.

“That was quick,” Stiles remarked, taking an appreciative second look at Derek's chest as it heaved with his efforts to recover his breath.

“Ran,” Derek explained unnecessarily. “I didn't like leaving you here by yourself when we haven't made absolutely sure it's deserted.”

Stiles rolled his eyes. “I may not be a super strong, super fast werewolf with a super sniffer, but I'm not helpless you know.”

“I know,” Derek said, moving to a metal shelf on one wall and dragging it to the side, revealing a door. “If I didn't agree with you, I'd never have left you alone.”

“Right,” Stiles said, mollified. After all, it wasn't Derek's fault he had abandonment issues and a fear of everyone around him dying. Given his past, that was inevitable. “Hang on, how long has that door been there?”

“I've known it was here for ages,” Derek said, trying the keys he'd got from Deaton one by one. “I've never had the opportunity to look back here though.”

The lock clicked and the door swung open. Stairs led down, and there was a light switch on the wall. Stiles flicked it automatically – the habits of a lifetime – and was surprised when a light came on.

“What new devilry is this?” Derek asked, eyebrows up near his hairline.
“That's three blowjobs I owe you,” Stiles said as they made their careful way down the stairs to the door below. There was a slight smell of ozone about, and Stiles hoped they weren't setting off any spells. “Unless there really is a Balrog of Morgoth down there, in which case we're both fried.”

There was no Balrog waiting for them. All around there was that ozone smell, and a feeling of released energy. There were also cages, the set up reminiscent of the Hunters’ longhouse. Instead of humans, or human-adjacent supernatural creatures, these cages held… was that a pixie? Whatever it was, it was dead.

All of the creatures in the cages were dead, all but the last one. The last one held a creature that was about two feet high and looked like a cross between a tree and a squirrel. Everything inside Stiles cried out at the thought of caging such a being. He heard Derek suck in a shocked breath, but only had eyes for the wizened creature.

Derek made no move to stop him as Stiles took the keys from him and opened the cage, releasing the trirrel.

The trirrel looked at them both for a long moment, before moving slowly to the door of the cage. Stiles was shocked when it spoke, its voice a rasp but clearly speaking English.

“So, this is not to be the place of this one's ending after all.”

“You have been done a great wrong,” Derek said, sounding oddly formal. “While we are in no way responsible for your imprisonment, I ask if there is anything we can do for your comfort.”

“Hmmm. Manners and courtesy, from one such as yourself? Interesting indeed. This one accepts your claim that you were not involved, but it is not your place to make claims on behalf of others, especially for one such as this other.” A small wizened face turned in Stiles' direction. “What of you? You were not part of this, child of the earth? You did not betray your mother so grievously?”

“No, no I swear I had no idea,” Stiles said, not understanding most of that but knowing without knowing how he knew that this was important. “I left the area because I was being kept out of things, and choices were being made that I didn't agree with. And I've never really trusted Deaton. But if I'd had any inkling that this was down here, I would have freed you all before leaving, I swear.”

“You would have tried to free us all,” the trirrel corrected. “Unless you made sure to kill the mage
first, you would have ended up trapped as well.”

“Is that what happened to you?” Stiles asked, only moments before realising that it wasn't all that tactful to start interrogating someone who had only just been set free. Someone either very important, very powerful, or both, given the way Derek was acting.

“Yes,” was the only answer the trirrel gave. It stood in the doorway of the cage, and Stiles realised suddenly that what with the height of the cage off the floor, the trirrel might find it difficult to get down.

“Can I assist you out in any way?” Derek said, pre-empting Stiles’ offer.

“You may,” the creature said regally. “This one will allow you to take it in your hands on this occasion only.”

Derek made his hands into a sort of platform, and then gently brought the trirrel up to lean against his chest. It put out small paw like hands and clutched at Derek's shirt while he carefully moved back up the stairs and made his way outside.

Stiles followed after, still wondering what on earth the little thing was.

Derek carefully lowered it to the ground, and the trirrel immediately moved slowly over to the grassy area under a tree.

It had no sooner laid all foot or hand like appendages on the ground, than began to make a loud and terribly inhuman sound, and started swaying from side to side.

“Death,” it moaned. “There is only death. All is dying. Oh, Mother, sisters, brothers. All is lost, all will fail.”

Stiles wasn't sure they should be watching what looked like a breakdown, but Derek appeared to have no intention of moving yet, so he waited too. And if he pushed himself up against Derek, hoping to find some comfort from the creature's grief-stricken wails, then that was his business.
Eventually the creature stopped swaying, and sort of collapsed onto the grass.

“Is there anything we can do for your comfort?” Derek repeated the offer he had made earlier.

“No, oh Lord Of All That Walks,” the small being said sadly. “There is not. There is no comfort left in the world for this one, or indeed for any creature belonging to the earth. The world is dying, damaged beyond its ability to heal itself, or be healed. All that has been will come to nothing, and all that should have been will never be.”

Right. The lack of weather, the dying vegetation. Stiles had suspected, but hearing it was still a blow.

“There is nothing to be done?” he asked hopelessly.

“Nothing can undo what has been done,” the creature said with some finality. It perked up again, turning towards them. “Nothing can undo what has been done, but there is a way to make it so that what happened never happened. Never will happen.”

“Time travel?” Stiles said immediately, his mind working furiously as he examined and discarded any number of theories. “Real time travel, rather than dimension hopping?”

“You are knowledgeable, child of the earth,” the trirrel said approvingly. “Yes, time travel. The Mother's last hope, and this one can only surmise that your presence here together is at The Mother’s design. For only two beings as separate and the same as you both have even a hope of attempting it.”

“Attemping? So, it might not work?” Stiles asked, sinking to sit cross legged in front of the creature, pulling Derek down to sit beside him.

“Of course not! You must petition, and you will be judged! If your need is great, your motive good, your souls clean of evil, if all of these are true and you both have the price and are willing to pay it, then there is a chance.”

“I’ve never heard of such a spell,” Stiles said wonderingly.

“Of course not, foolish child! Do you think that the knowledge of such things is left lying around for
“Fair enough,” Stiles nodded. “What is this price you spoke of?”

“This one does not know. This one only knows that the payment for such a thing will be high. As it must be.”

“How far back are we talking here?” Stiles asked thoughtfully. “Cause the problems that made all of this happen go back further than the actual zombie apocalypse.”

“The lore is that five cycles can be rewound, if the petition succeeds,” the trirrel said. “Will that be long enough?”

“That would get us back to when Laura was still alive and Peter was still in hospital,” Stiles said to Derek. “Before Scott was bitten. If we took Deaton out of the picture, then that would solve a lot of problems.”

“You think you can handle being fifteen again?” Derek asked, brows drawn together in consideration.

“The world is dying,” Stiles replied, with a nod towards the watching trirrel. “The world, Derek, not just our civilisation. If I can help make this not have happened, I will. Even if I- hang on. Mr Trirrel, whatever your name is or whoever you are, we will have our memories intact, right?”

“This one is the guardian spirit of this land,” the trirrel said with some dignity. “This one's name would be unpronounceable by those who speak with teeth and tongue. If you wish you may continue to address it as Mr Trirrel. And to answer your question, as this one understands it the petitioners’ souls are flung back through time. All that you are now, you will be back then. Only younger.”

“May we talk it over between ourselves before making our choice?” Stiles asked, already knowing what his vote would be.

“Of course,” Mr Trirrel said. “It should not be done until the child of the earth has reached twenty one cycles and come into his inheritance. You have much time to make your choice.”
“What is this inheritance that you speak of?” Stiles asked, curious since by process of elimination he’d figured that he was this ‘child of earth’.

“Did your mother not speak of this?” Mr Trirrel sounded shocked. “Surely she would not leave so important a task undone?”

“My mother died before I turned eight,” Stiles said stiffly. “One day she seemed fine, the next she was disoriented and unable to think correctly. Not long after that she was unable to communicate with us, and then she died.”

“Then the failure belongs to this one,” Mr Trirrel sagged. “This one was reckless, and was captured. It was this one's duty to ensure the protection of the essence while it was vulnerable. This all begins to become clear.”

“Just how long were you imprisoned for?” Derek asked, sounding as horrified as Stiles felt.

“This one does not know,” Mr Trirrel said, as it began to move towards the Preserve, slowly picking up speed. “With no way to measure the passing of the cycles, it could be any length of time. But it seemed an eternity, kept away as it was from that which nourishes it. And when this one made a foolishly unplanned rescue attempt, you, child of earth, were not long born.”

So, twenty years or thereabout. An age indeed. Stiles got up, and he and Derek followed after the small being.

They were led to the Nemeton, and to where the huge tree had once stood, the site of the Darach’s attempt for power.

Mr Trirrel made an anguished sound, and laid its paws on the bark. “Such a horror this one has never before witnessed,” it said after a few minutes communing with the stump. “There is no more need to wonder now, how your mother met her end. Some great evil found her unguarded after her worthless protector had been trapped, and severed the connection to the earth that sustained her. Death would indeed have been quick. If she held on at all, it was only her connection to you, a child of both worlds, that made it possible.”

“Wait,” Stiles was sure he must be putting the pieces of this puzzle together wrong. “Are you saying that my mother was tied to the earth through a tree? This tree? And that when it was cut down she
died?"

“In a manner of speaking,” Mr Trirrel said and sat against the stump. Its bark-like skin made a small scraping noise as it leaned back. “Your mother was the living essence, the channel of power of this land for many days journey all around. Her roots went deep, and she was strength and beauty and power and love.”

Stiles wasn't sure about roots, but strength and beauty and power and love sure sounded like how he remembered his mother.

“For eons she stood thus, sheltering all around. However, not very long ago she fell in love with a mortal man, as her kind are sometimes wont to do. So she fashioned a human style body for herself and met him as an equal. He fell in love with her, and they joined, and had a child.”


“Yes,” Mr Trirrel said. “But an essence away from her anchor is vulnerable, which was why this one was asked to stand guardian until such a time as she returned. The human life-span is never much beyond a hundred cycles, and it was a small enough favour for this one to grant a being who had given so much for so long. It is not an unheard of thing, after all, even if it is uncommon.”

“She fell in love and made herself a body to be with him, even knowing that he would die and that she would continue?” Stiles said, grateful for Derek's warmth at his side. Part of him wanted to reach out and touch what was left of the once mighty tree, but a bigger part was scared, and feeling like that small child again, sitting beside his mother's body after the life had left it.

“She loved him regardless,” Mr Trirrel said. “Better for her to enjoy it while it lasted, creating memories to savour until the end of the world than ignore or run away from it, and then to have that regret follow her forever.”

“Yeah,” Stiles said softly. “He never got over her, you know. I wanted him to move on, to try and be happy with someone else. Not because I didn't love and miss her, I just wanted him to not be so sad all the time.”

“That is not to be wondered at,” Mr Trirrel said sharply. “She was unique even among her own kind.”
“She was amazing,” Stiles said with a shrug. “But every kid thinks their mother is amazing, don't they?”

“This one was ignominiously trapped,” Mr Trirrel said. “Which is when some dastard found her unprotected anchor and *murdered* her. In the entirety of her existence she had only ever been truly vulnerable for less than ten cycles. If you had already come into your inheritance when it happened, then you would have been able to act as her anchor, allowing her to use her power to regenerate the damage.”

“I could have saved her?” Stiles asked, his stomach tying itself in knots. He'd always known somehow that he should have been able to save her. Everyone had told him he was being ridiculous, that there was nothing he could have done, but this being, this Mr Trirrel was telling him that he had been right. “There *was* something I could have done, it *was* my fault.”

“Don't be ridiculous!” Mr Trirrel snapped. “Does one blame a seedling for its inability to bear fruit just because one is hungry? No! The seedling cannot be expected to bear fruit until it has matured, and such is the case with you, child of earth. As it was, you were likely able to give her a great deal of comfort before the end.”

Stiles sagged back into Derek's embrace. He couldn't remember when Derek had wrapped his arms around him, but he was grateful anyway.

“Is anyone interested in betting against me if I want to put money on Deaton being the one that murdered my mother?” Stiles said, wiggling around until he could bury his face in Derek's neck. “We've gone way past coincidence and we're well into enemy action now.”

“No bet,” Derek said softly.

“Derek, my mother was a *tree*,” Stiles said into Derek's neck. Could he be blamed for feeling slightly hysterical? “Deaton pretended to be a druid, but instead was a tree-murderer. And you and me are going to have to go back in time and kill the bastard all over again, and then my dad will think I'm a murderer and have to lock me up. And my mother was a *tree*.”

“Hey, hey,” Derek said soothingly. “It's been a big day, there's been a lot to take in. Why don't we go home and eat the last of the tinned spaghetti, and just-” He shrugged, “I don't know, read or something. Tomorrow we can go and raid one of the family stashes, and once we're stocked up again we can sit down and think about all this.”
“Yes,” Stiles agreed, still hiding from the world. There were worse places to hide, Derek’s neck smelled nice, and Derek was so very strong that it was easy to let him take over for a while.

“Will you join us back at the house?” Derek asked politely, and Stiles realised he was talking to Mr Trirrel.

“This one thanks you, but no. It will stay here, or somewhere near, until the time to petition is closer. This one would also speak further to the child of earth, when he is feeling more balanced. It was not well done of this one to spring so much information on one so young without warning. This one recognises the debt owed for freedom, Lord Of All That Walks, child of earth. It will do all possible to help.”

When Stiles lifted his head to respond, Mr Trirrel had disappeared.

“I have had enough of this shit for one day,” Stiles said wearily. “Come on, let’s head home.”

By the time they were headed out to one of the Hale Family Stashes the next morning, Stiles was feeling significantly better about things. Sure, it turned out that Deaton had been the big bad all along, Stiles’ mother had been a tree, and he and Derek would have to go back in time, but on the other hand, if he had to go back in time with someone Derek was a good choice.

Stiles very much intended to find out from Mr Trirrel what Lord Of All That Walks meant. Cause when he had asked Derek, he had no idea. He also needed to find out what would be involved in this ‘inheritance’ that was due to arrive, or happen, or whatever, in about six months.

Stiles was still considering whether or not that meant he would get some nifty new powers when Derek stopped suddenly, and pushed on the rock face in front of them.

Stiles might have said something sarcastic about nearly bumping into Derek's back, but then the rock moved. Behind it was a narrow entrance way, curving around behind more rock and out of sight.

“What the fuck?” Stiles said, more to himself that to Derek. “I thought we'd be digging up crates or something.”
“At one point there were forty two of us living in Beacon Hills,” Derek said quietly. “Our stores needed to reflect that.”

By now they had turned the corner. There was door right there, and Derek led them through. Another door, some steps, another door, this one some kind of metal. More steps (much longer this time, going down) and another metal door.

On the other side of that door was some sort of living area. Derek headed straight for a room off to the left, leading Stiles through two other rooms before entering a huge area that was filled floor to ceiling with tinned foods. There were also some plastic barrels with labels on them, the only two that Stiles could read from where he was standing said ’Rice’ and ’Corn’.

Stiles turned to look at Derek who was sizing up the shelves even as he removed two folded canvas shopping bags from somewhere inside his jacket. His werewolf lover was environmentally conscious. Oh, how much fun he could have had with this if he’d known when he was sixteen.

“Was someone in your family a wee bit concerned about the likelihood of nuclear war?” Stiles asked, thinking about how deep underground they must be. “This isn’t a food stash, Derek. This is a full on fallout shelter. And it’s a fucking impressive one too, not that I’m an expert or anything.”

“My mother’s grandfather built these,” Derek said, glancing around as if seeing it for the first time. “Each one was supplied well enough to feed the entire family for six months. The idea was that we would split into small family units and take one each. With rationing and some other measures the entire forty two members of the pack could have stayed underground for up to ten years.”

“This is...” Stiles felt uncharacteristically lost for words as he looked around at the bounty sitting waiting. “This is incredible, Derek.” Out of the corner of his eye, Stiles saw Derek’s whole body relax. Had Derek been waiting for Stiles to make fun of his family, to deride them for being prepared for anything? Hell no, Stiles fucking admired that sort of shit.

“You know,” Stiles said conversationally, taking one of the canvas bags from Derek and beginning to peruse the shelves like he might at a supermarket. “Dad and I spent three months in the mountains to avoid the zombies, and most of that time we were inside with barricaded doors and windows. I would have given my right nut for something this defensible. This is awesome. How many of these did you say were scattered around Beacon Hills?”

“Five in total,” Derek said with a half smile. “Come on, let’s get some of this back to the house.”
As they trekked back through the woods, Stiles spent some time rhapsodising about what he considered to be the best find of them all. “Water, dude! Water without that icky foulness that's everywhere else. So much water!”

“Don't call me dude.”

Stiles had to laugh. “Do you know, I was worried in case your stashes weren't big enough?” he said. “And I was expecting to get very sick of eating the same stuff again and again. Your family rocked dude. Rocked hard.”

“Yeah,” Derek said, that small smile still visible.

After eating they lay down on one of the upstairs beds and stared at the ceiling while they discussed what they had learned yesterday.

It didn't take long for Stiles to realise that they were both on the same page.

“It's not even about the people,” Derek said, squeezing Stiles' hand apologetically. “I mean, partly it is, I know how glad you will be to have your dad back. It's more...”

“That the earth is dying?” Stiles suggested when it looked like Derek had run out of words. “That's what really worries me. I mean, we know that many civilisations have risen only to fall, dinosaurs covered the land and were wiped out, ice ages and what not. Humans etcetera were only ever going to be temporary custodians. But the idea that we killed the planet? That in a fairly short amount of time, it could turn into a barren rock that's no more inviting than Mars?”

“Yes,” Derek said gratefully, latching on to what Stiles had said. “I feel that we have to do whatever we can. It might not be our fault as individuals, but as a people-”

“Yeah,” Stiles agreed. “I've always felt that time-travel – and I mean true time-travel, which alters the lives of everyone everywhere – is morally untenable. Even if my life turned to crap, that's no reason to play ducks and drakes with everyone else’s life. I mean, how pissed off would I be if someone did that to me? No one has that right. But this is different.”
Derek sighed. “The only thing that concerns me is the price,” he said hesitantly. “And if fiction turns out to be correct, the whole petition is going to be an all or nothing event in any case.”

“All in?” Stiles said. “Cards on the table, everything to play for, everything to lose?”

“Makes sense,” Derek said heavily. “And if we fail...”

“Then we’re both dead,” Stiles replied bluntly. “But to be perfectly honest Derek, at this point I wouldn’t want to keep living if you were dead anyway. I mean, what would be the point? The rest of my life alone?”

The grip on Stiles’ hand got tighter. “Yeah,” Derek said quietly.

“So, we’re agreed that we’re going to do this?” Stiles asked.

“Yeah,” Derek repeated, a little louder this time.

“Then I guess it’s time to go find Mr Trirrel. Which okay, what exactly is Mr Trirrel by the way? You seemed to have an idea even back in Deaton’s dungeon.”

“It’s...” Derek shifted restlessly on the bed as he searched for the right words. “I suppose you could call it the spirit of the forest? Except that description sounds very limiting compared to the reality. The fact that it’s so small and reduced is a reflection of what is happening in its domain.”

“Hang on, I thought my mother was the guardian?” Stiles objected. “Why would there need to be two guardians?”

“Maybe she was, and it was just temping while she was on holiday? So to speak?” Derek suggested. “It did say that it was doing her a favour.”

“More questions,” Stiles grumbled. “God, I miss the internet. Well, how about we head back and tell Mr Trirrel that we’re agreed that trying to go back in time is the best option, and try and set up some kind of teaching thing. And I want to know what this Lord business is about as well.”
“Okay,” Derek agreed.

“And then after that we can go on a search for Peter's computer files,” Stiles went on. “I want to know if he knew anything at all about any of this, and anyway, even with him being nuttier than squirrel shit, his files are likely to be much better researched than that garbage that we lifted from the Hunters.”

“I want to do a more thorough search of those buildings too,” Derek added.

“Right,” Stiles agreed. “No need to hurry, we've got six months to achieve everything we want to achieve. I fully intend to go back in time armed with as much information as I can fit in my skull. Which- hey, I wonder if the Hunters had any sort of membership files or lists or whatever? Something else to keep an eye out for.”

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“So, about this Lord Of All That Walks business,” Stiles said, once they'd broken the news that they were definitely going to do their best to go back in time.

The little tree-squirrel hadn't looked the slightest bit surprised, which was a bit annoying.

“What do you wish to know?” Mr Trirrel replied.

“Well, what does it mean?” Stiles asked. “I mean, I see Derek and sometimes I go 'Oh lordy, that is the finest piece of ass to walk' but that doesn't mean that I feel inclined to call him 'My Lord' or anything. Unless we're roleplaying, that is.”

“Stiles!” hissed Derek, ears pink.

“Of course not,” Mr Trirrel replied, ignoring him. “You are a child of earth.”

“Yeah, but I definitely walk.” Stiles said. “Can you see how it might get a little bit confusing?”
“When he was birthed, The Lord Of All That Walks was merely a Wolf-Walker,” Mr Trirrel said in the slow tones of teachers everywhere who are annoyed at having to explain things to particularly dense students. “He has undergone transformation, walked all paths of the wolf. As a leader, he sacrificed everything that made him a leader for the good of a pack member. Throughout this journey he continued to try and do his best for all those around him, even to giving up avenging himself on those who had wronged him.”

“Yeah,” Stiles said impatiently. “We know that part.”

“He was tested many times,” Mr Trirrel continued, ignoring Stiles. “These tests he passed, and so The Mother bestowed her blessing, and he became The Lord Of All That Walks.”

“Yes, but what does that mean?” Stiles said again.

“It means that your mate holds dominion over all of the Mother's creatures who walk the earth.” Mr Trirrel said, somehow sounding affronted.

“So, he's like my boss?” Stiles said, exchanging a glance with Derek. Yeah, no, that didn't seem right at all.

“No, no, of course not!” Mr Trirrel chittered for a moment, before speaking again. “You are a child of earth, not one who walks upon it!”

“You see these legs?” Stiles said, pointing at his lanky limbs. “I use them to walk upon the earth. You can see where the confusion might come in.”

“I think I get it,” Derek said, looking rather uncomfortable. “You're saying that I'm now kind of the rank above Alpha, but that my… 'lordship', for want of a better term, only extends over those like me. Or like I was.”

“Far above. All Walkers bow to their Lord,” Mr Trirrel said. “It matters not if they walk as a wolf, or as a fox, or bear, or crow. All will submit.”

“Um,” Stiles said hesitantly. “Not long ago we ran into an old friend of ours, a werewolf called
Isaac. He'd gone feral, and hid from Derek, and then when I was alone he tried to kill me. Not a lot of submission going on there.”

“But he did not attack his Lord directly,” Mr Trirrel countered. “And he had received no direct order that you were not to be attacked or killed, correct?”

“Correct,” agreed Stiles with a sigh. “Okay, I get it. Wait, will Derek still be this Lord if we succeed in going back in time?”

“Yes,” Mr Trirrel said, slow and precise as if it was speaking to an idiot. “All that you are now, you will be back then. Only younger. It is one reason why you must wait for your inheritance, child of earth.”

“I have a name, you know,” Stiles said. “Several names even. Why do you never use them?”

“You have yet to receive your true-name,” Mr Trirrel said. “It will be chosen when your nature is decided. Until then, child of earth is accurate and true without binding you in any way.”

“Yeah okay, fine,” Stiles said. “So, I think we're done for the moment, but is it okay if we come back once a week with questions or whatever?”

“Yes,” Mr Trirrel agreed, beginning to fade. “This one will await your return to this place, child of earth, Lord Of All That Walks.”

“That is-?” Stiles shook his head. “Did he really do a cheesy fade out?”

“It,” Derek corrected. “It has no gender, and has repeatedly referred to itself as 'it'.”

“Good point,” Stiles said as they made their way back home. “You might need to remind me again.”

After that, time seemed to march relatively quickly. There was a lot to be done, because Stiles hadn't
been joking when he said he wanted to cram his head full of as much useful knowledge as possible.

To that end, he and Derek had systematically gone through the three houses on Hale property, Deaton's home as well as the old Vet clinic, the old Argent house in town, and anywhere else they thought they might find useful information.

According to several journals that they'd found of Deaton's, he'd been after what a lot of mad villains were after, immortality. He had planned everything so that the majority of humanity would be wiped out, giving him almost unfettered access to the power stored deep in the earth.

The unexpected tainting had derailed some of his plans, and he'd been in the middle of trying to adapt his previous strategy to take the new situation into account when Derek and Stiles had rolled back into town.

It was while going through some papers that Deaton was keeping at his home that they came across a letter from Scott in an envelope addressed to Isaac.

“Do you want to read it?” Derek asked, holding the paper as if it was a live wolfsbane grenade.

“Read it out loud,” Stiles directed, getting up from the floor to sit himself on the couch in Deaton's living room.

Derek sighed, but sat next to him and unfolded the single sheet that was inside the envelope

“Dear Isaac,” Derek read haltingly, as he slowly deciphered Scott's bad handwriting

“By the time you find this, I will be dead. Please believe that this is not something I want to have to do, but I have realised that I have to.

“I have discovered that it was Gerard who created the infection that caused the zombie apocalypse. I don't know how he got around Chris Argent's control over him, and Deaton won't confirm it, but I'm sure that it was definitely him.

“I have to stop the zombies and Gerard, Isaac, I have to do what is right. Unfortunately Gerard is
too well protected by his zombies for me to get close enough to kill him.

“But there is another way. Remember when Lydia and Peter died? If I die, then Gerard will die, and then the spell he is using on the zombies won’t have an anchor, and there will be no more zombies. So I’ve got one of Chris Argent’s old wolfsbane bullets, and I’m going to do what is right.

“I’m sorry that means you will be alone, Isaac, but Deaton is still around and you won’t have to worry about the zombies any more.

“Goodbye, Isaac. Thank you for sticking by me when everyone else abandoned me.

“All the best

“Alpha Scott McCall”

Stiles let out a sigh, and covered his eyes with his hand. “Tell me you didn’t just read that,” Stiles said, wondering how Scott’s idiocy could still surprise him. “Tell me he did not do what you just said that he did.”

“It fits,” Derek said with a shrug.

“Is it dated?” Stiles asked, wondering if his speculation would have confirmation.

There was a rustle of paper. “No,” Derek said. “No date.”

“Do you remember when the zombies stopped?” Stiles asked, still hiding behind his hand. “That gust of foul air that seemed to contaminate everything around? I’m pretty sure I know what that was. That was what happened when a spell that caused decay and zombie-ism in living things was unceremoniously cut off from its target, and then left adrift to latch onto the biggest and best living thing around to sustain it.”

“The planet,” Derek said with a groan. “Fucking Scott!”

“You want to know the best part?” Stiles said mirthlessly. “Zombies made from humans have a
limited shelf-life. The infection is spread through the soft tissue, and they can only be animated while a certain percentage of the soft tissue remains. Exposed to water and air, a zombie can only last for six months before they become mostly skeleton.”

“Which means...”

“Which means that if he'd waited only a little while longer, Gerard would have lost the use of his undead army and Scott could have killed him then. As it was, the humans had already been wiped out, that horse had already bolted.”

“Would going up to Gerard and killing him have not had the same result?” Derek asked, after a few moments silence.

“No,” Stiles explained uncovering his eyes and sitting up straighter. “Death is a natural part of life, and meeting your death at someone's blade or fist or claws or whatever, is actually a natural way to die. Whether we’re predator or prey, death by violence is always a possibility. Even poison, or combat magic. They are things that kill, therefore it is natural that they should kill us.”

“Okay,” Derek said.

“But what Scott did, what he was aiming to do, was not to kill, but to rescind permission to live.”

“What's the difference?” Derek asked, sounding confused.

“It's hard to explain,” Stiles said. “Can you just trust me that it is? Different, I mean? If Scott had killed Gerard with his claws, the zombie spell would have collapsed, much the same way as Deaton's spells collapsed with his death. But instead the spell – by now probably very strong given the number of zombies that were feeding it – was left untethered, and it latched onto the best source of sustenance around.”

“So you're saying that Scott tried to fix something that was about to resolve itself without his help, and instead of achieving anything of worth, he doomed the entire world because he acted without knowing what the hell he was doing?”

“Yeah,” Stiles said miserably. “Story of the last four years.”
“Not your fault, Stiles.”

“Wasn’t it?” Stiles asked. “You know there’s no such thing as a True Alpha, right?”

“What do you mean?” Derek’s eyebrows went right up.

“Every wolf has the potential to be an Alpha. All they need is enough power looking to them to lead. You get a Beta wolf who can convince five or more other Beta’s or Omega’s to follow him or her, and he or she will eventually gain Alpha status, and start building power.”

“So Scott-”

“I’m a child of earth,” Stiles said watching Derek's face. “I hold a great deal of power, even if most of it is unavailable until I turn twenty one. Mr Trirrel says that even if I had accepted the bite, nothing would have happened. Scott thought he was some prophesied messiah because my power boosted his power so much that became an Alpha.”

“Scott thought he was a prophesied messiah because he was an idiot who had Deaton feeding him misinformation,” Derek corrected. “Misinformation that he didn't bother researching or fact checking. Face it, Stiles, exactly how much about the supernatural world did you take on faith just because 'someone' told you?”

“Yeah, but I'm paranoid,” Stiles replied.

“You're alive,” Derek said flatly.

“And so are you,” Stiles returned. “No thanks to Evil Super-villain Veterinarian. No, I'm sorry. That still sounds stupid.”

“I wonder why Deaton didn't stop Scott from doing what he did,” Derek mused thoughtfully. “He must have known that it would wreck his plans.”
“Who knows,” Stiles replied. “Quite frankly, I'm much happier for him to be dead than I would be if he was still around to answer our questions. Not that he was ever in the habit of answering questions anyway. That's probably one of the things that originally set me against him, if I'm going to be honest.”

“Have you managed to get Mr Trirrel to tell you how it was captured yet?” Derek asked as they went back to sorting through the papers.

Stiles snorted. “It was a simple reflection/siphon spell,” he said shaking his head. “They’re easy enough to avoid once you know what they look like, but Mr Trirrel wasn't expecting it. A lot of the power that Deaton had been using since then was probably stolen from Mr Trirrel, and the feel of it would have felt natural enough to most supernaturals that they wouldn't question his claims of Druidism.”

“A bit embarrassing then?” Derek asked with a small grin.

“A bit,” Stiles agreed. “But really, I think that two decades of imprisonment and having its power stolen is plenty punishment. Not to mention what it's going through now.”

“Is there something wrong?” Derek said with some concern.

“I'm pretty sure it's only hanging on to existence out of sheer stubborn spite,” Stiles said sadly. “It's determined to help us, and that's what keeps it going. Have you noticed it's getting smaller?”

“I wondered if I was imagining that.”

“No, as I understand things Mr Trirrel is holding tight to its power. But as it uses what it does have, it will dwindle. Until finally it's nothing.”

“Come on,” Derek said abruptly. “These things won't sort themselves.”

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One day each week Stiles spent with the small guardian, learning about his heritage. There was a lot
that couldn't be taught until he'd come into his inheritance, but since after that he'd hopefully be sent hurtling through time back to when he had just turned sixteen again, he needed to learn as much as possible now.

“But Derek and I are going to kill Deaton, and then we can free you,” Stiles said when Mr Trirrel had told him that he was to learn as much as possible right now. “You can teach me then.”

“Foolish child! There is no guarantee that this one will be in any fit state, or even alive!” Mr Trirrel said angrily. “From the moment you awaken in the past, there are no sureties! The evil one might become uneasy at something and decide that it is better that this one is no longer alive! So you learn now.”

“Okay, I get it, I get it,” Stiles said, lifting his hands in the 'I surrender' pose. “No need to have a cow, dude. I'll learn!”

“What is a cow-dude?” Mr Trirrel asked suspiciously. “No! This one will not be distracted! Now we will discuss the safest ways to tap into the ley-lines. Pay attention, child of earth, this may one day mean the difference between success and failure.”

So Stiles learned.

He also used the generator to access the various computers he'd collected from Hunters and evil vets and a laptop that he was pretty sure had belonged to Peter.

It turned out that Peter was the only one who was keeping a lot of juicy stuff on computer, which kinda made sense. Hunters were more interested in killing things than keeping detailed, meticulous notes on everything, and Deaton was sixty, and old school, and was much more comfortable with pen and paper as his stack of personal journals proved.

But Peter's laptop was a little treasure trove, and while he was bug fucking nuts, he'd also anticipated his own death and left his information safely behind several puzzles that appeared to be designed specifically for Stiles. One of the questions was simply 'Where did I offer to bite you?' which ended up with Stiles relating the whole thing to Derek, making his eyes light up in anger.

So one day a week and for an hour each night, Derek and Stiles pored over the files that Peter had left. Some of the stuff Peter had managed to find made Stiles wish that he was able to take a flash drive or something back with him.
Meanwhile, Stiles and Derek made plans and contingency plans, and then contingency plans for their contingency plans, and Stiles was pretty sure that between them they'd thought of almost everything that could be expected to happen.

Of course, neither of them were stupid enough to believe that only things that they expected would crop up, but Stiles was of the mind that they could only do as much as they could. If the universe wanted more from them, then they would need a bit more help.

One of the issues they had discussed was Laura, who would still be alive and who would have been Derek's Alpha for five years or so. They had also discussed whether or not it would be a good idea to turn Boyd, Erica, and Isaac into werewolves again.

In the end, they decided to tell Laura everything and leave the option to bite the others up to her. She would probably need to bite someone, or they could send for Cora, or hopefully try to de-crazy Peter, or all of the above.

There were a lot of 'ors' and 'ifs' in their planning.

They talked about what to do about the Hunters, and Stiles was adamant that his dad be brought into things right from the start.

“But I thought you wanted to keep him safe?” Derek said with some confusion.

“Yeah well, I've grown up a bit,” Stiles said. “It's not actually up to me, he can make his own choices. In the end, keeping him in the dark only left him in more danger, and it strained our relationship almost to breaking point. I am not going through that again.”

“It's up to you,” Derek said. “I trust the Sheriff, you know that.”

“Good,” Stiles said. “So you'll tell him about what Kate did? Cause you know that I looked at the file from the fire, and there was plenty of circumstantial evidence, enough to bring her in, but since there was no motive she was disregarded.”

“There was?” Derek asked, his mulish expression changing to one of startlement.
“Yes,” Stiles confirmed. “So. You pin a motive on her? Get Dad to talk to all the people that Peter murdered so that they can testify? That will send a message to the Hunters. Cause I am not putting up with their bullshit 'we do what we want and you can't stop us' in my town again. Chris and Victoria can just take Allison and fuck off back to France. Or wherever, I don't actually care so long as it's far away.”

“I thought you liked Allison?” Derek said neutrally.

“I didn't want to make waves with Scott,” Stiles corrected. “She's as fucking psycho as the majority of the rest of her family, and no way did I want to be in her cross-hairs.”

“Yeah, not pleasant,” Derek said with a frown.

“So, we tell my dad,” Stiles said, bringing the conversation back to where it had begun.

Winter was no problem because there was no winter. The days got shorter, and the temperature was slightly colder, but there was none of the usual weather indications of a change of seasons. It was eerie and uncomfortable, and Stiles constantly felt that he was out of place. Mr Trirrel finally deemed Stiles' knowledge sufficient, and taught him the Ritual of Petition.

It was actually quite simple, providing the petitioner got the rune sets inscribed correctly. Stiles spent days laboriously carving the runes onto rocks and stones until his small teacher was satisfied.

Before too long, Stiles' birthday was approaching. He'd been coached by Mr Trirrel as much as the exhausted being could manage, but there were a lot of unusual variables in Stiles' coming of age. The sickness of the planet might mean that nothing would happen at all.

Stiles was pretty sure that something would happen. There was a sense of anticipation all around that just kept growing.

Finally, the day arrived.

In the dark before dawn, Stiles went down to the Nemeton and sat cross legged on the stump of his mother's tree, waiting. At first he'd felt a bit strange around it, but Mr Trirrel had cured him of that
pretty smartly.

As the first rays of sunlight hit him, he could feel the power start to flow. There was a brief moment where Stiles allowed himself to imagine what might have happened if he’d turned twenty one with no knowledge of his heritage, and then even that thought was consumed.

When it was over, there was no way that he could really describe what had happened to him.

What he did know was that he had chosen the path of his life, or it had been chosen for him based upon his life so far. He finally got why Mr Trirrel had refused to use a name for him. A being of Mr Trirrel’s power – even if most of it was now spent – naming him before his maturity might have affected him adversely.

“What are you, child of earth?” Mr Trirrel said solemnly. “Who are you?”

“This one is Justice for All,” Stiles said, answering without thinking. “Sprawiedliwość na wszystkie.”

Mr Trirrel began making the sound that Stiles had come to interpret as laughter. “Oh child. A true Justice has not been seen in many, many, cycles. This one wishes it could watch what that one does. That one will be most amusing!”

The little creature laughed for a while before it sobered. “But the child has chosen a path full of conflict. It is fitting that his mate should be the only Lord to Walk in as many cycles. Come, child of Justice. There is more learning before the petition can be made. There must be control! Why bother to save the Mother if you will just blow her apart again?”

For the next week Stiles put all of his energy into learning the control that Mr Trirrel demanded of him. As he learned, as the week went on, Mr Trirrel continued to grow smaller, until he could have fit on the palm of Stiles' hand.

“That will be sufficient,” Mr Trirrel said finally. “There is so much more that this one should teach you, but its time is running out. Listen well, child of Justice. On the day when the earth is closest to the sun, you must make your petition.”

Stiles nodded.
“This one has little left to offer,” the tiny creature said. “But what there is shall be used to best effect. Lean down, child of Justice, that this one may touch you.”

“You never did tell me what your name was,” Stiles said, his heart in his throat. He knew what this was, he had suspected for months that Mr Trirrel would not last until they were ready, that he and Derek would be left alone again.

“In your tongue, this one is Finder, Seeker, Hidden Teacher,” Mr Trirrel said, raising his hand-like paws to Stiles' forehead. “And this one gifts the child of Justice with Final Blessing, of its own free will. Go, child of Justice. Save our Mother, and all debts are repaid.”

Stiles knew that this time, when Mr Trirrel faded out, it wouldn't be coming back again.

He sat back against the stump of the tree that had been his mother and sighed. There was just over a month before the solstice. He and Derek needed to be ready.

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In the end, they performed the sacrifice at the Nemeton. Since he'd come into his inheritance Stiles could feel the power still imbued in the ancient wood that had once embraced and sheltered his mother, and he understood how staying near it had lengthened the time Mr Trirrel had been able to spend teaching him.

Thankfully there was no bloodshed required. If Stiles was not what he was, if Derek had not evolved, then their heart's blood would have been needed, but as it was Stiles was able to offer their lifes’ essences without such a messy beginning.

The whole experience was weird. He and Derek ended up standing in a white mist, stark naked. There were voices all around, some arguing, some laughing, but none speaking in any language that Stiles knew.

WHY DO YOU COME BEFORE US?

It wasn't words so much as a knowing that someone was asking them something. Luckily Mr Trirrel
had given Stiles some pointers.

“We have come in petition,” he said aloud for Derek’s benefit. “To make it so that what did happen
never will happen. To remove the architect of the destruction of our planet.”

AND ONCE THAT IS DONE?

“We know there is a price,” Stiles replied. “If we can pay it, we will. After that, we have no further
plans other than to stay true to our natures.”

JUSTICE FOR ALL?

“Yes,” Stiles shrugged. “I’m not a god or anything, I know I can’t fix everything. But I will continue
to do what I can, where I can, to ensure that all receive justice.”

AND YOU, LORD OF ALL THAT WALKS?

“I go with him,” Derek said, much to Stiles surprise. “I have never felt more at peace than I have
with him. Where he leads, I will follow.”

YOU FIND HIM WORTHY OF SUCH TRUST?

Derek nodded. “He is the best leader I have ever known. He cares for his people, he listens to them.
He is willing to sacrifice for them. He’s smart and loyal and beautiful inside and out. I have never
trusted anyone more.”

DOES THE CHILD OF JUSTICE ACCEPT THE SERVICE OF THE LORD OF ALL THAT
WALKS?

“I accept him as a partner, an equal,” Stiles said firmly. “I trust him absolutely. There is no one I
would rather have by my side.”

VERY WELL. YOUR PETITION HAS BEEN HEARD.
Stiles and Derek exchanged glances. The voices around them rose and fell with fevered urgency.

THE RE-ORDERING OF TIME IS OF BENEFIT TO YOUR PLANET. WHAT OF THE UNIVERSE AS A WHOLE? WHAT HAVE YOU TO OFFER?

“Only ourselves,” Stiles replied, wondering if this was going to be where it all fell apart.

More discussion that Stiles couldn't understand.

OUR JUDGEMENT IS THIS. WE WILL RE-ORDER TIME SO THAT YOU MAY ACHIEVE YOUR PRIMARY GOAL. THIS WILL REQUIRE THAT YOU BOTH BE REMOVED FROM THE TIME STREAM, TO AVOID A PARADOX.

THE PRICE FOR OUR INTERVENTION IS ETERNAL SERVITUDE. YOU WILL BE BOUND TO OUR SERVICE, WHICH WILL FORMALLY BEGIN NO LATER THAN THE NATURAL DEATH OF YOUR PLANET. YOU MAY TAKE UP YOUR SERVICE EARLIER IF YOU BOTH WISH.

BY STATING YOUR ALLIEGENCES SO CLEARLY BEFORE US, YOU ARE NOW CONSIDERED ETERNALLY BOUND. CONGRATULATIONS.

THE RE-ORDERING OF TIME WILL NOW COMMENCE.

Stiles reached for Derek's hand grasping it just before he was hit with a whirlwind of power that drove into the very centre of his being.

Even as he felt ripped apart at the atomic level, he could feel the ghost of Derek's hand clutching his.

Stiles woke up.
The first thing he saw was the familiar white ceiling of Beacon Hills Hospital. The smell of hospital grade disinfectant was strong, and there was a steady beeping in the background. By the feel of it he had one of those devices to monitor his pulse attached to his finger, and Stiles found himself automatically looking towards his finger to check.

Which was when he got his first shock. That was not the adult arm that he was used to seeing, nor the long gangly one of his mid to late adolescence. *That* was a child's arm, and one that he had not expected to see attached to him ever again.

Stiles looked up from his smaller than anticipated arm to take in the rest of the hospital room. It was one of the rare doubles, a room for two rather than the usual four beds. The other bed was occupied too, a dark haired figure was lying on top of the blanket with his or her back to him. Not an adult, unless the adult was very short. And whoever it was had ears that stuck out rather a lot.

Even as Stiles watched, the figure stirred, sitting up.

“Stiles?”

It was Derek. Not nearly as young as Stiles was – going by his arm anyway – but definitely much younger than he had been the last time Stiles saw him.

“Derek?” Stiles said, and man that was weird, hearing his youthful voice coming out of his mouth again.
Derek got up off the bed and came over to where Stiles was lying. “Thank god you've woken up,” he said, and wow, Derek's voice was way different too. And he was so cute with his big ears and his big teeth. Oh my god, Derek Hale wasn't the big bad wolf, he was a bunny rabbit.

“How-” Stiles tried to sit up, but gave that up as a bad idea when every muscle in his body protested. He frowned. “Derek, I can't help but notice that we are far too young to have gone back five years.”

"No,” Derek said rolling his eyes. “Really? What amazing powers of observation you have, Stiles! If only we all had such amazing skills.”

“Don't be snarky, give it to me straight,” Stiles said, fighting a grin. “Just how far did we come back? And why am I in hospital?”

“Fourteen years,” Derek said succinctly. “We arrived back the same day we left, only fourteen years earlier.”

“And I'm in hospital because?”

“Do you remember that time when a car went out of control outside the movie theatre, in the carpark?” Derek asked.

“Ye-es,” Stiles said slowly. “Vaguely. I might have been hit, but I was pulled out of the way by some guy who was there with his younger sister.”

“Well, this time he was disoriented because he'd just been hurtled through time, and he didn't get you out of the way quite fast enough,” Derek said, his ears going pink. “You hit your head, and since then they've been monitoring you.”

“Oh my god, dude, that was you?” Stiles said, gaping at his saviour. “No one ever told me, just said 'some guy'. Hang on, this means all my statistics on which of us has saved the other more often and more effectively is completely derailed. Derailed, Derek! No longer accurate! Also, your ears are adorable.”

Derek lifted his hands to cover his ears and scowled.
“Aw, you’re embarrassed. I take it back, it’s not your ears that are adorable, you are adorable!”

Derek flushed even more, before rallying. “I’m adorable? I’m twelve, Stiles. Whereas you… have you worked out how old you are?”

Stiles rolled his eyes. “Fourteen years makes me-” he broke off. “I’m seven? I’ve not long turned seven? But that means-”

“Stiles?”

Stiles’ head swivelled towards the door almost of its own volition. He’d almost forgotten that voice, forgotten how warm and safe and loved it made him feel. “Mom?”

“I’m sorry, honey,” Claudia said, “I was going to be here when you woke up, but I promised your father I would eat at least twice a day. How are you feeling, do you feel hurt anywhere?”

“Mom?” Stiles said, all of a sudden feeling like he wanted to cry.

“Oh, honey,” she said, and then she somehow managed to climb up beside him on the narrow hospital bed, gathering him into her arms. “I’m so sorry I left you alone. I never wanted to, you know that right? This time it will be better, I promise you.”

Stiles was unable to hold back his tears any longer, and he spent some time crying on his mother. Part of him was horrified at behaving like such a baby, but the bigger part, the part that had longed to feel his mother’s arms around him just one more time told that other part to shut up and deal.

When he had cried himself out, he lay there against his mother enjoying the stroking of her fingers through his hair, wondering just what had happened to change the plan so drastically.

Then a thought occurred to him, and he levered himself up and around to look wide eyed at Derek. “Derek! If my mom is- here, then that means that your family-”
“Yeah,” said Derek with a small smile. “All of them.”

“Well, where are they then?” Stiles asked looking around in case he’d missed other people in his room the first time he’d looked. Nope, no-one. He looked back at Derek. “Why aren’t you with them?”

“You’ve been out for two days, sweetheart,” Claudia said, still caressing her son’s hair. “Derek has told us the bare bones of what you both did, and why. Even without his explanation, it's very clear that he has become something I never thought I’d see again, and you, my small ball of terror, have had your maturity and your naming, and I wasn't there to see it.”

“Mr Trirrel said we could only go back five years, and that I would need my power fully awakened,” Stiles explained hurriedly.

“Who is Mr Trirrel?” Claudia asked, looking from Stiles to Derek and back again.

Derek was sitting on the uncomfortable plastic chair, and avoided Stiles' eyes.

“Derek, just what have you and haven't you told them?” Stiles inquired. “Surely Mr Trirrel is a rather large part?”

“I said that the world was dying, and we came back to stop it,” Derek said, risking a glance at Stiles and then staring at the blanket again. “And that you had come into your inheritance, and that apparently I had become something else too. Actually, that last one was pretty self evident.”

“Yeah?” Stiles asked, reaching out and grabbing hold of Derek's hand.

Derek grimaced. “You know how Mr Trirrel said ‘All will submit’? Well, he was right. Do you have any idea how weird it was when my own mother submitted to me?”

“Ah,” Stiles said. Yeah, that would be weird. “We haven't exactly planned for this eventuality Derek.”

“There's something else,” Derek said reluctantly. “You remember them telling us that we were now
eternally bound?”

“Ye-es?” Stiles said cautiously.

“What did you think it meant?”

“I haven't had time to give it a lot of thought. That our fates were now inextricably wound together, I suppose,” Stiles replied. “That we would always have each other? Quite frankly after that first bit my mind was a bit occupied by internal spazzing.”

“Well, one of the things it means, right here and right now, is that we are now bound,” Derek said stoically. “As in, if we get too far away from each other we feel excruciating agony, and there might be involuntary teleportation.”

“Well, shit,” Stiles said feelingly. And then after a moment his eyes widened. “Holy shit! If we can teleport involuntarily, then it makes sense that we can train ourselves to do it voluntarily too!”

“Stiles!” Claudia remonstrated. “Please don't use language like that! And I don't care if you are mentally twenty one years old, there are only a few people who know about that and I will not have everyone thinking that your father and I are bad parents just because you've developed a potty mouth!”

“Yeah, okay, mom,” Stiles said a bit sheepishly. He'd never sworn in front of his mother before, and to be honest it did feel weird. Kinda sacrilegious. “I'll try. You might have to remind me.”

“Of course,” she said. “Now, in all of this you still haven't said who this Mr Trirrel is.”

“Oh yeah,” Stiles said. “Well, he was this dude that me and Derek came across. He'd been kept captive, and we freed him, and he was the one who told us how to make the petition.”

Claudia's whole body seemed to lose some tension that Stiles hadn't even been aware it was holding. “You petitioned the Great Ones? Oh, thank heavens.”

“You really told them as little as possible, didn't you?” Stiles said to Derek, affection outweighing his
irritation.

“I'm no good at explaining things,” Derek said with a shrug. “You know that. I told them they'd have to wait until you woke up for the full story.”

“Fair enough,” Stiles said. “I am the brains in this dynamic duo, after all.”

“You'll be brained if you don't watch it,” Derek replied, the corner of his mouth twitching.

“Please, not against the steering wheel this time,” Stiles pretended to beg. “Use the wall instead, it hurts less.”

“No promises,” Derek said in his bldest voice, before he caught Stiles' eyes and chuckled.

“What did you think we'd done?” Stiles asked his mother, who was watching them indulgently.

“There are a number of ways I've heard of that people have used to try and influence the past,” Claudia explained. “As far as I'm aware, all of them have ended badly, except for the petition.”

“Is the petition used often?” Stiles asked curiously.

“Only once before in my existence,” Claudia said. “To be more precise, it has only succeeded once before. But who knows how many attempts have been made? That is not for us to know. We were not told why time had been re-ordered, only that it had.”

“But you remember other failed attempts at time travel?” Derek said, leaning forward in his chair almost unconsciously.

“Yes,” Claudia said sadly. She didn't seem inclined to say any more, which was fair enough.

“Hang on, you never answered my question,” Stiles said suddenly. “Well, you sort of did. If you and I can't get too far apart, then I get why you're here and not there, but why isn't someone with you?”
Derek sighed. “Technically there is,” he said reluctantly. “Mom and Dad have work, and Laura is looking after the younger ones. Since I can't be at home, Mom assigned me a watcher too, despite saying that she trusts Mrs Stilinski to look after me. Not that I need a watcher. My body might only be twelve but my mind is still twenty six.”

“Who did she punish with that job?” Stiles asked, running through a mental list of all the Hales he knew. “Not—”

“Ah, nephew, your one true love has awoken!” came a familiar voice from the door. “Dare I ask if it required a fairy-tale like devotion?”

Peter fucking Hale. Younger, prettier, saner, but just as annoying.

One look at Derek's face was enough to fill in the rest. Oh my god, Derek's serial-murderer glare on his twelve year old face was priceless.

By the look on Claudia and Peter's faces, they thought so too.

By the time Stiles was released from hospital he had come to a greater understanding of the issues Derek had gone through with resurrected!Peter. Because this Peter – a Peter that hadn't gone insane and lost his pack – was funny and strong and intelligent. He was fairly kind to his younger relatives, and only very occasionally did the sadistic cruel streak that Stiles had come to know so well peek out.

For Stiles it was actually rather easy to differentiate the two Peters. Derek was having a great deal more trouble, not helped by Peter's habit of gently poking fun at Derek as often as possible.

“Look, dude,” Stiles said to Peter while Derek was down the hall answering the call of nature. “You need to leave it for awhile.”

“You want me to leave? Stiles, I'm hurt!” Peter said with an insincere smile.
“Don't be a dick,” Stiles said bluntly, ignoring his mother’s sigh from across the room where she was filling out his early discharge forms. “If you love Derek, which I’m pretty sure you do, the best thing to do is let him work through his issues at his own pace. He's like a hedgehog, all prickly outside and soft vulnerable inside. You keep poking him, and he'll only curl up tighter and tighter until he might never properly un-curl again.”

“Does my nephew know that you've assigned him the traits of a small rodent-like creature that is highly susceptible to disease?” Peter asked, his smile turning into a smirk.

“Not very much that comes out of Stiles’ mouth surprises me anymore,” Derek said as he came back into the room.

“That's not a dare, is it, Derek?” Stiles asked, enjoying the brief panic that crossed Derek's face.

“No!” Derek said quickly. “Stiles, please just… no.”

“Okay,” Stiles relented. For now. “But only cause you asked so nicely.”

“Right, that's it!” Claudia said, signing the last form with a flourish. “I'm going to hand this in, the three of you can make sure Stiles is ready to head out. And boys, I don't want to hear any fighting, or I may just keep the peach cobbler that I'll be making tonight to myself. Since John won't be back from his conference till tomorrow.”

Stiles’ stomach gave a lurch at the mention of his father. It had been both good and bad that his dad wasn't there immediately after he'd woken up.

On the one hand, he was overjoyed that he had his dad back. On the other, there were all the feelings of loss and guilt that he'd never worked through. As it was, he was vacillating between being deliriously happy to have both parents back again, and crippling guilt that he’d profited from the destruction of his entire planet.

Cause if there was one thing that Stiles knew for sure? This time around he was going to do everything humanly possible – and several things humanly impossible – to make sure they both survived.
Which really made him feel for Derek. After all, if Stiles was feeling this much conflict then what was Derek going through? Derek, who as far as Stiles was aware still took personal responsibility for the deaths of almost his entire family.

Well, they could talk about it when they got home.

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Claudia Stilinski and Talia Hale had pretty much decided together that as soon as John Stilinski was back home then they would all have a nice sit down and then Stiles and Derek would tell them everything.

By 'all' they meant both sets of parents and Peter, who was by now extremely curious as to the reason for Derek's manner towards him.

On the whole Stiles didn't disagree with this plan. The one problem he had was Deaton's continuing existence. Every hour that passed when he wasn't taken care of was another hour for something to cock things up and interfere, or for Deaton to get wind of what was happening and go to ground.

He didn't need to be psychic to know that Derek felt exactly the same way. They didn't even need to talk about it. Scary shit.

And right there was one bonus of this bond thingy, because Stiles was pretty sure that if it hadn't been physically impossible, Derek would have gone off and taken care of it before Stiles had even woken up. Quite frankly, Stiles was looking forward to watching the evil bastard die all over again.

So Stiles and Derek waited until the household was asleep that night and snuck out the window to take care of things.

If anything, killing Deaton was even easier this time around. They knew where he lived, after all – an isolated house not far from the Vet Clinic – and even though the man had a bunch of protective wards, they were specifically set to protect him from werewolves.

Clearly in the intervening years Deaton had become a lot more knowledgeable. Paranoid too. So Derek slashed his throat while he was sleeping, and they crept back out the same way they'd come in.
And okay, maybe it was rather obvious, since it's not like there was any way that such a death could be construed as anything but an attack. Given that he had been in his bed in his locked house and then wasn't eaten.

Stiles considered whether they needed to burn the body the same way they had done last time, but decided against it. The only way to do it without leaving more evidence was to set the whole house on fire, which, considering Derek's issues, not really an option even if Stiles had been willing to risk such a thing in the middle of summer, on the edge of a forest. Yeah, no.

Besides, one of the things that Stiles had learned from Mr Trirrel was that his mother’s death had been the cause of the instability that allowed people to be resurrected in the first place. With no instability, no resurrection. This should be fine.

From Deaton's house they made their way to the Vet Clinic.

“Hey, Derek, you said your mother submitted to you,” Stiles began, speaking quietly since Derek would be able to hear him anyway.

Derek groaned. “It was the most awkward moment of my entire life,” he said. “When you were knocked over and hit your head I wanted to follow you to the hospital. Mom and Cora were both there, and it made sense to me that Mom could just drop me off there and take Cora home.”

“Were you not aware that you were only twelve at this point?” Stiles asked curiously.

“It didn’t occur to me,” Derek admitted. “So, we got back to the car, and I was horrified to realise that Mom had no intention of dropping me off at a hospital to wait around for a kid that she’d never heard of before.”

“Right,” Stiles said encouragingly.

“She started driving in the other direction,” Derek said, hunching his shoulders slightly. “And I…”

“You…”
“I flashed my eyes at her,” Derek said, sounding resigned. “It wasn’t even on purpose! I mean, I wasn’t thinking about what Mr Trirrel had said, I was just angry that she wasn’t listening.”

“Yeah,” Stiles said with a sigh. “I can see that becoming our catch phrase over the next few years. Getting taken seriously is gonna be a real hassle. So what happened next?”

“She bared her neck and dropped her eyes,” Derek said. “I think she was as shocked as I was.”

“What did she say?” Stiles asked, fascinated. He’d always been curious as to how a well established stable pack would interact, had often wished that he’d had the opportunity when the Hales were still alive.

“I don’t know,” Derek admitted. “That was when the pain started. It got worse and worse, and then all of a sudden I was sitting in the hospital carpark and the pain was gone. I could smell which way you’d been taken, so I just followed after you. I used the payphone in the lobby to call home and tell them where I was, and Mom sent Peter.”

“Dude, that is whack,” Stiles said, glad it wasn’t him in that position. “What are you going to do?”

“What can I do?” Derek asked helplessly. “I don’t want to be in charge of our pack, but if the Alpha defers to me...”

“Maybe you could instruct her to carry on leading the pack as she sees fit,” Stiles suggested. “It will mean you’re on the outside a bit though. Sorry, I know how much you’ve missed them.”

Derek shrugged. “It’s been so long since I had to answer to anyone else other than you, I probably wouldn’t fit in with them anyway.”

“We answer to each other,” Stiles said firmly. He made a face. “God, this seven year old body is weird. We’ve been out for an hour now, and I haven’t thought about having sex with you even once. Well, just that once just now, but that was more along the lines of ‘Why does this walk in the dark feel different than usual?’ than because sex was on the brain.”

“Fuck,” Derek said feelingly.
Stiles looked at him inquiringly.

“Puberty,” Derek said as if that explained everything. And it did, it really did.

“Fuck,” Stiles said, and sighed.

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One advantage to being back in time was the level of technology they had to deal with. There was no CCTV yet so any monitoring systems would be purely magical, and they would no longer be active with Deaton's death.

Carefully making sure not to leave any fingerprints, Derek moved the metal filing cabinet again. Once more they made their way down the steps into the basement.

Unlike last time, all the cages were full of live creatures. Since neither Stiles nor Derek knew what to do with most of them, they headed straight to the end of the row where Mr Trirrel sat in his cage, silent and watchful.

It was strange to see it looking a lot less wizened than they were used to. In fact, if it hadn't been the way he felt to Stiles' fairly new magical senses he might have walked right past it. The strength the little creature exuded was staggering. Which made sense really, since the other Mr Trirrel had been sucked almost dry over another thirteen years of imprisonment.

Derek reached out to rip the metal door off, but Stiles stopped him.

“We have come to release you,” Stiles said hurriedly, not wanting to be attacked as soon as the door was opened. “Derek and I met you in the future, and you told us how to petition the Great Ones, and now we've come back in time and we're going to let you go.”

Mr Trirrel didn't answer, but Stiles had spent enough time around it to know that he'd got its attention.
“May I get rid of this door thing now?” Derek asked with sarcastic politeness.

“Yes, yes,” Stiles said, giving him the hand wave of permission.

“Thank you so much,” Derek said, and then there was the screech of metal and the door popped free.

Derek didn’t have the full strength of his adult body yet. At this point in his physical development it was highly unlikely that he would have been strong enough to bend bars like the ones in that Hunters longhouse, but luckily these were obviously made of inferior metal, their effectiveness more about what had been bonded to the bars than the metal itself.

It didn’t take long to give Mr Trirrel the gist of things and to receive his agreement to do whatever needed to be done with the rest of the caged creatures.

Derek didn’t need to force open any more cages, as the keys were actually on the wall by the door. Stiles felt a bit sheepish when Mr Trirrel pointed them out, but shrugged it off with a grin.

“Now, we really have to get back,” Derek said, looking anxiously at his watch. “As it is we’ve probably already been missed, and I for one don’t want to have to deal with the results of a search party.”

“This one will speak with you at a later time, child of justice, Lord Of All That Walks,” Mr Trirrel said solemnly.

“Oh my god, is it tattooed on my forehead or something?” Stiles muttered as they let themselves back out of the Clinic.

Derek shrugged. “Do you want a piggy back ride to your house? That way I can run.”

“Yes!” Stiles agreed enthusiastically. God, this was fun.

As Derek had predicted, Claudia and Peter were awake when they got back. Peter smirked at them, but all of Stiles’ attention was on his mother.
“I’m sure that there’s a wonderful explanation for us to wake up to two empty beds,” Claudia said so nicely that chills ran up and down Stiles’ spine.

“There was something that we needed to take care of,” Stiles said when it was clear that Derek was waiting for him to speak up. Which was probably fair, if it had been Talia standing there in a nightgown and a frown then Stiles would leave it to Derek to deal with.

Hell yeah, of course he would. Stiles had met Talia Hale that afternoon, and that was one formidable woman. He had no doubt that she had a strong enough personality to keep any number of werewolves in line. God, if only he could have seen her dealing with Jackson. That would have been satisfying on so many levels. And she would have been brilliant with Erica as well.

Although, given Derek’s wolfy dominance thing, he’d be able to just flash his eyes at her and get her to drop the questions. Maybe Stiles should have a word with Derek, advise him not to use that power unless it was urgent. There was no point in creating more strain in the relationship, not when Derek had just gotten his family back.

“Stiles! Are you even paying attention?”

Whoops.

“Sorry, mom, I guess I’m tired-er than I thought,” Stiles said, and he didn’t need to fake his yawn, fatigue all of a sudden catching up with him.

“We will be talking about this in the morning, young man,” but while his mother’s voice was still stern, it had lost the edge of anger and worry, so that was good.

Stiles and Derek were hustled back up to his bedroom, where Derek had a sleeping bag laid out on the floor beside Stiles’ bed.

Stiles waited until Claudia had kissed them both goodnight – or good morning, whatever – and gone back to the room she shared with John before shuffling over to one side of his bed.

“Come on up,” he said to Derek. “It will be a bit of a squish, but there’s enough room if you want
Two minutes later they were trying to get comfortable. In the end, Derek lay on his back and Stiles curled up mostly on top of Derek.

“Being this small again really blows chunks, dude,” Stiles said sleepily. Derek made a knobbly and strangely shifting mattress, but this was still the most comfortable and relaxed Stiles had been since waking up in his seven year old body.

“Hmmm,” Derek rumbled. “But it's worth all of the rest of it to have them back, right?”


Stiles had expected the long explanation of how he and Derek had come back in time to be difficult, but as to be expected, explaining the why ended up being much harder. And longer, so much longer.

Luckily the first part of things didn't even involve them. Stiles and Derek sat together on an oversized chair watching while Claudia, Talia, Peter, and Derek's father David had the unenviable task of explaining werewolves and whatnot to Stiles' dad. Claudia was clearly worried about revealing that she was actually an ancient being of power that used to hang around as a tree, but she put on a brave face.

Stiles had the advantage of already knowing how his dad had taken the news of the supernatural world. The whole ancient tree thing was a bit of a wild card, but Stiles had faith in his father, and his father's love.

John's eyebrows rose steadily from the start to the finish of the explanation he received. Then he sat in silence for a few moments before speaking. “I always knew that there was something different,” he said with a sigh, before levelling a gentle smile at his wife. “But I love you and trust you, and quite frankly this is less worrying than what I had been thinking.”

Claudia threw herself at John and kissed him, hard and deep, barely missing the table holding the water jug and glasses – thoughtfully requested by Stiles in anticipation of a lot of talking.
Maybe when Stiles really was seven he would have found it gross, but here and now with the memory of the long years of his father’s grief, this was like the best present ever.

“Hang on,” Claudia said, once she’d expressed her relief to her own satisfaction and everyone else’s amusement. “What was it that you had been thinking?”

“Well, the most concerning was when I wondered if you were on the run from a mafia family or something,” John said with a shrug. “Is it really all that important? It didn’t matter to me then and it doesn’t matter to me now. I love you, whoever or whatever you turn out to be.”

That earned him another thorough kissing.

“So, if that's the teaser, then what's the main event?” John said after his wife was finished with him. “Since Stiles and Derek are both here, I'm presuming that it involves both of them?”

Talia sighed. “What they have to tell us will sound even more fantastical and unbelievable,” she said, settling on her chair. “Three days ago I became aware that the son I had had breakfast with that morning was not the same as the one driving home with me after the car accident. It was still Derek, was still my son, but no longer the son I knew.”

“The same was true of Stiles,” Claudia said gently. “He is still our son, but he radiates the power of a much older person. I could tell as soon as I saw him that he had achieved the growth I had not expected to see until he was at least three times as old as he is now.”

Here it was, the moment Stiles had been dreading the moment when his father once again looked on him with suspicion. Stiles felt himself shrinking into the couch until Derek pulled him close into his side. The familiar comfort was enough to get Stiles to raise his eyes again, only to see his father staring bemusedly at Derek.

“Stiles and I came back in time fourteen years,” Derek said, directing his cute glare at John. “As far as we're concerned, this time last week Stiles was twenty one and I was twenty six. At the time that we made our petition we were under the impression that five years was the outside limit of the time that could be re-wound, so finding ourselves here and now is almost as much of a shock to us as it is to you. But regardless, Stiles is still your son, even if he is mentally older than he was last time you saw him.”
“My apologies,” John said to Derek, before turning his eyes onto Stiles. “I didn't mean to- This is just a lot to take in.”

“Yeah,” Stiles said, his voice only wobbling slightly. “I had it gradually over four or five years, and it still seems a bit unreal. Especially right now.”

“Come here,” John said, and then Stiles was enfolded in his father's embrace again. God, he hadn't appreciated this nearly enough the last time he was this size.

When John released him, he clearly expected Stiles to remain sitting with him and his wife, but there was no way that Stiles was going to leave a depressed Derek – who was dreading having to reveal the truth about the fire to his parents – sitting on the chair there all by himself.

Twice already this morning Stiles had seen Talia attempt to offer some comfort to Derek, but the biggest difficulty there was Derek's giant sized guilt complex. There was no way that he would allow himself to receive comfort from his family when he still held himself directly responsible for them burning alive.

So Stiles went and sat beside Derek, leaning into his warmth and wondering where to start.

In the end, Stiles felt it easier to direct his words at Peter. Peter who was familiar and yet not, Peter who even in his insanity had showed such terrifying intelligence. Peter who was not either the mother or father of Laura, whose dead body was the object of Stiles' youthful ghoulish curiosity.

Stiles decided that it made sense to tell the story in as much chronological order as possible. So he started by talking about how the guardian spirit that was supposed to keep watch had been captured, and the subsequent cutting down of the tree at the Nemeton.

“Oh, sweetheart,” Claudia said brokenly. “How old where you when this happened?”

“It would have happened in about six months, so I wasn't eight yet,” Stiles said, pretending not to feel gutted all over again. He sighed, and looked at the ceiling. “With the guardian gone, the tree cut down, and me still too young to assist, my mother got very sick and soon died. The doctors diagnosed her with frontotemporal dementia, and my father and I had no reason to disbelieve that diagnosis.”
There was silence. Talia, David, and Peter, looked very sympathetic, and John was clutching Claudia to him tightly.

Claudia looked devastated. “I left you alone when you were only seven?” she said. “Sweetheart, I'm so sorry.”

“For me it was a long time ago,” Stiles said, trying to ease her distress. “Thirteen and a half years. I missed you every day, but I had some counselling and finally accepted that sometimes bad stuff happens.”

Which was a bit of a lie. Stiles had always blamed himself, but seeing a counsellor had taught him that he needed to hide that better.

Derek was frowning, and Stiles hoped he wasn't going to bring up the conversation he'd had with Mr Trirrel. Stiles was fully aware that his feelings of guilt were irrational. That didn't stop him from feeling them, but telling his mum and dad about it right now would only hurt them.

Stiles went on to explain the werewolf/hunter treaty summit, and the events that led to its eventual implosion.

Then came the next difficult part. Stiles clutched Derek's hand and refused to let him pull it back while he talked about Kate Argent coming to town, about how she had targeted Derek who was only fifteen.

“Hang on, how old did you say this Argent woman was?” John asked sharply.

“Twenty four,” Stiles said grimly.

“What kind of Alpha am I that I didn't see this happening?” Talia said, sounding rather distraught. “I'm so sorry that I failed you. I can't believe- I promise I'll do better, Derek, I promise.”

David and Peter had fallen in behind their Alpha in a flanking stance, reacting to her distress. Stiles was impressed, and spent a moment mourning what could have been.
“It's not your fault,” Derek said directly to his mother, startled into speech.

“A grown huntress stalks my underage son for months and it's not my fault?” Talia replied, her eyes flashing red. “It *is* my fault! My fault, and the fault of every other adult member of the pack. We're supposed to protect you from threats like this! We let you down, Derek, let you down when you needed us, me most of all. It's clear as day that she hurt you badly. We should have, I should have, seen what was happening and stopped it.”

“What did she do?” Peter asked, with more gentleness than Stiles had believed him capable of.

Derek was silent, and so Stiles answered for him.

“She seduced him into telling her some of your defences, and then she used that information to set the Hale house on fire with as many people inside as possible.”

Five sharply indrawn breaths.

“She used mountain ash to ensure that no one escaped.”

Peter's claws emerged, and his eyes flashed as he growled. Talia laid a shaking hand atop one of his to calm him down. David had gone pale, and he leaned into Talia's other side.

“Derek and Laura weren't home, and we discovered many years later that Cora wasn't inside either. Peter tried to get inside to save people, but he was trapped between two barriers. It's only my personal speculation, but I think that the hunters had some doctored accelerant that they poured over him and set alight.”

This time it was Talia growling. Stiles didn't feel inclined to ask her to stop, but waited until she had more control of herself anyway.

“Peter was so badly burned they thought he would die. His werewolf healing wasn't working, and he was in a coma. He was admitted into the hospital, and remained there for the next six years, healing slowly. It's only my theory, but I think that was when he went insane.”
“Oh god,” Peter said.

Stiles looked at him.

“I know who I am, okay?” Peter said, still sounding sick. “I know my strengths, my weaknesses. If I was insane, and my sister was dead, then there was nothing and no one capable of stopping me without killing me. Please tell me that someone killed me before I could do too much damage.”

“Laura and I considered giving you the release of death,” Derek said, and this was the first that Stiles had heard of it. “In the end we couldn't. Not with everyone else already dead. If there was even the slimmest hope that you might recover...”

“I understand,” Peter said with a sigh. His penetrating gaze locked onto Stiles.” But your advice to me yesterday makes more sense now.”

Stiles shrugged and got back to telling the story, about Laura becoming the Alpha, and she and Derek heading off to New York, leaving Peter in the hospital.

There was a bit of a time skip after that. Stiles briefly mentioned John's ascension to Sheriff, and spoke a bit about the friendship he'd formed with Scott. How as two relative outsiders they were drawn together, how Scott's cheerful optimism steadied some of Stiles' wild recklessness.

If any of the listeners thought it was strange to spend so much time talking about his best friend, they didn't say anything.

“Then, unbeknownst to anyone but the nurse who attended to him, Peter Hale came out of his coma,” Stiles said, looking steadily into Peter's eyes. “I'm not sure of all of the details, Peter was pretty close-mouthed about it even much later, and to be honest I never made much effort to find out.”

“No one did,” Derek added quietly.

“He still had horrific burns covering the majority of his body,” Stiles said with a sigh. “He was already insane, I think. I don't know if it was the pain, or the isolation, or even if the Hunters did something else. He charmed his nurse, and she not only didn't report him, she helped him.”
David poked Peter in the ribs, and Talia rolled her eyes.

Talking about how Peter had lured Laura to her death was hard. Actually, explaining everything from there was hard.

When Stiles told them about Scott being bitten, Peter let out a sigh. “One cannot be sure why a crazy person does anything,” he said when everyone looked at him. “But I would hazard a guess that I recognised you for what you were, Stiles, or at the very least your potential, and hoped that by taking Scott into my pack I would get you too.

Stiles let out an involuntary bark of laughter. “Oh, that's rich. Man, I wish there was some way to rub that in his face. He pretty much treated me like a disposable sidekick from then on, you know? He was stronger and faster, and therefore better. I thought it was a phase, and then when he got over it he'd go back to being my goofy friend, only with some nifty extras.”

“Were you never offered the bite?” Talia asked gently.

“Oh, I was offered it all right,” Stiles said. “And I can't say I wasn't tempted. But by then I knew there was a possibility that I would die rather than turn, and there was no way I was going to leave my dad alone.”

“Thanks, kid,” John said. “Which brings up a point, where was I during all of this?”

“Um,” Stiles said, caught unprepared and hoping for a distraction.

John just looked at him. Parental face number six – I am waiting for your explanation and I won't be distracted, nice try, Stiles, now spill.

“I did it to keep you safe,” Stiles said, speaking rapidly. “I might have maybe done my best to keep everything supernatural from you for as long as possible in the hope that by staying away from the crazy you would live longer. But I've realised I was wrong, and I promise that I won't do it again, okay?”

“We can talk it over later,” John said, and Stiles knew better than to heave a sigh of relief.
But he'd already had this conversation once, it could only be easier to have it with a father who was only hearing second hand about the bad stuff rather than having to witness bits and pieces without the full information.

By the time Stiles had related Peter Hale's death, everyone was looking a bit shell-shocked.

To Stiles' pleasure, the majority of John's ire was focused in the exact same direction as his. “Do you mean to tell me that these 'Hunters' think that they can go around hunting people, and that the law doesn't apply to them?” he said, furious. “It's like the Ku Klux Klan all over again.”

“They think they're performing a service,” Talia shrugged. “At least, the good ones do. There have always been Hunters in one form or another. Theoretically there's a code which forbids the hunting of innocents, but no one polices them and there doesn't seem to be any punishment for those who act outside the code. Retaliation only makes it worse.”

Stiles couldn't help beaming at his father. “We can talk about all of that later, for now I'm at the part where Derek has just become the Alpha, and Scott has thrown a wobbly because he wanted to be human again.”

“That old myth!” Talia exclaimed. “Where on earth did he get that idea?”

“I needed his help,” Derek said sheepishly. “He was more concerned with getting into Allison Argent's pants, so I wanted to motivate him. I wouldn't have said it if I'd known what a pain he would be about it. And to be fair, I presented it as a myth. It's not my fault he decided that since he wanted it to be true then it must be.”

“Didn't anyone correct him?” Talia said, after a censorious look at her son. “I thought you said he was working at the Vet Clinic, surely Deaton said something?”

“Nope,” Stiles said, popping the 'p'. “Nothing that stopped Scott believing it, at any rate. Anyway, the next thing that happened was Lydia waking up.”

When he got to the bit where Peter was resurrected, Claudia started shaking her head. “There's more to that story than you know, Stiles. I'm not sure what it is, but what you've described is impossible. Don't worry about it for now, I'll think on it for a while.”
Stiles shrugged, and carried on. He tried to gloss over Derek's problems as an Alpha, but Derek wouldn't let him.

“IT was a mess,” Derek admitted readily, eyes on the floor. “I wasn't ready to be an Alpha, and I kept expecting newly bitten teenagers to understand what being a wolf, being a Beta was about.”

“Well, you appeared to be significantly better at it than I was,” Peter remarked consolingly.

“Than he was,” Stiles corrected. “You and the Peter Hale that I knew before coming back in time may have shared a face and a lot of memories, but for the rest… his actions are nothing to do with you.”

“You're very kind,” Peter murmured.

“Not really,” Stiles said. “I'm tactless, and blunt, and I tend to think the worst of people. So when I say that I blame all of your post-fire actions on the Hunters that caused your insanity, then I mean it. And believe me, I've thought about it.”

“I'm not sure I agree,” Peter said with a shrug, “but I'll take it.”

“Do you blame Derek for the fire?” Stiles asked point blank. “Any of you? Anyone here? Show of hands please. If you think the fire was Derek's fault, put your hand up.”

No one moved. Derek had closed his eyes tight, his whole body curled in on itself.

“Derek, I want you to look around,” Stiles said.

Derek just shook his head. “Stiles- no, I can't.”

“You need to look, Derek,” Stiles commanded, his voice steely. “I need you to see that no one blames you. I know that it won't change how you feel, but it's an important first step. These are the people with the most reason to hate you, if it was your fault. Look at them.”
Derek reluctantly looked up and around, and his face crumpled as he took in the expressions of those around him, as he looked his mother in the eye for the first time since Stiles had told everyone about the fire.

Stiles' heart ached, and he gripped Derek's hand tightly. “You don't have to stay away, Derek. They love you, they want you, and they don't blame you at all.”

“Can we carry on please?” Derek said a little desperately. “We were at the kanima, weren't we?”

“Kanima?” Peter said, straightening up again.

More explanations. Stiles supposed it was lucky that he was used to talking so much, otherwise he might be hoarse by now.

Surprisingly everyone managed to keep their comments to themselves, even when Stiles reluctantly told them of how he was abducted by Gerard Argent and worked over in the basement.

John Stilinski looked like he was one step away from getting his gun and going after Gerard Argent right then and there, but his wife's hand in his managed to calm him down, although he glowered again when Stiles mentioned his lie about the opposing team.

By this time, Stiles was skipping over anything that he didn't think was relevant to where they were now. Talia looked like she was crushing David's hand when Stiles brought Cora into things, and when Stiles told them about Derek giving up his Alpha spark to save her life, everyone in the room heard the crack of bones breaking.

“Sorry, love,” Talia said apologetically to her husband.

“That's okay,” he replied with the ghost of a grin. “Hazards of being mated to an Alpha. If I was stronger it would probably be your hand healing right now.”

“Carry on, Stiles,” Talia instructed. “I can't believe that Deucalion could turn into such a monster. He has always been so level-headed. And what the hell is Deaton up to? He's given you almost no help at all, what kind of behaviour is that for an Emissary? I'm not sure I should appoint him after all!”
Stiles and Derek exchanged glances.

There was a complicated eyebrow discussion, before Stiles said cautiously, “I'm not sure he's in a fit state to be anyone's Emissary right at the moment. But we'll get to that later.”

“This wouldn't have anything to do with what the two of you were up to last night, would it?” Claudia asked knowingly.

“If it is, you'll find out later,” Stiles said cheekily. “Now, where was I...”

“Derek isn't an Alpha anymore,” Talia said, looking proudly over at her son.

Derek looked both delighted and terrified in equal measure, so Stiles took a drink of water before continuing.

There wasn't all that much left to tell really. Hearing how Scott became a True Alpha, and the defeat of the Darach made Talia, Peter, and Claudia all frown, but Stiles refused to let anyone interrupt him.

He talked about going away to University, his worries for his father and the pack, and about what he'd found when he came back for that first Christmas.

“That does it,” Peter said, leaping to his feet with his eyes flashing. “I don't know how he's managed to fool us into thinking he's a Druid, but something is seriously wrong with Deaton, and we need to find out what it is.”

“Sit down,” Derek said. “We're not finished yet.”

“Don't tell me what to do, boy!” Peter said angrily as he loomed over them both, using his height as an intimidation tactic.

Derek just flashed his eyes. “Sit. Down.”
Peter sat down, right there on the floor, looking rather astonished.

Stiles felt the inappropriate laughter well up, and did his best to stifle it. Unsuccessfully, it turned out, and he turned his face into Derek's arm to hide his snorting laughter.

“Do I even want to know?” Derek said with a sigh.

Stiles sputtered, but couldn't get out a proper sentence. “Sit! Stay!” he said, before howling with glee. Eventually he calmed down enough to speak again. “Oh my god, Derek, that is the funniest thing I've ever seen! Imagine doing that to Jackson! Or, hey, Deucalion and Kali! Can you see the looks on their faces?”

Derek tried to hide his smile, but Stiles was used to interpreting even the smallest of expressions. What Derek's face looked like might be different, but the way he used it was not.

“I needed that,” Stiles admitted. He smiled at Peter who was looking a bit offended. “I understand your feelings about Deaton. I shared them, and I was so worried about what he and Scott and Chris had done that I convinced my dad to pack up, and we moved to Canada.”

Well, going by the faces around him, that had been a surprise.

“What?” Stiles asked. “I had been doing my best for Scott ever since he'd been bitten, but he was constantly blowing me off, leaving me hanging, disregarding my contributions, negating my importance because I was only a normal human. What he did with Gerard and the Furies was the final straw.”

“We're not arguing with your decision to break with Scott,” Talia said gently. “I'm amazed that you stuck it out for as long as you did.”

“I'm stupidly loyal, I suppose,” Stiles said with a touch of the bitterness he still felt about how he'd let Scott use him colouring his voice. “I should have done something sooner, made a stand or something. The only reason that Scott was an Alpha in the first place was because I was constantly taking his side.”

Claudia was nodding sympathetically, while Talia, David, and Peter all looked intrigued.
“You didn't know,” Derek said calmly.

“That shouldn't matter!” Stiles said. “There were so many times when I agreed with you but went with Scott. If I'd followed my own inclination, maybe none of the rest of it would have happened! But instead I supported Scott, who used and abused my trust again and again. You were the one who deserved my trust, Derek. You were the one always saving my life when Scott left me hanging in the wind to stare longingly into Allison's window.”

“You learned from it though, didn't you?” Derek asked, eyebrows up expectantly. “I don't think you will ever trust that blindly again.”

“No,” Stiles admitted. “Not even you. And you have earned my trust a thousand times more than Scott ever did.”

“I don't trust blindly either,” Derek said with a shrug.

“So, you tell me that just because Scott took advantage of my trust and did bad things, that the fact that I trusted him doesn't make what he did my fault,” Stiles said slowly.

“That's right,” Derek agreed.

“Let's change some words around in that sentence then, shall we?” Stiles said, holding Derek's gaze. “Just because Kate took advantage of your trust and did bad things, the fact that you trusted her doesn't make what she did your fault.”

Derek looked like he'd been slapped.
“I don't expect you to answer, but I do want you to think about that,” Stiles said quietly. “If you are to blame, then so am I.” He turned back towards their waiting family. “Right. Canada.”

“You grew up so well, my Star,” Claudia said proudly.

Stiles felt his face grow hot. “We hadn’t been in Canada for very long when the first case of zombie-ism made headlines around the world,” he said, focussing back on Peter.

From there the rest of the story didn't take very long. Stiles glossed over what had happened to John, just saying that he'd been infected and chose to end things rather than become a danger.

Before any questions could be asked, Stiles moved right on to the collapse of the zombies about a month later, and the strange weather following.

The return to Beacon Hills and finding that Hunters had built on Hale land was enough to re-direct everyone’s attention away from John's death. When Stiles mentioned finding Scott's dead body, both Peter and Claudia gave signs of comprehension.

Stiles rather relished telling them about killing Deaton. “The one thing I'm still confused about was the silver dribbled all over the floor,” he said when the congratulations stopped. “What on earth was that about?”

“That wasn't silver,” Derek said. “I thought you knew.”

“Well then, what was it?” Stiles asked.

“Mercury,” Derek said. “Quicksilver. Most magic slides off it, so if we'd wanted to hit him with a spell we would have needed to be inside the circle.”

“But why-” Stiles stopped himself, rolling his eyes. “No, never mind, I get it. He was worried that I'd turned into the same sort of mage that he was. That was probably why he didn't try to incinerate me with a fireball or something as soon as I walked in. I had wondered about that, why he didn't fire first. It's what I would have done.”
“Don’t forget that he seemed quite keen to do a standard villainous monologue,” Derek reminded him.

“That’s true,” Stiles agreed. “Hey, I wonder if pop-culture has influenced the way evil villains behave? Did they always monologue, or are they as brainwashed as the majority of the masses and do it because it’s expected of them? In fact, I wonder how many evil villains take up villainy solely so that they can have that monologue moment?”

“You’re suggesting that an evil villain is just an attention seeker on steroids?” Peter asked with dark amusement.

“If the shoe fits,” Stiles said with a shrug.

“Regardless of the size and shape of shoes, we’re straying from the point,” Claudia interjected. “So, Deaton is dead. Well done! Continue, please.”

“Derek moved the metal cabinet, and we went through the door behind it,” Stiles said, watching the Hales for a reaction.

Sure enough, all three of them sat up straighter or leaned forward with increased interest.

“I’ve always wanted to know what was behind there,” Peter said, throwing a glance at his older sister. “Someone wouldn’t let me break in and find out. ‘There has to be trust, Peter!’” he said in a rather good impression of Talia. “‘He is allowed his secrets from us, just as we have secrets from him!’”

Talia growled, but it was a playful noise, and Peter growled back.

“Probably not a great idea to have gone down there while Deaton was still alive anyway,” Stiles said, over the competing growls in the brother/sister standoff. “It’s actually lucky for us that we killed him before going investigating. If he’d not been in and we’d gone down there without killing him, we would have ended up as trapped as the dude we found there.”

“I take it this is where Mr Trirrel comes in?” Claudia asked encouragingly.
“Yep,” Stiles replied. “Mr Trirrel isn't its real name, of course. I mainly called it that 'cause we didn't have any other name for it, since it didn't want to share. It looked like a cross between a tree and a squirrel, and it was about two feet high, and looked old and shrivelled.”

“The Guardian?” Claudia asked, horrified. “Mr Trirrel was the Guardian? Deaton held it captive all that time?”

“Yes,” Stiles said simply. “He'd been siphoning off its power and using it as his own for the previous twenty years or so, and it was its power that made him believable as a Druid.”

Claudia huddled into John's embrace, and shuddered all over.

Stiles explained how they'd released Mr Trirrel, and what they'd subsequently learnt.

“What does Lord Of All That Walks mean?” Talia asked intently.

“We're actually still learning what it means,” Stiles responded. “Mom will probably be able to help us with that, but for right now it's less important than what we found in amongst Deaton's papers.”

Cue discussion about Scott and his final swansong cock up, truly his biggest yet.

“Not only that, but what did he think he was doing, leaving his Beta alone to become feral?” Talia was fuming. “How could he have done it?”

Stiles stared. “Are you more pissed off about him leaving Isaac behind than you are about him killing the planet?” he asked incredulously.

“Killing the planet was an accident,” Talia said, still frowning. “It was a stupid accident, granted, but I'm sure that the end result wasn't his intention. What he did to Isaac, though, that was deliberate. He had a duty to his Beta, and he ignored that in order to do what he wanted to. That tells me everything I need to know about his character.”
“Scott liked the perks of being a werewolf, but took none of the responsibilities,” Stiles said with a sigh. “I recognised that long before I eventually cut ties with him.”

“How will you handle him now?” Derek asked neutrally.

“I won't,” Stiles shrugged. “There isn't going to be a friendship this time around. There never would have been, regardless of how I felt about him. He's seven years old, Derek, and I'm twenty one. How could any kind of friendship work?”

Derek's body lost some of the tension it had been holding, and Stiles had to suppress a sigh. The way he'd continually sided with Scott over the years had affected Derek worse than he'd thought. It was something they'd need to work on.

Well, they had time. So much time.

“I want to hear about your maturity,” Claudia said, interrupting his train of thought. “Your naming as well.”

“Weelll,” Stiles said slowly before pausing to consider how best not to alienate his new in-laws. “The thing is that Mr Trirrel made a big deal about names being important,” he said reluctantly. “And the truth is that there are three people in this room who I have never even met before. Except for Peter, of course. In a way. Not a way that would be conducive to me sharing stuff that might leave me vulnerable though.”

Claudia rolled her eyes. “You have Derek here, Stiles. He can command them not to reveal what you tell them, and they won't.”

“He can?” Stiles said, looking at Derek who seemed as surprised as he was. “They won't?”

“I can see that there is a lot you both still need to know,” Claudia said with a determined glint in her eye. “Well, I suppose I have plenty of time to teach you both now.”

“I thought we needed to figure out what to do with Deaton,” John asked. He eyed Stiles and Derek. “Or has that already been taken care of? I remember something being said about you both sneaking out last night.”
“We couldn't risk him getting spooked,” Stiles said unrepentantly. “We're getting ahead of ourselves. So, on my birthday I went through my maturity, and as my nature was revealed I was gifted with my true-name, which is Sprawiedliwość na wszystkie.”

“I don't know about anyone else,” Peter said into the silence. “But I have no idea what you said or what that means.”

“I think it was in Polish, as the name my mother gave me is Polish,” Stiles said with a grin. “The translation is basically 'Justice for All'.”

“Perfect,” breathed Claudia as she looked at Stiles proudly. “Now that you've said it, I can see it. Do you know how long it's been since a true Justice walked the land? I never dreamed of such a thing for you.”

“What were you expecting?” Stiles asked curiously.

“There's no guarantee that a child of earth will be gifted with anything, beyond a certain affinity with growing things,” Claudia said, her eyes still shining with joy. “For you to have been named a Justice, you must have truly impressed the Watchers.”

“Stiles has always been impressive,” Derek said when Stiles felt unable to respond.

“Mr Trirrel made it sound as if my being gifted was assured,” Stiles said, feeling a little bit uncertain. He wasn't that special, surely?

“Mr Trirrel is one of the Watchers,” Claudia said with twinkle in her eye. “He would have had a fair idea.”

Stiles gaped at her.

“Close your mouth, love, you look like a fish,” his mother said. “Now, what happened after that?”
Stiles related Mr Trirrel's last blessing, and then it was time to talk about the petition they had made.

“Eternal servitude?” It was Talia who spoke, but Talia, David and John all looked horrified. Peter looked speculative, and Claudia was nodding her head.

“We were asking a pretty big favour,” Stiles said with a shrug. “We always knew there would be a price. We'd already given our lives just to be able to make the petition, so what else was left?”

“But...”

“It probably hasn't fully sunk in yet,” Stiles admitted, leaning on Derek. “But then I'm not sure that this isn't some elaborate dream, and I'll wake up and we'll still be stuck alone after the zombie apocalypse. Also, even though I know I'll lose everyone again, I'll always have Derek and he'll always have me. It could be worse.”

“I must say that the two of you did rather go to extremes to be able to elope,” Claudia said reprovingly, although her eyes were laughing.

“It wasn't-”

“We didn't-”

Stiles and Derek went to speak at the same time, before Stiles saw how amused Claudia was and rolled his eyes. “Yes, yes, very funny.”

“So, what did happen to Deaton?” John asked in the warm silence that followed Stiles last words.

“We paid him a visit,” Stiles said evasively. “Then we went and freed Mr Trirrel again.”

John frowned.

“I know that what we did wasn't lawful,” Stiles told his father earnestly, willing him to understand. “The truth is that there was nothing the law could do. But he had imprisoned and was torturing at
least one sentient creature, maybe more. It might not have been lawful, but it was justice.”

“I know,” John admitted. “I've given my life's service to the law, and I'm aware that doesn't necessarily mean justice. I don't disagree with you on a personal level, but it might take a while to reconcile things with my professional side.”

“Just think of him as outside your jurisdiction,” Stiles suggested. “I can't promise I won't do it again, but I can promise that I will only take a life in order to save others.”

“It will take some getting used to,” John repeated with a smile. “But I'm pretty sure I'm up to it.”

“Wonderful!” Claudia said enthusiastically. “Now, I don't know about anybody else, but I'm starving. Who's up for lunch?”

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After lunch there was a bit of discussion as to how things would proceed. Derek followed Claudia's instructions on how to ensure that Stiles true-name would never be repeated by the werewolves.

“I'm not sure you had anything to be worried about,” David said with a wry grin. “I have no idea how to pronounce that mish-mash of syllables that came out of your mouth. However, if there's one thing a wolf-pack can understand is the importance of secrecy and safety, so I'm happy to do whatever you need me to do so that you're comfortable with our knowledge.”

Once that was done, Stiles mentioned something that he'd been thinking about all day. “I think it would be best for me to be home-schooled from now on,” he said seriously. “Derek too, probably. The truth is that we both know everything that would be taught in school, and if I have to sit through classes again I will go nuts. And that would be a bad thing for everyone.”

Derek was nodding, and so was everyone else. Stiles had expected that to be a lot harder.

“While I'm home I can work part time,” he said, forging ahead while everyone seemed in an agreeable mood. “We can set up a business and I'll do most of my work online. Just by virtue of being from fourteen years in the future, I have a lot of skills and knowledge that will work to our advantage.”
John was frowning, so Stiles turned his best beseeching eyes on his mother. That ploy didn't always work, but she must have agreed with him this time, cause she gave him the little nod that meant that she'd work on it.

“Don't think I didn't see that little exchange,” John said dryly. “If you think you were being subtle you have another thing coming. I'm not fond of the idea of you working so young, Stiles, but we can discuss it as a family later. What I really want to think about is how we're going to handle things when these 'Hunters' come to town.”

“I agree,” Talia nodded. “There isn't any great urgency to that though, so I suggest that we turn it over in our heads for a couple of days, and meet again to discuss what we've come up with.”

Everyone nodded. Stiles thought back nostalgically to how he was used to meetings with werewolves going. All in all there had been much less growling than he'd expected, and no threats of death by claws or teeth? Which begs the thought, where on earth did Derek pick up such bad habits?

“I'd like to test out the range that Stiles and Derek can be away from each other,” Peter said from where he was leaning against the wall, coffee mug in hand. “If we want to fly under the radar as much as possible, it would be better if they didn't have to be attached at the hip. On the other hand, involuntary teleportation is not particularly conducive to remaining incognito either.”

There was more nodding from the parents. Stiles had to quell his reflexive response, which was to grab hold of Derek and never let him go. He didn't want to be separated from his bond-mate.

Derek sighed. “We should probably do it,” he said reluctantly to Stiles. “It's better to find out in a controlled environment than to have something happen accidentally.”

“I know that, Derek,” Stiles said petulantly. “I just don't feel comfortable letting you out of my sight. And to be perfectly honest, I'm not looking forward to that excruciating pain that you mentioned yesterday, either.”

“You might not feel it,” Derek suggested half-heartedly.

“Or, I might feel it twice as much as you, and I just didn't notice because the other day when it happened I was unconscious,” Stiles returned.
“You might find that it's a bit different with Stiles awake,” Claudia interjected. “Also, if Derek isn't being taken away against his will, that should have some bearing on things as well.”

“Peter, are you okay to do this testing with Derek?” Talia asked. “David and I really need to get back to work, and then tonight we can have a family meeting where we can let the rest of the pack know what's going on.”

“Can I come?” Stiles asked excitedly. Finally, his chance to see a stable pack in action! Well, not action, but interacting, anyway.

“You might need to,” Talia said dryly, before turning her smile on Claudia and John. “You two are both welcome as well, of course.”

“We would be honoured,” Claudia said with an inclination of her head.

Fifteen minutes later, it was just Stiles and his mother in the house. John had reluctantly headed to the station for a couple of hours to get his paperwork sorted out, and Peter and Derek were driving away for the proximity test.

“You missed out part of your story, you know,” Claudia said lightly as she sat down with Stiles to wait.

“I did?” Stiles said, wondering which part she was referring to. How would she know, anyway?

“When did you and Derek fall in love?” Claudia prompted.

“Derek and I aren't in love,” Stiles said, his stomach doing a nose dive as he realised he was going to have to verbalise something he'd been hoping to avoid thinking about.

“Pull the other one, it's got bells on,” Claudia said with a snort. “I'm your mother, remember? Are you going to sit there and tell me you're not in love with Derek Hale?”
“No, of course not,” Stiles said with a sigh, glad that Derek was out of earshot. “Of course I'm in love with him. I've been teetering on the edge of it since I was sixteen, and finding out he was still alive, spending all that time with him… well, it was a bit of a foregone conclusion really. He's not in love with me though.”

Claudia gave him a look.

“Oh, he probably loves me in his way,” Stiles tried to explain. “We had to be everything for each other after Dad died. We trust each other, hell, we're bound together. But he didn't fall in love with me. We just sort of… ended up together.”

“Oh, Stiles,” Claudia said, running her fingers through his hair again. “So observant and yet so very blind. Of course he's in love with you. Even if I discounted the evidence of my own eyes, there are the Great Ones to consider.”

“They bound us together because we professed our loyalty to each other,” Stiles said, wondering where she was going with this.

“The Great Ones don't just bind souls together willy-nilly,” she said exasperatedly. “You got married on a cosmic scale, Stiles. You are bound together for eternity, and you don't seem to mind at all.”

“Of course not,” Stiles said, staring at her. “I love him, there is no one else I'd rather be eternally bound to.”

“Yes, the point I'm trying to make is that Derek doesn't seem to mind either,” Claudia pointed out.

Stiles fiddled with a pen, wondering if she could be right. Could Derek really be as in love with him as he was with Derek? It seemed unlikely, after all Derek was so far out of Stiles' league it just wasn't funny. It had taken the zombie apocalypse to make him see Stiles as an acceptable bed partner.

A memory flashed through his brain, of Derek explaining that Stiles had been underage and therefore off limits.

Okay, so maybe it wasn't just the zombie apocalypse. But there was a big difference between wanting to play hide the sausage and deep abiding love. Just because Derek had wanted one, didn't mean that he necessarily wanted the other.
Except that it had been Derek who crossed half of the United States of America chasing the bond he'd already had with Stiles. Maybe Derek thought Stiles already knew?

Shit. He had no way of knowing for sure unless he asked, and now they were in these immature bodies he couldn't even use sex as a relaxant first.

“I'm going to have to talk to him,” Stiles said bleakly out loud to his mother. “If he is in love with me, then he probably thinks I already know. In which case the only reason for me to not say anything is if I don't feel the same way.”

“Just be honest, sweetheart,” Claudia said, patting him on the shoulder. “I'll distract Peter.”

“You mean I have to do it now?” Stiles asked, feeling panicked.

“If you leave it then you'll start over-thinking things again,” Claudia replied. “Just bite the bullet Stiles.” She winked at him. “I bet he grew up nice, didn't he?”

“Oh god yes,” Stiles said emphatically. “You can't believe how annoyed I am that I'll have to wait nearly eleven years to get a piece of that action again. I mean, right now I don't care all that much, but I'm pretty sure that won't be the case in five years’ time.”

“You have eternity,” Claudia said dryly. “I think you can wait a decade. Some of us went for eons without sex, you know.”

“Are you sure about that?” Stiles asked, eyebrows raised. “I know all about how plants procreate, you know. Are you telling me that your tree never flowered?”

“That is a terrible euphemism, and I never want to hear it ever again,” Derek said from behind them, making Stiles jump.

Claudia didn't even twitch, and Stiles sent her a censorious look before wondering how long Derek had been standing there.
“I'll just leave the two of you alone,” Claudia said in the most unsubtle way possible. “I'll go wait on the porch for Peter.”

“What was that about?” Derek asked when she'd closed the door behind her.

“She brought up something that we need to talk about,” Stiles said heavily. “She asked when we'd fallen in love.”

Because he was watching it, he caught the minute flinch Derek gave.

Stiles raised his head, squared his shoulders, and continued. “I told her that I was in love with you, but that I didn't think you were in love with me.”

Derek's mouth dropped open, his eyes went wide and defenceless.

“She told me I was being ridiculous. And since we're going to be together forever, it's probably best that we know where we stand.”

“Of course I'm in love with you,” Derek said a grin growing on his face. “Oh god, I feel like some kind of pervert. You only look seven years old!”

“Yeah I know,” Stiles agreed, his heart feeling full to bursting. “I was just lamenting to mom that it would be over a decade before I could climb you again.”

“You were talking about sex with your mother?” Derek asked, looking taken aback.

Stiles shrugged.

“Well, at least you'll be seeing action in your teens,” Derek said with a sigh. “I'll be twenty three before I get laid again.”

“Oh,” Stiles said awkwardly. “You don't have to wait, you know.”
“Yes I do,” Derek corrected him. “We’re bound together, remember? And why would I want to have sex with anyone else when I’m in love with you anyway?”

“I don't know?” Stiles said helplessly. “I just didn't want to trap you.”

“You didn't trap me, Stiles,” Derek said fondly. “You were the one who set me free. Now come on, we've got years to talk about this. Peter will be back any moment now, and I don't know about you but I'd prefer not to have an audience for this.”

“Yeah,” Stiles said with a smile. “Okay. So how far did you get? How did the pain compare to last time?”

As they sat back on the couch, talking over the experiment that had been running, Stiles felt a warm glow of contentment envelop him.

Right now he had almost everything he'd ever wanted and in the future there would also be scorchingly hot sex, making life complete. Stiles was going to fight for that future, a future where he'd have his parents and Derek with everything in him.

Everyone else had better look out.

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