<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Mature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Archive Warning:</td>
<td>Graphic Depictions Of Violence, Underage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category:</td>
<td>F/M, M/M</td>
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<td>Fandom:</td>
<td>Teen Wolf (TV)</td>
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<td>Relationship:</td>
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<td>Character:</td>
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<tr>
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</tbody>
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**Thrill of the Night**

by messersohara

**Summary**

In most universes Scott McCall follows his best friend into the Beacon Hills Preserve and is bit by an Alpha werewolf. This is not one of them. When Stiles is attacked it changes the world dramatically. Not only does he have different priorities in mind when it comes to the serial killer on the loose, but his coping skills are put to the test without a lot of help from his friend. Never mind that weird, hunky Hale guy who can't seem to leave the shadow of his past behind to focus on the present problems in a productive manner. Well, at least his Dad's in the know. Imagine how awful it would be if he wasn't, right?
Chapter One

Chapter Summary

Who's that I see walking in these woods? Why it's little Red Riding Hood...

(Little Red Riding Hood - Sam the Sham and the Pharaohs)

Chapter Notes

Warning: Graphic Violence

Wednesday, Jan. 19th

Wolf Moon

No one thought the night of the Sheriff’s 51st birthday would be all that special, least of all his teenage son. First of all, the man had been working everyday that week and between his work schedule and Stiles’ best friend, Scott, dragging him out for anxiety driven lacrosse practices they barely had anything edible in the fridge. Stiles had been careful to pull out all the stops for his dad’s big five-oh last year, but he’s well aware the Sheriff has been hoping his birthday would be forgotten for oh… The last decade or so.

Except, the teenager only had the one parent left so that wasn’t going to happen. He sure as Hell was going to celebrate another year with his father and another year without a warning from the doctor on the older man’s cholesterol. Maybe the reason the Sheriff wished to skip his birthday was because he never got to eat all that red meat anymore. Stiles wasn’t going to deal with a heart attack on this of all days.

But… There’s nothing in the fridge. Amber brown eyes squint into their yawning fridge with little hope. No, there’s really nothing he can do with half an onion, carrots, various jellies, a block of cheddar, coffee creamer and a half empty pint of milk. The last meal he’d put together was Saturday: a beautiful chicken salad with a mix of greenery even the Sheriff had been surprised to like. And now: empty.

With a half-hearted sigh, the lanky teen yanked the fridge door closed and looked at the takeout menus magnetized to its front. Now he would have to figure out the tastiest low cholesterol meals from a possibility of diner food, pizza delivery, or something Asian. Oh, joy.
Giving it up for a lost cause within minutes, Stiles called their favorite diner and asked for the usual to be delivered at the usual hour. They knew all about the Sheriff’s heart and the Sheriff’s nagging son; at least it’d be hassle free on his end. He still had a couple hours of homework to do depending on how much he could actually focus, and while he would make the most of the birthday when his father finally got home, he really had to use his free time judiciously tonight.

By the time 5 o’clock rolled around the younger Stilinski felt a persistent twitch in his limbs and gnawing hunger in his belly. His Adderall was wearing off; his homework for tomorrow was complete, mostly, although all future assignments had been flicked through alongside twitter feeds so he’d probably have to re-do half of those. The ring of the doorbell burst through his chest and startled him into flying off his computer chair with a yelp. Recognition coursed through in him in the next second and he flung himself haphazardly up and out of his room before he’d even gotten his feet under him. Bouncing off the wall and leaping down the stairs, Stiles slid on socked feet and caught the kitchen door frame before he totally passed it by. He fully extended himself to yank a small drawer open rather than take those few stabilizing steps closer, and stole the roll of bills set aside for take-out for the month.

He opened the door to disappointment. Not that it wasn’t the food! It was. It was just being delivered by an ass. Stiles threw out a desultory, “Hi,” and restrained himself as a relatively unknown senior of Beacon Hills High gave him the total with a look of disdain. Seriously, how could people who don’t even know him dislike him?

Stiles had never even had an encounter with the average looking senior at school, didn’t know his name or anything about him other than ‘senior on the lacrosse team’. Scott probably knew his name. They’d both made the bench sophomore year, but Stiles still wasn’t as taken with the sport as Scott. And sure, he was a complete klutz, but it’s not like he was taking a spot on the field and slowing the team down. They made the Championships the last two years running.

Being the soul of generosity, Stiles still gave him a tip in return for the food. A small one. The guy was punctual, but could use an attitude adjustment. The kid didn’t say a word as he took the cash and bolted for his still running car.

“Yeah, thanks!” Stiles shouted sarcastically at his back, then muttered, “Jerk,” as he closed the door. Honestly, he knew he was annoying to a lot of people because of his mouth, but he wasn’t a real troubled kid or anything. He was the son of the goddamn Sheriff! Just because he knew how to pick a lock didn’t mean… Well, okay, he did get in trouble a bit, but it wasn’t anything that got around at school! The teenage populace really had no reason to shun him. Assholes.

Hauling the plastic bags in, the teen boy set about plating up their individual meals. It was his dad’s birthday, they could stand to eat with utensils. Not even a minute after he’d finished tossing the last
bag in recycling and styrofoam in the trash, the Sheriff got home. Pleased with the perfect timing, Stiles called out a merry, “Happy birthday, father-mine!”

The usual silence and sigh accompanied before the tired man answered, “Thanks, son,” and finished unbuckling his regulation belt. His father entered the dining room, carefully unarmed, and took in their diner fare. Flicking a glance up, the man asked hopefully, “Real burgers?”

With a derisive snort, Stiles retorted, “You’re lucky it’s not tofu.” The tired man grimaced and sighed again, muttering under his breath about how he was the parent in this house, not the aggravating seventeen year old. Eyes rolled and Stiles gave his voice a sarcastic pep, “But there’s curly fries!”

The oddly shaped potatoes didn’t actually make up for the lack of red meat. They both knew that. But it made the old man smile, so that’s why he said it. Stiles usually hoarded the curly fries and the Sheriff could never be bothered to order his own. And he could sneak a couple of his son’s.

Sitting down to dinner together at the table wasn’t a rare occasion, but neither was it common. It happened about as much as eating in his father’s squad car since Stiles tried to go out of his way to eat with his dad, even when he had the night shift and would be going to sleep as Stiles left for school. The Sheriff dug in with nary a grimace although he made a half-hearted comment when he noticed his son’s true beef burger, “So I’m still the only one on this diet, huh? What happens when you hit forty and your cholesterol’s through the roof?”

“Not gonna happen, we both know I’m too twitchy to sit still long. And the lacrosse.” He was lucky his father was well versed in Stiles-food-in-mouth speak, otherwise he would’ve missed half the words. Still, the Sheriff had a good rejoinder, spoken with a sly glance and the corner of his mouth.

“Oh, are you playing now?” The boy paused to swallow thickly and scowled at his parent.

“Hardy har har. Har,” Stiles intoned, animating his face drastically for the returned grin. He took a savage bite in response and chewed enthusiastically. The Sheriff shook his head and tried to make way through the turkey burger he’d been saddled with. A burst of thought froze Stiles’ limbs for a second and he dropped everything to dash to the living room, “One sec!”

As he dived into the entertainment center for the couple DVDs he’d stashed when he got home, Stiles completely missed his father snatching a palmful of curly fries from his plate and immediately snarfing them down. Sliding back to his seat, he started to speak and froze open-mouthed as his eyes noticed a discrepancy his mind didn’t fully recognize. Looking at his plate in confusion then over to his father, Stiles realized the man’s theft based on the huge pouch of a cheek he was sporting. Huffing quietly and giving him an unimpressed look, the boy slammed a DVD rental case on the
The Sheriff struggled to swallow then asked with an arched brow, “True Grit? I thought we agreed remakes were never as good as the originals?” His lips twitched to restrain a smile as Stiles openly stole the deli pickle from his plate with no show of remorse.

With a crisp bite, the boy chewed happily and spoke around his food, “Not according to the reviews. Thought it was worth a look. Besides, I did get this one too.” He offered the second case he’d kept under the table and dropped it on top of the first. A classic black and white picture was inscribed with High Noon across the bottom corner. If it had been up to him, Stiles would’ve just illegally buffered the westerns for viewing, but his dad was the Sheriff after all.

The classic movie did get a sincere smile out of the man, “Thanks, son.” Ah, if only all his problems could be solved with a bribe of Old West films. But no, the Sheriff was a good parent and made sure his punishments were creative enough to fit the crime. Stiles had never gotten away with anything he’d been caught at, always having to show remorse in some, usually humiliating way. Beacon Hills may joke that their Sheriff was incorruptible, but it was the God’s honest truth.

Small talk resumed and they each learned a bit about the other’s days. Several teens had been caught speeding after school let out in the usual traps, making Stiles roll his eyes. It was a small town and since he started driving on his own, the Sheriff had taken to rotating the speed traps at irregular intervals. It still didn’t take much for Stiles to recognize the danger zones and either take back roads or just plain slow down to proper speed limits. God forbid he drive a few miles above it in his highly recognizable blue Jeep. The Deputies would pull him over just to fuck with him.

The younger Stilinski had had an uneventful school day. Mr. Harris was an ass as per usual, but Stiles had lucked out by not getting a detention. Lydia was beautiful, like usual. Jackson was a suck-up, not usual but gratifying as it meant he’d misstepped around Lydia somewhere and Stiles could watch the ensuing snark with pleasure. Oh, and Scott was freaking out about making first line. The kid had some really unrealistic goals for his high school career. Besides, if he got off the bench then where would that leave Stiles?

The Sheriff was not impressed. “You know, you ought to be supporting him. Or maybe even trying alongside him,” he added, picking up their empty dishes. Stiles just sighed at him. There was only so much enthusiasm he could muster for a game played with nets on sticks. At Beacon Hills High the most celebrated sport was not the all-American football, baseball, basketball, or even soccer, but an East Coast private school yuppie sport. He’d only tried out for the past two years because Scott had his sights set on being the star player one day. Not that that would happen with Jackson around and Scott’s asthma, but the dream was apparently holding strong.

“I do support him. By reminding him of his limitations I make sure he’s never unduly disappointed,”
Stiles answered, gently sliding between his father and the sink. It was routine for Stiles to provide dinner and his father to wash the dishes, but it wasn’t like he had cooked and it was the man’s birthday. Giving the plates and forks a quick scrub before being placed on the drying rack, Stiles answered the judging silence without care, “And, you know, I keep playing a freaking contact sport I absolutely suck at. No big deal.”

He saw the Sheriff shake his head out of the corner of his eye. But the man was smiling crookedly too, “I’ll just set up the movie, shall I?”

“What True Grit first!” Stiles called over his shoulder as his dad left the room. They both knew his father would belittle the remake even if it was fantastic, just so he could outrageously compliment the black and white feature afterwards. Then Stiles would yawn exaggeratedly and nonchalantly call all Westerns boring, starting a short familiar argument before he headed up to his room for the night.

The teen finished cleaning up the kitchen and entered the living room just as his father hit play on the main menu. The opening credits started quietly as Stiles sprawled on the couch, only to be interrupted by a muffled ring. Both men froze in their seats, acknowledging the meaning behind the distant, annoying electric bell. The office landline was where the Sheriff took emergency house calls for work. Looking at Stiles apologetically, the father sighed when his son wouldn’t meet his gaze, staring at the living room curtains intensely.

Unknown to him, the second he was out of the room Stiles became a blur of near silent motion. The TV and DVD player were shut off, the boy’s usually elephantine steps up the stairs became soft thuds indistinct from a walking step, and the master bedroom’s receiver was masterfully lifted to give no indication that his father was now in a three-person call. That makes it… What, the couple hundredth call he’d successfully eavesdropped on? Stiles listened in with a smug grin.

“—tell if this was an animal attack, sir. There’s been no sign of scavenging.”

“And the cadaver dogs?”

“No luck yet, and they’re acting oddly, scared almost. If the other half is out there, we’ll probably need a search team.”

“Alright. Call the State Police, ask them for a K-9 unit and whoever they can get over here within a couple hours. We gotta find the other half of that girl before morning if we can. The less nature destroys the evidence the better, and try to close off the Preserve so no more joggers stumble in.”
“That last one is easier said than done, Sheriff.”

“I know. I know. I’ll talk with the Mayor, get an announcement out by early morning. Until then, have some rookies taping off Preserve entrances. That’s the most we can do for now.”

“Understood. See you soon, Sheriff.”

“Meet you at the Preserve.”

When Stiles heard dial tone, he quickly replaced the handheld and ran as lightly as possible to his room down the hall. His heart had quickened at the conversation, eyes wide in excitement. A body? No, half a body! A woman killed in the Preserve, found by joggers, and they couldn’t even tell if it was an animal attack!

Taking a deep breath, the boy shook his arms vigorously before stretching them over his head trying to physically relax for a moment. Flinging himself across his bed, Stiles let one leg sprawl half off the mattress and reached for a comic kept under his nightstand. His heart was still pounding like a drum, but he wasn’t shaking anymore, just in time for footsteps to be heard coming up the stairs. They stopped just outside his doorway, and possibly carried an air of suspicion if Stiles was reading the mood right.

“Go, I’ll be fine,” he called, waving a hand negligently before turning a glossy page, careful to avoid looking at his father. The man could read his ‘guilt’ face a mile away, never mind that no one else in the world could get a read on him.

“You weren’t listening in again, were you?” Oh yes, that was suspicion alright. Well deserved, and definitely well earned.

“No, dad. There’s only so much I can listen to about paperwork and the filing errors of our fine Deputies,” to be fair, only about three-quarters of those emergency calls had to do with cleaning up after incompetence and half of that was the filing. “You know, that’s probably why I grew out of wanting to be a Sheriff. Or a boss of any sort. I don’t know what I’m going to do for a career, but I’m done with the idea of minions. Pesky workers rights…”

An exasperated, if fond, sigh was his answer. The Sheriff shook his head and lied that he’d be back in a couple hours so Stiles had better be asleep by then, before heading back downstairs to gather his equipment and leave the house. Stiles stayed frozen for a long few minutes, breathing shallowly and
listening as hard as he could for the rumble of the squad car’s engine to disappear down the street.

Then everything was silent, he bounced off his bed, “Yes!” and ran for his desk. His hands tried to simultaneously work his cell phone and pull out his police scanner from the back of the drawer with mixed results. The machine landed with a crash and he had to erase several numbers before stabbing at Scott’s name when it appeared on his phone. As the device rang out, Stiles used his right hand to turn the dials on his scanner, seeking out his father’s channel. Scott’s voicemail answered him just as he found the right station. “--we got a bus coming in quiet for the vic when forensics finishes up. Let’s move our units so these guys can get in close, copy?”

Groaning, the teen skipped leaving a message and redialed. The line continued to ring out as more information was passed along the Sheriff Department’s channel, explaining that the State police were due to arrive in forty-five, the rest of the K-9 unit was woken up and would be joining them in ten, and could somebody please get a move on with locking up all the Preserve parking lots? Voicemail. Again. What the Hell was Scott doing, late night lacrosse?

Tapping a foot and hand impatiently, the boy redialed while listening hard. His father’s voice came on the channel, reporting his ETA at ten minutes and that he would handle the State police from here on out so everyone else focus on their own tasks. The closest Preserve parking was literally ten minutes from the Stilinski house, so Stiles knew he would have to park a fair distance away when he got there, but at least that gave him an idea where the cops would be. And once he saw those bright lights of the crime scene and the fan formation the cops would begin the search in, he could chose another direction alongside them. It never even occurred to him to stay home that night.

On the fourth redial, Stiles was grabbing his keys and squashing his feet into already tied sneakers, turning off the scanner and knocking it into the drawer once more. He almost dropped his phone storming downstairs when his best friend answered with a loud, annoyed, “What?!"

“Hey now, is that how you greet your bestest friend in the whole world who just found us an adventure this boring Wednesday night?” Stiles dramatically informed Scott as he ran around making sure all the doors and windows were locked before turning off lights to simulate a sleeping household. There was a barely audible ‘huh?’ from Scott’s end and Stiles knew the puppy-eyed boy would be making his signature confused expression, complete with dog-like head tilt.

“Stiles, what are you talking about?”

“Some joggers found a body in the woods,” he answered smugly, finishing up downstairs by grabbing a plastic water bottle from the fridge and putting it in his jean pocket. Always useful when going to the woods. His maglight was already in the back of his Jeep, tucked under a thick woven blanket alongside his travel-sized first aid kit. He may not have been a boy scout, but he was well prepared anyway.
“A body, like, a dead body?” Scott asked with a note of trepidation.

The spastic teen stilled in disbelief, beginning with a bit of flat sarcasm, “No, a body of water. Yes, dumbass, a dead body!” he ended with an indecent amount of excitement, “Dispatch called, they’re bringing in every officer and even the State Police.”

“But wait, if they already found the body then what are they all doing?”

Oh, did he forget to mention? Stiles stomped upstairs with a grin, “That’s the best part. They only found half.” Ending the word on a sing-song note, the boy grabbed his jacket and finally turned off his bedroom light before swinging one leg out his window, “We’re going.”

“What, no!”

Well. That wasn’t the response he expected. It was such an instinctive negation it completely stopped Stiles’ forward momentum. He restrained the whiny, ‘what do you mean ‘no’?’ from escaping by sheer force of will. Scott didn’t refuse this sort of thing. Hell, when they were kids and Stiles wanted to try gliding off the roof with just a sheet buffeting him Scott had been right up on that roof with him without a single hesitation. His swift refusal now meant he was probably in the middle of something.

“Scott, you’re the one who’s always bitchin’ that nothing ever happens in this town.” There’s a slight pause over the phone as Stiles anxiously waited to start moving again.

“I-I was going to get a good night’s sleep before try-outs tomorrow.” Oh fuck. Not this again.

“Oh right, cause sitting on the bench is such a grueling effort.” They weren’t going to make first line. Stiles: because he couldn’t be bothered to focus on lacrosse of all things, and Scott: because he had asthma and always pushed himself so hard he had an attack whenever he got on the field. But try telling him that, it was like telling a retriever puppy not to fetch. Sometimes you just had to stop throwing the ball for the dog’s own good.

“No, because I’m playing this year. In fact, I’m making first line.”

“Hey, that’s good. Everyone should have a dream. Even a pathetically unrealistic one,” Stiles
countered with happy pessimism and a bored expression. C’mon Scott, this would be way more fun than the suck-fest playing beside Jackson Whittemore and being yelled at by Coach Finstock was.

Scott huffed at him over the phone, choosing to ignore that response as he usually did with such casually hurtful things from his best friend, “Just out of curiosity, do you even know which half of the body you’d be looking for?”

“*You*? What is this ‘you’ stuff, Stiles wondered before replying, “Huh, you know, I didn’t think about that.”

“And what if whatever killed the body is still out there?”

“And what if whatever killed the body is still out there?” And he didn’t really care. There would be two squadrons of police out there; they’d have more trouble dodging the authorities than a chance of stumbling upon a murderer or predatory animal. With the search on, they probably wouldn’t even find a deer with the way everything would duck and run, and there were an annoying amount of deer in the Preserve.

“Glad to know you’ve thought about this with your usual attention to detail.”

Stiles’ usual response of a sarcastic acknowledgement stuck in his throat. A cold prickling feeling spread from the center of his chest. Scott wasn’t coming.

A sigh buzzed over the phone, humming in his ear while he still straddled his windowsill. The silence carried interminably before Scott finally said, “Get some sleep, Stiles. I’ll see you tomorrow at school. We’ll both make first line this year, alright?”

No. No, they really wouldn’t.

“Yeah. Later,” he muttered. Looking at his smartphone screen a second later, he watched ‘call disconnected’ blink across it before the call app closed out. That was a first. A really disappointing first. It felt like all his prior enthusiasm had been drained into his hot to the touch cell, but Stiles stuck to his purpose with a deep breath and shoved the device in a free pocket.

Carefully, the teen slid feet first onto his roof almost half his body length below the window. He used both hands to quietly close his escape route and then made his way off the second floor by habit to the baby blue Jeep parked in the driveway. He put the car in neutral without the headlights, doing his
best not to disturb any nosy neighbors and softly turned the car in the opposite direction his dad would have left in. When he had no more momentum left, he turned the noisy engine on, hoping no one would care or recognize it.

One block down he turned his headlights on and started to pick up speed. There was a Ranger service entrance on the edge of town twenty minutes away that he could park at and start his search from. Stiles concentrated on driving within every law, keeping an eye out for a black and white cruiser in every direction. Even the rookies tasked with police-taping the parking lots would recognize his vehicle and report his movements to the Sheriff. Stiles had a bit of a reputation.

Unseen for the moment, he parked before the Preserve’s chained entrance and collected his hefty flashlight before heading out. The full moon was bright overhead by now and while the trees were silhouetted in shadow, the ground was fairly visible without an artificial light. The natural blue tones gave the forest an otherworldly feel that Stiles ignored. He’d been in the woods plenty of times at night. The wilderness practically abutted people’s backyards and businesses. The most trouble they gave people was the massive deer population and the few times bears passed through a bit too close. The cougars avoided town and none of the nature trails made good ambush spots, maintained so purposefully. Wolves hadn’t been seen in California for sixty years and other smaller canids were even more likely to avoid people.

Stiles walked up a gradual incline, using his torch to scan his surroundings though he doubted the body would be so close to the road. A few minutes later he climbed a short hill and paused to assess the new sights. Hearing barking, the teen was surprised to find the search squad already coming hard on his right, the dogs leading the effort. If he continued on, they would cross paths. But to the far left was a dry streambed, he knew.

Thinking and moving fast, the lanky teen jogged down the short slope and followed it left until he hit the litter covered bank, skidding and windmilling his arms to keep from falling in at the last second. Heart pounding, Stiles couldn’t judge the distance to the bottom in the dark but didn’t want to risk it. What was the point of avoiding the cops just to sprain his ankle in the fall? His father would know he’d been out anyway. The Sheriff always figured him out with that kind of evidence.

The police and their dogs were close, but not too close, he thought. Biting his lip, the boy decided to risk it and walked along the edge which seemed a bit too much like a straight cliff rather than a bank at times. Flashlight still scanning the ground around him, Stiles felt his energy returning for the task, the adventure. With his adrenaline pumping it was much easier to find joy in evading the coppers and seeking out a dead body even without his best friend along for the ride.

Relying on his hearing to warn him if a dog was nearby, Stiles investigated the ground by trying to think like a predator. If he was a bear would he have dragged it to a safe place to eat? If he was a murderer would he have buried the body at the bottom of the gully? With that thought he started looking for freshly turned ground, forcing his mind away from how he knew exactly what that
looked like. Like a new cemetery grave…

The teen was so intent on his search he only noticed his distance from the authorities when the eerie silence quickened his heart. Hairs on the back of his neck standing on end, Stiles paused to look around and realized he must’ve progressed much further than the cadaver dogs as they covered the land in a grid square search. But it really was too quiet. He knew the woods well in light or dark and this was just… Strange. Spooky, even. Although it didn’t occur to him why until he heard something like thunder in the distance.

It had been absolutely silent. No birds or crickets, or other night creatures had made a peep before this sudden rumble echoed in the air. Without a storm in sight, Stiles felt like he’d stepped on stage to a cheap horror flick. That was when he saw movement, the source of the thunder: a stampede!

Eyes wide in surprise, Stiles tried to scan the forest for a makeshift shelter before deciding on a tree just wider than his shoulders and made it in time for the herd to reach him. Whips of air, hoof, and antler passed inches away from him and he didn’t dare crouch down for fear of a stray hoof knocking him in the head. Dust followed in their wake, choking him into shallow breaths and watering his eyes. He coughed involuntarily and fought to pin himself as strongly as possible to the rough bark behind him. Finally, just as his eyes burned too strongly and his throat tickled something fierce it appeared the last of the frenzied animals sprinted past.

Stiles muttered a relieved, “Oh thank God,” breathlessly before sinking to the ground to cough his lungs out. Using his button down, the middle layer shirt, he carefully wiped at his reddened eyes and blinked rapidly to clear his blurry vision. Sick of the layer of dirt coating his throat, the teen forced himself to squeeze out a hacking cough that fully cleared his trachea and spat the result away from him in disgust.

Ribs, throat, and eyes aching, the boy collapsed back against his protective oak and took a few minutes to appreciate the clear air. He uncapped his water bottle, grateful for his own forethought, soothing his abused throat in slow sips. But already his mind was racing, wondering ‘why, why, why’ on every aspect of the event. Deer don’t stampede, not unless they’re being chased or were just plain scared out of their wits. The police officers were behind him so the cadaver dogs couldn’t have scared them. In fact, Stiles desperately hoped the dogs didn’t scare them back in his direction. That would just be rotten luck. As for being chased, there really wasn’t any predator in the area that could’ve caused that. Bears didn’t hunt deer at night and there were no wolves. He even doubted a mountain lion could’ve truly caused it. They were an ambush-style predator and wouldn’t have chased anything for very long.

His brows tilted in confusion and curiosity started to thrum through him. It was dead silent again. He thought that was just something fictional media used to drum up tension. Bouncing back up, Stiles stared in the direction the herd came from, spying no further movement or sound. Then he returned the almost empty bottle to a pocket, aimed his flashlight and examined whatever fell into the beam as
far as possible, rotating a full circle. There was nothing visible in the tree line. And still it was silent.

Heart rate finally slowing, the boy grimaced in frustration before he scratched his closely shaved skull with the metal torch. Perhaps a minor earthquake had happened? He hadn’t felt the last one reported from the Bay area, but apparently their neighbor’s dog had freaked. Wild animals were supposed to act oddly as well.

Shrugging it off, Stiles backtracked to where he estimated he’d been along the stream bank, letting his flashlight arc along the ground. In the back of his mind, resources to check for earthquakes online and maybe the effects of a full moon on animals continued to occupy him. His ADHD working for him rather than against him this time, reviewing information while he scanned the ground then the stream bed itself briefly. Nothing yet.

With a thoughtful hum, the young man oriented himself to his path only for something to make his heart pound. When he’d faced West again his torch had flashed along something starkly pale in the shadow of a young tree. Was it really that easy? He wondered as he edged closer.

Stiles swallowed down a bundle of nerves and carefully shown the light on the crime scene. He didn’t step again, not yet. From over five feet away, he could still make out a long bundle of dark hair, a deathly pale face, and a dark blue sweater covering the rest of her. What rest of her there was. There was nothing below a visible waist; nothing but intestines. His heart hammered at the gruesome scene, a first for him. Not the first dead body he’d ever seen, no that was--he ended the thought.

Grim faced, the teen finally came closer, examining every inch of ground he covered to make sure he wasn’t affecting any visible evidence. If he couldn’t see any moving careful and slow, he could bet a police officer and cadaver dog wouldn’t have done a better job. Within a yard of her-- the body--Stiles crouched on his heels and tried to take in any clinical details he could find. There were no visible footprints around the body, where it lay on its side, but the earth was disturbed around her waist, where she’d been…

He couldn’t tell if a weapon was used to bisect the body, and he knew better than to dig around and disrespect the crime scene or the girl. It was odd that the organs weren’t bothered. There were some pretty choice ones in the chest cavity, most animals knew. There were plenty of small carnivores around; coyotes should’ve at least found it by now, even if they fled with the stampede after. Perhaps the scent of the murderer lingered? A human scent could deter predators from scavenging for a short time, in theory, Stiles amended. Dispatch was right, this was a weird case.

Finally, he let his eyes drift up to her face. Pity filled Stiles’ chest, expanding outward and making his eyes warm. He couldn’t touch her, not even to close her eyes. Coming this close at all was asking for trouble. The look of surprise, a hint of fear, was etched on her face in terrible stiffness. Amber eyes scanned her hands, her fingertips. She didn’t fight back; no blood or torn fingernails. They were
held slightly curved, but not towards the ground to catch her fall. Had she been standing, she might have just raised her palms in pleading, or surrender, and was struck dead before she even hit the ground.

Clenching his jaw, the investigating teen shined a light on all the ground around him before carefully stepping back. At a respectable distance, Stiles pulled his cell phone and brought up his father’s number without hesitation. He’d get in trouble, yes. But it was important that the authorities have the other half of the body. This was likely the scene of the attack too. His father’s contact information was just under his thumb when he heard a distinct crack.

His heart battered against his ribcage. A broken branch. And he’d heard it because it was absolutely silent around him otherwise. Carefully, the boy turned only his head to scan the treeline when he saw the glow out of the corner of his eye. Unable to stop the instinct, Stiles tripped around to face it. A red glow? What the Hell? His breath came quicker, nostrils flaring, but his thoughts came faster with each scenario more impossible than the last. This didn’t make sense.

They looked like a pair of… eyes?

A second snap, and he observed a dark outline, massive even from a distance. And even from that far… A growl echoed, making his limbs tremble.

Oh God. He was so fucked.

It was his last conscious thought before he whipped around to run. He knew you weren’t supposed to run from a predator. It would trigger the instinct to chase. But that wasn’t… That couldn’t be a simple animal. He’d never seen a cat or dog’s eyes refract like that. Even a bear’s wouldn’t. Instinct drove him to a younger oak tree not far from the body. He wouldn’t be able to outrun it, he knew that.

Already dropped the maglight for weighing him down, Stiles shoved his phone into a pant pocket before he jumped, hitting the ground with all his strength in the hopes of a low branch. His fingers barely caught it, scratching painfully against the bark. He didn’t notice. The animal’s snarl was audible behind him. He could hear the panting breaths of it coming closer, the galloping of heavy paws.

Kicking desperately at the nearby trunk, his arms screamed as he lifted himself to reach for a higher branch and his mind celebrated a minor victory when he caught it on the first try. He hadn’t climbed a tree since he was eleven. Right arm hooked securely on the higher limb, he swung his left leg up to the lower branch. Almost there--
A bank of heat registered in his hind brain, a being of flesh, blood, and teeth was just below him as his leg curled and his sneaker trod the bark. Claws sliced into the muscles of his right calf and the pain screamed through him, ripping a shout from his throat. It was the last thing he noticed when a rush of air tore around his entire body. He barely realized he was falling before he hit the ground.

He landed hard on his back, arms flung to catch the impact, but still he couldn’t get his breath back. All the oxygen had been slammed out of his lungs, and his instinctive gasp shot pain through his back--along his lower ribs, unable to fully expand with the new injury. Oh God, he’d broken a rib.

And then it was on him. A massive beast of muscle and short, dark fur. It’s face was oddly shaped, with a short muzzle and low ears, but the only thing that registered to Stiles was that it was furious. It was roaring as it leaned down, lips pulled back around a mouthful of fangs. Stiles’ fist swung out. Self-preservation.

The thing barely felt it. His skin broke on it’s teeth, blood glinting darkly in the moonlight. It hadn’t even reared back at the incoming blow and his knuckles had glanced off its muzzle. The only thing he’d done was delay the inevitable by pushing it’s deadly mouth off target. Bone sliced through the tendons of his shoulder and Stiles found the breath to scream.

Tears welled in his eyes and when he couldn’t feel his left arm-- he couldn’t feel his fingers, fuckfuck, he couldn’t feel-- his right immediately wrenched for the beast’s face. Heat radiated from his leg, his back and shoulder, so much pain altogether it barely registered when he caused himself more in his quick movement. Instinct and anger coursed through him for this--this animal that had killed before and was trying to kill him. His fingers clawed down it’s oddly shaped skull before digging into their goal: an eye socket. He stabbed forward. A wet pop, audible around both of their heavy breathing, preceded the beast’s own scream. Stiles could feel the bass of it vibrate through his chest and he didn’t let go.

He curled his fingers, causing more pain, making his nails dig into nerve endings. It’s jaw unlocked and it flung itself backwards with another scream. A rush of cool air greeted Stiles like a victory anthem. He didn’t want to hope, but when a second later he heard the desperate scramble of a four-legged animal through leaf litter moving away from him he about sobbed in relief.

Tears coursed down into his ears as he lay flat, body trembling in adrenaline and pain… so much pain. Swallowing and breathing shallowly, the boy lifted his shaking right hand towards his jean pocket. His fingers were slick and skid before catching the edges. Memory of what he’d done made his stomach churn, but he wouldn’t think about it. Haltingly holding the phone up and tapping the button to bring it to life, he noticed a liquid touch his left ear. It was thick, and warm.
The knowledge that he was bleeding out, forming a puddle of blood around his useless arm, made even more tears fall. His viscously covered finger tapped his father’s number despite his blurring vision. The cell connected within a few seconds.

“Stiles? What’s wrong?”

The concern in his father’s voice made him sob. He could barely hear him as he held the swaying phone above his face. Warm blood was gathering behind his neck and all he could feel was the pounding of his heart. It felt like it was convulsing his entire body with its efforts. “Stiles?!” The edges of his vision didn’t blur. They went dark.

“Dad, help.”
Chapter Two

Chapter Summary

Another reason that you wanna be alive, just to watch the bruises heal...

(Bruises - Band of Skulls)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The Morning After

Thursday, Jan. 20th

Later Stiles would recall the rest of the night and early morning in fits of sensations. He wouldn’t remember all of what he’d said, and his father would tell him about how he’d told the Sheriff to get his phone’s GPS, that he’d found the animal and the girl, that he needed an EMT. How his phone had gone quiet as Stiles passed out, nearly giving his father a panic attack.

He remembered the smell of blood. For a second his body felt feverish and his heart pounded and he could swear the beast was back--could smell it’s rank, bloody breath. But that was just a nightmare. The next sensation was pain and nausea as his world shifted from the ground to the air, carried by a stretcher, voices echoing in and out around him as his vision darkened again. The bright lights of an ambulance stung his eyes once and he felt himself fall back into comforting darkness, even as his father’s voice pled with him to stay.

He knew the smell of the hospital: antiseptic and illness, bleach and death. He knew the place very well. Stiles didn’t bother to open his eyes. This was just another nightmare.

Pain… and heat and wet, a numb pulling sensation on his skin, a tightening across his chest and arms, restraining. The world tilted and his stomach churned. A tugging on his shoulder, then his leg, up and down, over and over. The feelings were horrifying and swift, washing over him in waves of memory sensation one after another and each second of it felt like an hour. A new source for nightmares resting in the back of his skull.

Stiles wouldn’t remember the first time he woke. Apparently it’d been quite early in the morning, and his father had been slumped by his hospital bed waiting. The familiarity must’ve been terrifying. He’d been given a sip of water for his dry throat and then he’d passed out again, unable to stay awake under the leftover sway of anaesthesia. But the nurses and doctor told his father it was good
that he’d woken. It showed he hadn’t retreated into his mind with the trauma. Stiles was glad for that too. His head wasn’t somewhere he wanted to be at all times either.

He was fully aware the next time he woke. It was early afternoon, warm light coming in from the windows and a soft bustle of noise coming from the corridor beyond his closed door. The Sheriff was still in that uncomfortable chair, asleep this time and holding his right hand. His left had a cannula pressed under the skin of his knuckles and heart rate monitor on his ring finger. An IV delivered a clear fluid directly into his vein. The electronic beeping quickened with his awakening and stirred his father. Stiles squeezed the man’s hand, feeling surprisingly strong where he’d expected exhaustion. The elder Stilinski woke completely with a jerk, catching his son’s eyes right away. Blue eyes watered instantly and then strong arms encircled him ever so gently. The Sheriff leaned over, hugging his boy as fiercely as he dared and ignoring the discomfort of the position.

Stiles found himself holding on to his father’s shirt with both hands, tilting their temples together as his own eyes teared. Then the man pulled away, cupping the boy’s elbows and looking at him seriously, “Never do that to me again. Do you hear me? Never again.”

The teen whispered, voice trembling, “I won’t, I won’t. I promise. I’m sorry. I’m sorry, Dad.” His last apology was muttered into the man’s shoulder as he quickly ducked to hold his son again. The sheer relief of being alive and seeing his Dad, wrapped up in his father’s arms like a little kid, made Stiles shudder into relaxation. Muscles that had tensed in remembered wounds went lax, and surprised Stiles by a lack of stabbing pain. His shoulder ached to the bone, and chest felt warm where he was sure he was nursing a cracked rib at the least, but overall he was surprisingly pain free.

“These must be the good drugs, huh?” Stiles attempted to laugh. The Sheriff sighed, a hint of relief about him even as he shook his head in exasperation and leaned back. He worked his chair closer, scraping the floor, before he sat and rested his elbows on the bed, gripping the boy’s right hand like an anchor.

“Lowest dose, I think, but it’s still morphine,” the Sheriff agreed with a nod. The teen frowned a bit. That didn’t sound right. His dad would’ve mentioned if he was doped with anything else. There were two bags attached to his needle, and he recognized both: the morphine on a timed drip, and saline. But he’d lost a lot of blood, Stiles recalled. Maybe he’d already been given a bag, during surgery? He assumed he’d had surgery. He could feel his left arm for one thing, and his shoulder was padded with gauze and tape. He didn’t even feel like he needed physical therapy. Hopefully that was just the drugs, Stiles thought uneasily.

“Did you find the girl?” he blurted out, the question had been lingering in the dark of his mind and spoke aloud to distract from his injuries.

His father tensed and nodded, “Right where you said she was.”
“Where I said?” He didn’t remember that. He could barely remember holding up his phone, the glow bright against the surrounding darkness, not all of it the night.

The Sheriff frowned in return, “How much do you remember, kiddo?” It was a necessary question. Stiles knew that. He didn’t want to think about it, barely let his mind rest on one image before spinning off to another. He wished he didn’t remember.

“Finding the body. The attack. Trying to call you,” he explained in short quick sentences, his heart rate steadily increasing but not spiking dangerously as he purposely took deep breaths. Old light blue orbs took in the monitor, measuring it, and nodded in understanding. But Stiles knew he was going to need to go over everything, in detail, at least twice despite being the Sheriff’s son. Maybe because of it. He needed to get this over with, get his statement done so he’d relive last night as little as possible. If his mind would let him.

“Can we get a Deputy here?” he asked, letting the implications hang in the air. They both knew the procedure. The earliest they could get a story, the less likely a witness was to misrecall things. Not that it didn’t happen anyway, but they were less likely to fill in the gaps on their own.

Sheriff Stilinski studied his son with concern, but when Stiles held his gaze if not with confidence, at least with surety, the man bobbed his chin in understanding, “Alright, son. I’ll go get Deputy Graeme.”

Tara, Stiles thought, not the best choice for an impartial cop. She’d helped raise him, tutoring him in maths all through middle school. But he just nodded in return, watching his father leave before looking down at his hands. Carefully ignoring the puncture in one hand, the teen observed that someone must’ve cleaned him up. A kind nurse, maybe even one that remembered him when his mom was here.

He was glad. He didn’t want to see what those fluids had looked like in daylight. And cautiously hoped that when his phone got back to him from evidence that someone had the foresight to wash the screen. Although, he thought he’d have scraped palms from the tree climbing… Touching his neck and ear, Stiles was relieved to find he didn’t look like a murder victim covered in blood anymore. He still felt the need to shower off the grime of the woods, the feel of twigs and leaves digging into his back as a massive weight hovered over him-- he wanted a shower.

He needed to give a statement first. His room door opened slowly, letting his father in who held the door for Tara. The pretty, dark-skinned woman gave him a motherly smile, relief in her eyes. “Good to see you awake, Stiles.”
“Yeah, finally, am I right? I could still sleep for twelve hours straight without trying right now,”
Stiles grinned, turning his head to watch her take his right hand visitor’s chair. His dad stayed at the
foot of the bed, but couldn’t seem to stop himself from grasping his son’s foot. His right one. Which
didn’t feel pained at all, now that he thought of it.

Swallowing thickly, Stiles brushed that aside and focused on Tara. She had pulled out a recorder
from her belt, setting it on the bed between them, though she gave his hand a soft squeeze too. Small
town cops, he thought with affection.

“State your name for the record,” her soothing voice started.

“Oh, Stiles Stilinski. I don’t think my legal name will do anyone much good here,” he added with a
half-hearted grin. Everyone at the station had at least heard about his ID, and the fact that his first
name was a simple initial told everyone just how much the DMV had hated it. The clerk had
certainly looked relieved when he said to just put an ‘M’ down.

Tara watched him warmly, but with the recorder on didn’t remark. What followed was possibly the
slowest conversation he’d ever had. Deputy Graeme kept it professional, walking Stiles through the
previous night as the boy answered in fits and starts. He bypassed explaining how he knew to go into
the woods and with an exasperated sigh his father left him off the hook. The recorder probably
helped. As did the heart rate monitor acting like a lie detector, which Stiles only realized halfway
through when his heart jumped at the memory of redredredeyes.

When it came to describing the body, the teen could barely look either adult in the eye. He realized
now his little adventure, his bit of shallow small town excitement, came at the expense of a dead
woman and those who survived her. Somewhere along the line, he might have to speak with
someone, a father, a sister, a best friend, and explain why he was the one who found her. The top
half.

Stiles choked after. Because after… He didn’t even know what the Hell that beast was. The closest
and only logical species was bear. But he’d never seen a bear look like that, or even fucking sound
like that. The snarls and roar was more akin to a sci-fi movie Hellhound, a cross between lion, bear,
and wolf. And Stiles couldn’t get a word out around the lump that this monstrous creature was in his
throat.

Tara spoke softly, stroking his hand to bring him out of his head. She broke it down for him, action
by action. The chase, the tree and the fall. The heart monitor came in handy, making him hyper
aware not to touch that edge over into panic. All three of them listened whenever his pulse jumped,
pausing and waiting for him to breath through it. Eventually, he gave the best description he could: a
huge Grizzly-sized bear, but short black fur, enraged like a bull elephant, and missing an eye after trying to go up against the younger Stilinski. That properly shocked the adults in the room.

“You’re sure? You’re sure the bear will be missing an--” the Sheriff began, a weird expression like pain and pride across his face.

“Yes, Dad,” Stiles interrupted with a roll of his eyes, “I know, shocker. Little old me got one over on the Killer Grizzly. But you should know, the virgin always lives. Now I just have to stay celibate until you find and shoot the damn thing. Otherwise my life is forfeit until the sequel.”

The Sheriff snorted, covering his face with his palm to restrain the laughter bubbling along his shoulders. Stilinskis. Always good for gallows humor. Tara sighed with a slight smile, but otherwise said nothing. Right, the recorder. Well Stiles can’t be expected to remember he was in an official interview when it included his dad and his math tutor without any Adderall. *Come on!*

“Anyway, it ran off and I was able to get my phone out to call my Dad. I don’t know how you knew that I needed medical attention,” the teen added with an inviting look. His father had implied they’d spoken, though he could’ve sworn he just passed out after the call connected. Sheriff Stilinski nodded an acknowledgement, but didn’t speak. Instead he mouthed ‘later’ and pointed his chin towards Tara.

“You don’t remember your conversation?” Tara reiterated. Stiles affirmed absently, listening to his heartbeat slow with the end of his story. The next time would be easier, he thought. Surely, it would be. Had to be. She nodded in return and added, “We’ll ask the Sheriff to give us those details later. This will do for now. Let me know when you’d like another go.” This last was said to his father who quietly thanked the woman as she stood to leave, clicking off the recorder.

Stiles focused on the *beeps* of the monitor, counting them and hearing them slow. His whole body felt tense, on edge, and his mind was exhausted; emotions dredged up and hashed out, restrained for their audience and echoing in the clench-unclench of his fists.

Tara paused at the doorway, watchful for a moment. He finally looked over, and her gentle chocolate brown eyes held his full attention, “Just remember, Stiles. You survived this. And everything that comes after… Just divide it,” that sounded familiar, but he couldn’t tell from where. She must’ve read it in his face, because she smiled and quoted, “Divide each difficulty into as many parts as is feasible and necessary to resolve it.”

Recognition sparked and distracted all but his deepest thoughts from past events. Memories of long division and algebra, sitting at the Department’s front desk with Tara, hunched over worksheets and
textbooks flashed warmly through him. “Descartes,” he answered and nodded gratefully. With the acknowledgement and her recorded statement, Deputy Graeme left the room to head back to the station.

It was like his mind had been given a puzzle. Divide it. He survived. Now he just had to figure out… Amber brown eyes drifted to his left shoulder, covered by gauze and tape and not hurting. He swallowed.

Divide it.

“So? The Sheriff started, worry etched across the age-lines of his face. Too many were caused by him; too many panic attacks and nosing into trouble and not being where he was supposed to be. They didn’t talk, not as much as a father and son who’d lost the ‘mother’ part of the equation should. He didn’t know if that was typical or odd, but either way, they didn’t talk about Mom. They hugged, but they didn’t… hash out their feelings. Stiles had seen a therapist for his panic attacks. His dad had seen Jack Daniels for his grief. Maybe this time they’d try something different.

Maybe he’d try to get through it with his dad rather than worrying each other to death. “I need a shower,” Stiles blabbed without permission from his brain. But it was a start, he thought, “Could I just change my bandages after?”

The elder Stilinski’s concern visibly lessened, and he confirmed, moving to the side intending to help Stiles up off the bed. But he wasn’t tired, not physically anyway. Dark brows furrowed as the boy pushed himself up from his elbows, touching his left side again as the heat along his back shifted but didn’t pain him. He exited on the left, careful of the IV needle, letting his bare feet touch the cold floor without flinching.

They both looked at his heart monitor and IV tubing with consideration, before the Sheriff diplomatically pressed the ‘call’ button to alert a nurse. Stiles carefully edged off the bed, feeling for aches or pains while his father helped steady him by his right elbow. Thankfully he’d been dressed in scrubs rather than that embarrassing backless gown. Well, he didn’t have a catheter either, which was probably a minor miracle. He’d been sleeping a long while and the thought made him feel the need right there.

By the time Stiles was done taking stock of all the weird places that didn’t hurt and the Sheriff wasn’t done watching for any signs of pain, a nurse stopped by. The teen ignored their conversation, focusing on the IV bags even as the nurse turned off their equipment and started to tape the cannula to his wrist to keep it from sticking out. Thanks to his previous hospital experiences he could tell the morphine dose really was low, and the bag was still mostly full. He hadn’t been lying there long enough to even halve the bag, which meant even the drip was dialed slow as well. The morphine was barely affecting his system. Considering what Stiles knew his injuries had been, this should’ve
barely taken an edge off.

Free of the plastic restraints, Stiles gave an absent thanks and walked to the restroom, rubbing the back of his hand covered by a plaster. In his peripheral vision he saw his Dad take a seat on the more comfortable chair closer to the window and the bathroom. “Let me know if you need anything,” the man said before Stiles got in.

“Uh huh,” the boy muttered, hand absently drifting to his stitched shoulder. He closed the door, quickly emptied his bladder and then stripped the thin clothes off. Bandages covered his shoulder. A beige colored cloth was wrapped tightly along his lower ribs. Another white bandage covered a square patch of calf. Pale pink skin as far as his eyes could see; no bruises or scrapes of any size were visible. Taking a determined breath, the teen unclipped the ace wrap, pulling the cloth loose until it fell around him to the floor. Then he quickly ripped the bandages from his skin, barely looking until they were on the floor and he stood before the mirror again, looking up with wide eyes. Black stitches etched an ugly wound along the meat and curve of his shoulder; the beast’s lower jaw had angled towards his chest. Twisting to see the back of it, he visually traced where the front teeth would’ve clasped. That thing really had been huge.

His breath shuddered and he realized he was trembling just as he caught the edge of counter on his unblemished hands. The skin was an angry pink, but… There wasn’t even a hint of scab. It was a scar. Already. Stiles involuntarily looked down to his white-knuckled fingers as he started counting his breaths. This was real. This was something he survived and…

A little further down he caught a glimpse of more black and turned his ankle just so. Three neat black lines covered the back of his leg. Four pale pink lines almost matched them. One of the claw wounds hadn’t needed stitches. He swallowed thickly and compared them to his shoulder. The teeth marks were a little more visible, a little more raw looking. But just a little.

Jesus Christ. What the fuck had happened to him? Clearing his throat and physically shaking his head just to feel it, Stiles turned to the shower and quickly started it up as hot as he could take. The pounding water and instant steam grounded him, told him it was real. No matter just how unbelievable such a thing was. He rolled his shoulders, fisted his hands and let go, curled his toes, twisted at the waist. He felt a vague ache where his injuries had been.

Scrunching up his face, Stiles forced himself to the present by grabbing the tiny soap bar and scrubbing it across every inch of skin he could reach, avoiding the stitches more for what they meant than their original purpose. When he finished his frantic washing, when he couldn’t feel the leaf litter at his back thanks to the rather average water pressure, he breathed deep of the steam. Palms pressed against the slick, cool tile replaced the sensation of bark and short fur, and he took several deep breaths through his nose and out his mouth. He didn’t stop until he started getting light headed, until he couldn’t smell the blood or the beastly musk in the back of his nose, nothing but steam and slightly floral soap.
With a sigh, he dipped his head under the spout, ran a hand over his closely-shaved hair and then turned off the water. Thin towels were stacked over the toilet and he absently wiped himself off, avoiding the stitches until the last. They still looked the same. No oozing, no healing scabs, and all perfectly healed skin. He left the bandages and wrap on the counter and opened the door dressed only in his towel before he could talk himself out of it.

The Sheriff looked up automatically, glancing at the naked flesh as if to seek injury before he focused on the teen’s serious face. Stiles bit his lip, tensing and unable to keep from hesitating at first, stomach churning nauseously. “Stiles?”

“There’s something wrong with me,” he started automatically, then blinked and backtracked, “I mean, not wrong, I’m fine. I’m too fine. I’m…” Swallowing, Stiles blinked rapidly and gestured to his stitches, hoping his father would just see for himself. It was strange to explain, difficult to say aloud for the… Fear, he’d admit. Fear of what was happening to him. What it meant.

With a frown, the Sheriff stood and fully focused on his son’s bare shoulder. Stiles could see the moment it hit him. At first the man had looked relieved, glad for the healed wound, and then deeply surprised. Stiles was right, it was too healed. He wasn’t going mad. A large hand gently grasped his shoulder, avoiding the black lines and he carefully studied the wound from front to back. When he looked back at his son speechless, the boy just looked down at his leg pointedly.

Immediately crouching to see, the blue-eyed Stilinski examined the healthy pink scar tissue, daring to touch the pale line with no stitches. His mouth gaped in shock. Yeah, that silence was probably Stiles’ first choice in reactions. Better than questions he couldn’t answer. Or maybe his father could just see his helplessness in his face. The next worse choice would be telling the doctor about it.

A frantic thought occurred, and Stiles glanced to the door to his room. His unlocked door. “Don’t let them know,” he said quickly, backstepping to the bathroom, away from his still crouched father. “Please, I don’t want--what if they--it’s not natural--I don’t--”

The Sheriff interrupted as his boy quickly pulled the scrubs back on over damp skin, standing and pacing a few steps, “Okay-- okay, we won’t, we’ll… I don’t--but what do we do if we don’t talk to the doctors?” he ended feebly. But he hadn’t insisted. He returned his son’s stare as the boy looked around in fear.

“What if they want to study me?” Stiles continued, eyes wide open, “They’ll want blood samples, and if they don’t find anything, they’ll want more samples, more everything. What if they take me away? Take me away for experiments and--” Flashes of late night X-Files viewing ran away through his mind, alongside imaginary images of himself on a steel slab, cut up and open to see how quickly
he’d heal.

His voice had been reaching a frantic level when his father broke in, “No! No, I wouldn’t--that wouldn’t happen. I wouldn’t let it happen. No one is taking you away,” the Sheriff said like it was a law. A known fact. No one was taking his son from him. Over his dead body. The thought churned Stiles’ stomach, recalling how close to death he’d been just last night.

The surety of his voice lent a calm to the teen and he realized that in sharing this, in dividing this problem with his father, he’d have to give up something. Something else unbelievable. Only a little shaky now, the boy added, “There’s something else. Something I didn’t tell Tara.”

“Something--” the Sheriff repeated, meeting his son’s gaze with his own wide eyes, “Like a vat of toxic waste something? A meteor? A magic fairy circle--what?!?”

At the boy’s flinch, the man closed his eyes and pressed both palms over his whole face, muttering Jesus Christ before apologizing softly. Stiles swallowed, forgiving his distressed father easily, “It wasn’t a bear. Or, I don’t think it was.”

The man mouthed the words back at first, unthinking. Then he said it aloud as if to make it real, “It wasn’t a bear,” pausing on the phrase as if it would make sense the longer he thought on it. It didn’t. “Then what the goddamn Hell was it?”

“I don’t know,” Stiles muttered at first, looking away, and unfortunately catching a glimpse of his covered shoulder in the mirror. He turned his head quickly and stepped out of the bathroom. The images almost seemed clearer, cleaner in the light of day. Having gone over it before, his heart pounded but didn’t edge into panic. It was a thin line. Sharing this seemed to be keeping that panic back. “It was--it was bigger than a Grizzly. Maybe polar bear in size. And super strong. It didn’t just pull me down the tree, it dug it’s claws in and threw me from it. And it had--it had… It had red eyes.”

“Red…” his father repeated helplessly once more. Watching his son stare listlessly around the room, their cumulative confusion seemed to lessen their raised emotions. Repressed the anger and fear, the tragedy of the attack, in the face of this impossible beast. The Sheriff couldn’t help asking for more, “It didn’t look like a bear?”

“It’s fur was… Different. And it’s head. It didn’t have that slope, you know,” here Stiles gestured, finally comfortable enough to describe with his hands, “That bear forehead. The skull was more curved,” he remembered clawing his fingers down it, “and it had a shorter muzzle. Kinda broad, but more dog-like. Bears have a really fleshy nose, full jaws. This thing’s jaw was long, brought it’s nose
Stiles blinked incredulously. This was impossible. So impossible it was practically... He’d eliminated everything else, so no matter how... implausible, it was probably true. He couldn’t help mangling the quote to his situation. Sherlock hadn’t seen a werewolf in Baskerville. This was just... ridiculous. “Like a wolf. In fact it kinda looked like...” he looked at his dad as the man started to shake his head, “It did, Dad. It looked like those freaking werewolves in Underworld! With the nose and the ears!” He couldn’t help gesturing, showing off the muzzle and the odd, low-placed pointed ears. That hadn’t been one of his favorites. He’d thought the monster design looked weird. Even the Wolfman had been better put together.

“And red eyes,” the Sheriff added, shock evident in his voice. He shook his head again in disbelief, “Stiles, are you--are you sure?”

“Yes!” the boy exploded and then paused as he realized the implications that must’ve already occurred to his dad. Why he’d been in denial, hadn’t wanted to believe his son. Because that would mean... That would mean he’d been... “And I was bitten...”

Blood rushed in his ears, echoed in the tremble of his limbs. His breath caught tight. Amber eyes glazed into the middle distance, unaware of his father suddenly coming in close. Hands gripped his elbows before squeezing hard and then he could hear his voice.

“--Stiles listen. Breathe for me, that’s it,” at his gasp, “Hold it for a second, now let it go, son. Exhale, longer now. Okay, in again, again, deeper Stiles. Hold. And let it go,” the coaxing and instructions started a pattern he’d once been accustomed to. Not so long ago that he’d forgotten it. When he could feel his senses coming back online, his lungs steadying instead of clenching, Stiles gripped his father’s forearms. Getting his balance back, the boy nodded, still following his subconsciously counted breathes while he stood on his own. The Sheriff let go, but stayed close, “We don’t know if it’s true, Stiles. We don’t know anything right now.”

Purposefully widening his brown eyes, the teen practically wrenched his neck to pointedly look at his stitches and then back to his father, keeping up his exercise rather than speak such obvious words.

“Okay, yes, you’ve healed... Spectacularly, actually. We know that. But--but maybe it’s more like Wolverine or something.”

Stiles laughed. It was a soft, breathless thing, involuntary. But he laughed. A grin twitched across his mouth, unable to settle in his revolving door emotions, “Oh, if only. Am I right?”
The Sheriff chuckled too, forced for his son’s sake like the boy couldn’t tell, “Okay. But we don’t have to immediately jump to–to werewolf. I mean, if you want a supernatural explanation, there’s a number of things to choose from, right?”

The teen nodded, though he didn’t really believe it. It fit too perfectly. The simplest solution was typically the best one. He’d been attacked by a giant, hairy, wolf-man-like beast. On a full moon night. He’d been bitten, and healed by the next day. He was a… He was… He swallowed.

“Alright,” he acknowledged, hoping for his dad’s sake that he wasn’t going to turn once a month for his Sheriff-father to try to keep holed up and away from murdering people. Stiles shook his head and forced himself to think of the next problem, “But they’re going to want to put new bandages on me. And they can’t--I don’t want them to know.”

This time the man nodded, no hesitation. This situation wasn’t something that could be shared with the general public. No need to bring his son under a microscope.

Sheriff Stilinski was thinking of a solution in the quiet, while his son fidgeted and looked out the window in the afternoon light. Stiles was grateful the moon wasn’t visible yet. He dreaded to find out if he could be affected by the waning full moon. For three days most people saw the moon as fully shaped, only the middle day, yesterday, was it at its peak. But still… Stiles unconsciously began to bite a knuckle.

“Melissa,” his father burst out, startling the teen into staring at him, “She’ll help us out. You know she’ll cover for us.” Blue eyes watched him steadily, reassuring his nervous son until the boy nodded in acceptance, “She’s on shift. I’ll bring her in, and we’ll have to explain, but she’ll get us out without anyone else seeing to you.”

“Okay,” Stiles agreed around the lump in his throat. He swallowed down his instinctive denial, the need to call his father back as he walked out the door, tried to trick himself into thinking he could see the man, knew exactly where he was going and he’d be right back, that he wasn’t actually out of view. It was an old trick he’d done as a child, after his mother… Just after. And as these reassuring, though obviously untrue, thoughts ran through his head, the teen realized he was gnawing on his knuckles and hearing a pulse in his ears.

He really needed to slow it down, next thing he knew he’d have as much heart trouble as his father. Stiles couldn’t give up red meat, not before he’d gotten out of his teens. But the focused breathing exercises didn’t seem to help; if anything, he could swear he heard it louder the longer he calmed. Brow furrowing, he tried to find his pulse in his wrist, pressing down when he caught it and wondering at the inconsistency for a second. Stiles could feel his pulse in his wrist. It wasn’t as quick
as the one he could *hear*. Well, until he realized he was hearing someone else’s heartbeat, then his own pulse jumped accordingly. *Shit.*

The teen startled when his father suddenly opened the door to the room, and Stiles lost track of the rhythm in his head like it was never there in the first place. Fucking Hell, he thought, was it trauma messing with his head?

Melissa had followed his father through, seemingly unaware the man quickly closed and locked it behind her as she focused on the tall boy in front of her, “Alright, I know you guys wanted to talk, but let me work while we do, okay? It’s best to get the bandages--Stiles, why’d you put your shirt back on? You’ll just have to take it off again so I can re-wrap your shoulder.”

“Well hey, less work for you today,” Stiles answered back snippily, before cringing back at the force of a double ‘disappointed parent’ stare. Melissa’s came with a raised eyebrow to signal confusion, “I mean, uh… You really don’t have to do any bandages. Unless they’re fake ones, like if we need them to get me outta here, then I’ll wear some, but really I don’t like the tape--”

“Stiles,” the Sheriff interrupted with a sigh. Melissa had crossed her arms, staring in a decidedly unimpressed way, “Just show her.”

“Oh, right,” the boy muttered, before grabbing the hem of his thin shirt. If he’d thought about it, rather than been distracted by the throbbing in his eardrums, he would’ve realized that of course the Sheriff couldn’t explain what was happening right out in the open. Nerves made his fingers stiff and the fabric tangled on both his elbows, locking his arms together for a second.

“That doesn’t hurt? Do you need help, Sti--” the nurse’s words abruptly cut off as the shirt was finally pulled away, revealing the neat stitchwork. And the scars. Her big brown eyes widened and her mouth dropped only slightly. Stiles would’ve felt better if she’d made a more ridiculous face. Slowly, she reached up to tentatively poke at the bright pink skin. Stiles made no move to stop her; it really didn’t hurt. The woman he’d come to think of as a second mother, gently traced alongside the stitches with a fingertip. Then her lips tipped into a frown, and Stiles was treated to the classical face of ‘worried Melissa’. Usually Scott was the recipient, and being on the other end of it now made Stiles feel guilty as Hell.

It was a wonder his best friend didn’t hesitate before following along with Stiles on his schemes. Actually, Scott’s obsession with lacrosse had probably saved his life last night. Or… or maybe he would’ve just been bitten and survived too. And the wound would have healed… Would his asthma have healed up too? Would he ever have to worry about his own health ever again? God, the choices were a nightmare: creature trauma and incredible healing, or sanity and asthma that could kill you one day. What *amazing* options.
Stiles slowly came out of his head as Melissa was studying his calf stitches, and his father began to speak, “We don’t want to tell the doctors if we can help it. This sort of thing would draw a lot of attention. He’s just a boy, Melissa.”

“You don’t have to convince me,” the dark haired woman answered automatically, before taking a deep breath and lowering Stiles’ pant leg. She stood and absently commented, “You can put your shirt back on,” before focusing on the Sheriff, “I get it. This is big, and weird—”

“Hey,” Stiles chimed in reflexively, before giving both their stares a nervous smile. They ignored him after a second.

“I can get you guys out of here, but you’ll have to file out as against medical advice. There’s no way around that or the wheelchair. You can take my car for now, I’m on shift until five,” Melissa hashed out, one thing after the other as businesslike as she could make it. Stiles realized she made the best kind of level-headed nurse. Definitely his top pick for a zombie apocalypse, right after his dad.

“Thank you, Melissa,” the elder Stilinski said strongly, looking physically relieved. “It’ll be easy to excuse the both of us as just not wanting to be here longer than necessary when Stiles can recover at home. That’s perfectly true,” he added with a sad smile. His son looked away guiltily, all three of them aware of their past hospital experiences.

In the next moment Melissa seemed to notice Stiles unconsciously fumbling with the thin shirt having not put it on yet, and moved to the counter behind her. The boy watched in confusion before she revealed a pair of silver scissors. With a raised eyebrow, she stated, “Since they’re not doing you any good,” and quickly snipped the necessary threads before gently tugging the stitches out.

“Damn, that feels so weird,” Stiles commented, watching despite the fact it was giving his stomach squirm. The bite pattern rose and fell with the change in canines, molars, etc. And so did the pattern of stitchwork, requiring multiple snips to free up the knots. His skin prickled as Melissa stepped behind him to get his back.

“Think the scars will fade?” the Sheriff asked suddenly, having watched their personal nurse work as closely as his son had. Stiles almost shrugged, caught himself with a slight flinch that made Melissa smirk and pat his back gently.

“Who knows,” the teen muttered morosely. Normally he might be all for a wicked scar, a story to tell to a captive audience, but this wasn’t something he could announce with pride. When Nurse McCall
finished his shoulder, tossing the many black threads on the counter, she came around to see both men.

“They might, they might not. I’m sorry Stiles. I think if they hadn’t been stitched they wouldn’t have scarred at all. Can you bring your foot up?” Stiles thought on that while he stepped closer to the bed and obligingly stood on one leg for her. The thin pants stretched, revealing half his shin before he tugged it up the rest of the way. Both Stilinski men watched as her deft hands undid the stitchwork once more. Now the teen wasn’t sure whether he wanted them to fade, as if last night had never happened, or to keep them as a visceral reminder that this wasn’t something he could deny. Couldn’t ignore. He got the feeling if he did, he’d end up hurting someone. “Do you know what the original injuries were, Stiles?”

He startled, jerking as Nurse McCall tugged the last thread away. Swallowing and trying to breathe evenly, he rubbed the fresh skin on his calf and asked, “What do you mean?”

Damn it, wrong question. Both adults looked at him with a varying levels of suspicion and concern. Then the Sheriff stared directly at Melissa and asked in a tone that said he dreaded the upcoming realization, “Do you mean he was already healing by the time the paramedics got to him?”

Stiles could imagine just the image he’d presented to his father: passed out in the leaves and blood, clothes saturated with it and puddled by his head. Now that he thought of it, he realized someone must’ve brought the Sheriff a change of clothes. He was in casual wear. Hopefully someone had managed to salvage the bloody uniform, those things cost the department an arm and a leg every year.

“Stiles?” Melissa prodded, and the teen lowered his leg, crossed his arms defensively though he knew he’d have to answer. Not that the knowledge would do anyone any good.

“My leg was pretty bad, moving my ankle hurt so the claws must’ve gone deep,” his jaw clenched, “Pretty sure I broke a rib, maybe cracked a couple, when it threw me on the ground. And the bite,” he paused, licking his lips and breathing for a second, unconsciously touching his shoulder where the pain had gathered before the numbness of the rest of his arm. The new, uneven skin made an unnerving contrast under his fingertips, “It severed tendons, maybe an artery. My arm was numb, couldn’t feel or move it. And there was so much blood…”

Sightless amber eyes watched the memory of those blinding white teeth arching toward him. The skin on the back of his hand had torn across the thing’s teeth, but that paled in comparison. Just like he didn’t bother mentioning the scrapes he should have on his palms from climbing the tree. Such little things, of course he could heal those so no one knew they were there if he could heal from such devastating damage in half a day.
In the quiet Stiles had missed the look of horror on his father’s face. He didn’t miss the man swiftly grabbing him up in a bear hug. The warm embrace threw his mind back into the present, and Stiles sighed in relief, hugging back tightly. He rested his forehead on his dad’s shoulder, taking slow, deep breathes of the familiar soap and aftershave, the detergent they’ve had since his childhood, and the lingering scent of gunpowder and ink.

When a minute had passed, the Sheriff sniffed strongly and clapped his son’s back once before grasping his shoulders to look him in the eye, “Son, I know this is awful, but I am… I am just so glad you’re okay. No matter what that thing was that bit you, I’m grateful you’re not worse off.”

Stiles nodded, fully understanding the mixed blessing after having thought on Scott possibly ending up in the creature’s path. Melissa got both their attention with a soft sigh. The elder Stilinski pulled further away to look at her, and she gave them a weary smile, “Alright. Let’s get moving. Stiles can get dressed, there’s at least socks in a drawer here. Your clothes and things were taken for evidence, but it’s not too cold out. You’ll be okay to get to the car. I’ll go get the paperwork, let a doctor know you’re checking out, and get my keys. I’ll see you in a few minutes.”

Both Stilinskis nodded with her and she grabbed up the black threads to take her leave. Must be disposing them somewhere they wouldn’t be noticed, the boy realized. Stiles pulled his shirt on, then the socks his dad had swiftly found for him though he wasn’t cold at all. Another weird thing he was getting too tired to think about. Also… Oh my God, was he starving.

“Man, we are so stopping for food first thing. I’m starved,” he commented absently. Sitting heavily on the unmade bed, Stiles sighed and watched his father do the same before sitting in the closest chair. Somehow, even though his first instinct was not to worry his dad and to have kept this to himself, the stress of everything didn’t seem so bad with his family working together. He was attacked, healed, and probably a freaking werewolf. And he didn’t have to give himself a heart attack trying to keep his healed wounds from his dad, hide the faint scars from medical staff on his own or try to make up an explanation for whatever the Hell was going on with his head.

A bemused smile crossed his lips, “Thanks for bringing Tara, dad.” His father looked up, watching him for a moment until a sad smile was returned to his son.

“You weren’t going to tell me, were you?” Stiles looked down a touch guiltily, let his fingers twist and turn against each other in mimicry of his rapid thoughts.

“It was a bit unbelievable, don’t you think? I mean,” light brown eyes shot up again, meeting his father’s understanding expression, “When I saw scars instead of… Just the creature itself was too weird to be real, but healing overnight like that--”
“Yeah, that’s something,” the Sheriff agreed thoughtfully. He scratched at the back of his head, ran a hand through his short blond hair, a habit shared between them. Then he relaxed back into the barely comfortable chair and segwayed, “We’re getting burgers. And do not give me any crap about the beef. Hell, I’m getting bacon too. I think this situation calls for a free for all.”

Stiles snorted and looked away with a wry smile, “Whatever you say, dad.” He wasn’t getting bacon. Try all he wanted, that wasn’t going to happen. The teen would concede on the real beef at least. After the stress he put the man through last night, he definitely deserved it… Alright, if the man could sneak bacon onto his burger without Stiles noticing then he’d let the man have it. But only then.

After what seemed a short minute of comfortable silence the door burst open, startling Stiles into jumping to his feet. The Sheriff stood as well, slower and instinctively getting between the white coated doctor and his son as subtly as he could. The man was shorter than the officer, with average brown hair and a regrettable face. Stiles couldn’t recall him, but then the only hospital employee he truly knew was Melissa. The rest—he preferred they kept to the status quo. He doesn’t know them, they don’t know him; no one brings up the reason a seventeen year old boy is intimately familiar with the layout of the only major medical center in Beacon Hills.

“So, you want to check out early, Mr. Stilinski?” the man asked neutrally, eyes still on the clipboard in front of him, pen sketching across it. Melissa stood next to him, a wheelchair and keys jangling in each hand. Looked like she had her way, not too surprising.

“Yeah, the hospital’s not the best place for him to recover,” the Sheriff answered vaguely, stepping close enough to confirm which forms were being filled out. The man glanced back with an affirming nod to his son, making the boy exhale in relief.

“It would’ve been best for him to be under observation for the first day, but I can understand your sentiment. Nurse McCall will teach you how to take care of your bandages, how often to change them or tell you where to come if you’d like a nurse to help with that instead. I’ve prescribed an antibiotic, an anti-inflammatory, and a series of rabies shots for the upcoming weeks. You got your first just after surgery. Make sure to keep those appointments,” brown eyes glanced up for the first time in his whole speech, finally meeting each Stilinski’s in turn. The very thought of rabies needles had Stiles’ stomach churning, goosebumps raising across his skin. The teen gave a weak smile, more a grimace, before the man signed one more thing and passed the clipboard to the elder Stilinski, “Please fill out the designated areas, sign at the bottom, Sheriff… You’re taking your son against medical advice and I’d like to remind you of the insurance issues this could propagate.”

The Sheriff’s hand paused before the signature, and he looked over his shoulder where Stiles stood awkwardly fidgeting. The boy raised his eyebrows meaningfully, with no little amount of sarcastic
humor, before _casually_ bending his scarred limb to scratch the very back of his neck. Blue eyes rolled, and the officer smiled sardonically at the doctor before signing. “I think we’ll be fine.”

Hopefully Melissa could get him out of those rabies shots, because _goddamn_ that would suck. He’s heard those hurt like a bitch. When the doctor gave his parting words and left, Melissa passed along her car keys and where the Toyota was. She gave a quick gesture toward Stiles and offered, “Here, I’ll take that off for you,” reminding him at the last minute of the rough band aid holding his IV shunt to him.

An ugly thought occurred as he glanced down at it. He hated needles. An open tube to his vein was almost worse. With a calculating frown, the teen murmured absently, “Oh. Right,” before roughly peeling up the adhesive. He was highly aware of the two adults watching him with concerned expressions and couldn’t help himself. The thoughts buzzed inside him, and he just wanted… He wanted to see it. No one had seen it happen before, so who knew if it was even still happening, right? Taking a bracing breath, Stiles ignored Melissa’s calling his name and said, “Let’s see a magic trick.”

He pulled on the tube, remembering at the last minute to cover the injection site with the same palm, dropping the cannula. “_Stiles!_” his name echoed in stereo in the small room, both adults rushing the few steps closer and hovering, unsure what to do. Stiles licked his lips, having felt a single spurt of blood and then nothing. Still staring at the back of his hand, he deliberately smeared the heel of his right palm along the needle point. Most of the red fluid rubbed down his wrist, away from his knuckles and revealing his wound.

Or well, where his wound should be. But there was nothing but skin. Pale, blue veined, hairy skin. Blinking reflexively, Stiles exhaled in a mix of relief and fascination, mirrored by his father. He was knocked out of his daze by a swift slap to his shoulder.

“What?!” he cried automatically.

Melissa held her pointer finger to his face, expression a mix of grief and irritation, “Don’t you do that again.” The teen widened his eyes in a mocking innocence, giving his unhurt arms a short flail to demonstrate nothing had happened. She used the same hand to cuff his skull, eliciting a startled yelp, and pointed again, “Go wash your hands. Jesus, Stiles. You just can’t help yourself, can you?”

He grimaced at her, muttering under his breath about the Hippocratic Oath but doing as he was told anyway. The Sheriff only sighed, rubbed a hand against his temple and forehead before smiling apologetically at the woman who shared his suffering.
Stiles had to deal with not being able to wheel his own ass out of the hospital, *no he wasn’t going to do a wheelie, who did they take him for?*, but at least it was his dad doing the pushing instead of Melissa. Getting wheeled out by a petite Hispanic woman would’ve been a touch more awkward than his father, especially considering Stiles knew he already looked ridiculous with his long limbs and cramped slouch.

The Sheriff left him with Melissa for a few minutes as he brought the old Toyota around the entrance. Stiles spent this time clenching and unclenching his fingers, biting and licking his lips to the point he could feel them chap. Finally the woman couldn’t seem to take it any long and exclaimed, “Well, spit it out already!” shocking him into almost kicking out of the chair. With his ass hanging off the edge, Stiles looked at her wide eyed and utterly ridiculous. She just sighed at him and waited, watching until he looked away and started to collect himself.

“I just,” he paused, tapping with agitation on the chair arm, “I’m glad Scott wasn’t there. And,” Stiles swallowed the lump building in his throat and felt his shoulders slump without conscious thought. His voice softened as he finished, “I’m sorry I asked him to come with me. Last night.”

In the silence that followed the teen sniffed and cleared his trachea, wondering if they’d sit in the quiet until his dad drove up. Then he felt a small hand touch his shoulder, making him whip around to look up at her. A soft expression, something like sadness and understanding, watched him as she gently squeezed his newly scarred shoulder, “I’m glad he didn’t come with you too. And I’m sorry he wasn’t there for you last night.”

Stiles felt his eyes burn and when he couldn’t hold her gaze any longer he stared out into the parking lot, sniffing quickly before trying for a deep breath to make himself not think about it any longer. He cleared his throat again, getting rid of the pressure, and felt relief when he spied the McCall’s vehicle come around the corner. “It’s lacrosse try outs today. Think I’ll hold off the weird shit if he makes first line and if he doesn’t I’ll use it to distract him.”

The blue Toyota car rolled up slow and the Sheriff came around swiftly to open up the passenger side door. Stiles didn’t bother to stand until he looked at Melissa again who gave him a grateful smile in return, “Sounds good, Stiles. Stay safe and call me if you need help with any of the ‘weird shit’, alright?”

The teen nodded, standing while his father gave Nurse McCall his own thanks and gave a little show of holding his son’s elbow to help him into the car. The Sheriff added that he would bring the car around at the end of her shift and said their goodbyes. When the elder Stilinski was comfortably in the driver’s seat, door closed and scanning the lot to move out, Stiles sighed and reminded him, “Food first.”

“I gotcha, son. I didn’t bother with the cafeteria here.” Stiles snorted in response, too tired to start a
fight on balanced meals and healthy eating habits. The man was lucky to have gotten dinner last night before getting called in. If all he missed was breakfast it wouldn’t be the first time. To the teen’s relief, his father pulled up to Denny’s so at least it wasn’t Carl’s Jr. or Mickey D’s. It also wasn’t the diner where he was guilting the staff into restricting the Sheriff’s diet to heart healthy choices but Stiles would let this pass on account of the fact it felt like his stomach was eating itself.

They were seated quickly despite Stiles’ lack of shoes; the Sheriff recognizable by his face alone, which made his son suspicious on just how often he ate there. But the interrogation would have to wait on account of his groaning gut. They ordered briskly, a quick and dirty argument over the bacon—“Bacon cheeseburger, no onion, fries are fine.” “No bacon, and add a side salad.” “Yes, bacon.” “No bacon.” --at which the Sheriff pretended to lose ungracefully and Stiles allowed him to nonverbally cue the waitress to get it anyway. It wasn’t exactly subtle, mouthing ‘yes bacon’ behind his menu while passing it to the woman. But Stiles let it slide. Because he is the soul of generosity.

When their plates were served, Stiles dug into a turkey club with abandon, barely tasting it. The filling sensation gave him an instant relief. After downing the first half the teen gave an excessive groan and leaned back in the booth, muscles melting into the cheap plastic. Almost immediately exhaustion hit him like a two by four to the skull. His eyes closed and he let his head fall back, just missing his father giving him a cautious stare. A strange light-headedness seemed to be traveling from his neck down his spine and limbs. Stiles’ next deep inhale left a tingling in his nostrils and an odd taste in the back of his throat, like when a smell is so strong you can taste it.

“Son?” the Sheriff asked softly. Stiles hummed and opened his eyes to half-mast, seeing his father’s brow creased in worry. “You alright?”

The teen cleared his throat of the taste, gave his head a slight shake to try and curb the fuzzy feeling, “Yeah. Yeah, fine. Just tired.” His dad had stopped eating for a moment, watching the boy start on the second half of his sandwich with all the enthusiasm of his chem homework. The rapid appetite change and mood shift wasn’t lost on either of them. Still, Stiles kept at it, knowing he had to replenish his energies. Disconnected thoughts vaguely circled the idea that he needed to eat, needed to keep his calories up, hadn’t he just lost a lot of something? Blood, right?

So his body was just rebuilding; he had healed incredibly fast. And Wolverine wasn’t exactly an accurate representation of biology, no matter how quickly a healing mutation could work. His dad ate slowly across from him, concerned glances becoming more frequent as the man, for once, finished before his teenage son.

The Sheriff pecked at his salad, inviting criticism, wit, anything. Stiles seemed to barely be paying attention. All of the boy’s focus was on trying to finish before he fell asleep at the table. On the last bite his hand dropped on his plate with a slight bang and he muttered a soft apology. The elder Stilinski immediately stood, throwing several twenties on the table and pulling on his son, trying to get him to stand.
Even the attempt at exercise couldn’t get his body to slow his descent into sleep. “Dad?” he questioned roughly, trusting the man to guide his limbs to the car. Voices echoed around him, raised in concern but unintelligible to his ears. His skin was unfeeling to the brisk outside air, too warm for it to matter, like he was running a fever. But without any muscle aches or headache. Just that inexplicable lethargy. His father uttered soothing words, encouraging him to keep walking, to watch his head as he sat in the passenger seat. When Stiles’ hands were too heavy to reach for his seatbelt, the Sheriff did it for him.

As the driver’s side door shut away the outside world, the older Stilinski leaned over and tapped at his son’s face. He tried to waken him just a bit more, calling his name repeatedly. “Stiles, what is this? Should I take you back to the hospital?”

That finally got a response, half-asleep as it was. “No,” Stiles murmured with a roll of his head, eyes stubbornly shut, “s the healing…”

“You’ve already healed, there’s--there’s nothing more to heal, right?”

“I’s fine. Too much healed. Tired,” the boy sighed out, sinking further into the seat before rubbing his cheekbone across the fabric of the chair’s shoulder pad, “No hospital.” His last words were barely breathed out before his body went limp and the Sheriff was left helpless once more with his passed out son.

Chapter End Notes

Kudos to whoever catches the movie reference in this chapter! :) I’ll give you a hint, Tyler Hoechlin was one of the leads in it.
Chapter Three

Chapter Summary

...the beast still grows, chewing through the ropes!

(Carnivore - Starset)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The Night After

Thursday, Jan. 20th

It didn’t stay dark long. He dreamed.

Stiles dreamed that his Dad half-carried him home and up to his bed. He must’ve been drunk as a skunk, he was so uncoordinated. Boy, he sure was gonna get it once he woke up. He could already feel the headache nudging at his temples. The Sheriff would probably make his hangover a living Hell in the morning. Hopefully it hadn’t been his Dad’s stash he’d gotten into. Then it would be the ninth circle of Hell in the morning.

In the way of dreams everywhere, the teen felt himself sprawl into bed and belatedly noticed he was under the covers. And he wasn’t wearing shoes. Dad must’ve taken them off, he thought, and muttered a soft thanks.

He went under to the feel of his father’s hand stroking over his skull, brushing the soft bristles back and forth. Stiles woke up in leaf litter and the smell of the woods at night. Startling, the boy rose up on his elbows and skittered backwards automatically. He was in hospital scrubs and socks. His breath fogged the air, almost white despite the deep black forest surrounding him. Quickly descending into panic, he scrambled to his feet and cast about. Paranoia kept his eyes whipping around, and a choking fear restricted his lungs and chest.

Then he heard it: thunder. Everywhere. It echoed eerily around him until it was almost painful. But the stampede… No matter where he turned he couldn’t see anything, couldn’t tell if it was louder from any direction. Just that it was drowning everything else out of his skull. He couldn’t think! He covered his ears, but it did nothing. The thunder echoed in pulses until he screamed. Doubled over he felt a sudden cracking and gasped in pain.
His ribs, oh God, his ribs hurt. Then his left hand went numb, dropping from the side of his skull, throwing off his balance. He almost fell when a hot burning pain slashed down his right calf. Gasping and crying out, Stiles barely kept his footing, and started to shake when he finally saw the blood pouring down his unfeeling arm. So much blood...

“This--this is just a dream,” he panted. Amber eyes widened as he instinctively looked up. It was dark, so dark he shouldn’t have been able to see it from this distance. But he could. The beast was there. He could see it clearly now, as if it hovered right over him from fifty yards away. Close and far at once. The black, sleek fur. Paw-like fingers tipped with claws. Fangs too big for it’s short muzzle, peaking through too thin human lips. Mutated human skull. And red glowing eyes. “It’s not real. It’s just a dream.

“Wake up,” he whispered, unheard under the thunder in his ears. Stiles smacked his head with his right hand, barely felt the sting under all the rest of the pain, “Wake up, Stiles!”

The werewolf creature started to prowl forwards upright, legs still mostly human-like from what he could tell. His eyes watered, fear choking his throat so his voice came out rough, panicked, “Wake up, Stiles. Wake up!”

He hit his head harder, across the temple, trying to force it. His breathing picked up with the creature’s pace. It fell to all fours and lunged, red eyes never moving from the boy. Stiles got a deep breath in as he hit himself one last time, “Wake UP!”

He squeezed his eyes shut just before it pounced.

And gasped when he jerked awake again in his room. The pain was gone. He was still in scrubs, wrapped up in his comforter. The relief was so palpable, he could taste it like that weird sensation on his tongue in the Denny’s. Stiles let himself lie back and just breathe. He blinked slowly, feeling the shakiness of his limbs dissipate. It must’ve taken at least five minutes to come down from that, he thought listlessly.

Did it count as a panic attack if he had it while asleep? Or did that just count in the nightmare column of psychological issues? God, what would he tell his Doctor? The Adderall was working for the most part, and if he had another panic attack he couldn’t take them again until his issues were sorted out. But what therapist could treat lycanthropy, right? That was just asking the impossible.

Besides, he was pretty sure the werewolf healing factor would take care of any cardiovascular side
effects. Then Stiles’ stumbled over the question of whether or not the Adderall would work at all… Shit. He was so fucked if it didn’t. Because given the racing of his thoughts surely he was still ADHD?

With a melancholy sigh, Stiles sat up and set his feet to the floor, ready to experiment with his pills and dosages for the rest of the… Night? Brows furrowed as he looked out his window at the darkness beyond. Had he slept the rest of the day away? Christ, his Dad must be freaked.

A leaf crinkled, making him still instinctively. He looked down.

White socks were smeared in dirt, so thick only the tops were still a muddied brown and white. He could see the edges were black with wet soil. Wet… Uncomprehendingly, Stiles counted the leaves sticking to the bottom of his feet. Then got a disturbed idea, and threw back the covers of his bed. Across his bed sheet more leaves, broken and crinkled and damp, were scattered like he’d rolled or fallen in leaf litter before going to bed.

But that wasn’t right, it couldn’t be. He’d been to the hospital, his Dad must’ve taken him home—he couldn’t have… Stiles swallowed back nausea and found his gaze drifting to the window. A cool breeze floated through, taunting him with its openness. The Sheriff wouldn’t have left it open, not after last night and telling him about the beast.

A small tremor of fear waved over the teen, and he forced himself to stand, breaking more leaves under his feet. The few steps to the window felt like a mile, each pace closer increasing the drumming in his blood, the wheezing of his lungs, to his suddenly hypersensitive hearing. When he finally reached the window sill, long fingers grasped it to keep his unsteady form still.

There was no sign of a break in. But there was mud smeared along it, like he’d pulled himself up and through from… From the woods. But that was only a dream, it couldn’t have been real. His wounds had healed, the beast couldn’t have…

Stiles finally looked through glass into the night. There was a figure in his yard, upright and human shaped. Red eyes glowed at him. It felt like his heart stopped and silence reigned. Just before he screamed.

Suddenly horizontal again, the boy couldn’t stop screaming, eyes unseeing on nothing but redredred in the black of night. His limbs flailed, caught and trapped. When he finally took a breath a deep voice startled him from how close it was. He lashed out and the blanket parted with a fast ripping noise; freedom. His arm kept going and the voice was gone with a yelp.
Everything felt muffled, oddly underwater but only enhancing everything instead of dulling: it was too dark, too loud, too everything! His head was killing him! Something animal inside took the lead, safety being his first priority in the unknown. Limbs scrambled for balance until he was upright, away from the bloodied threat. He went for the rectangle of light, too bright!, flailed along wall before his fingers caught and pulled. The being behind him shouted, echoing in his skull and incomprehensible for the moment. Putting the fear back into his bones. He fled.

Stiles took corners blindly, bouncing off of walls so fast he couldn’t tell where he was at or where he was going, just-- away. Fresh air wafted from a place ahead of him, rectangular wood waving with the breeze. It was colder, clearer out there, and the teen raced towards his release. But it wasn’t quite what he was expecting.

Somewhere in the back of his conscious mind the boy had pictured trees and green things, dark dens and safety away from the light. There was only stone and metal and distant lights and strange noises. But he could smell the woods. It was just there, just past the odd smelling landscape.

The teen leapt forward, running pell mell towards the scent and never minding where his path led him--over wooden fences and across solid stone streets, veering away from twin lights careening down at him. When he finally hit wild grass, the cool wet dew soothed his heated skin. The treeline and brush deterred eyes from his vulnerability. And he could finally deal with his throbbing head.

With a groan, Stiles let himself fall to his knees and claw towards a sheltering tree with large roots he could duck close to. A whimper escaped, animalistic and hurting. He pawed at his head, felt relief as sharp tipped fingers scratched across it. Huffing softly through his mouth the scents were diluted and much smoother than where he’d come from. The harsh man-made scents had sent stinging pain across his sinuses and magnified his headache. Laying on the cool ground, inhaling the life and death of nature slowed his breaths and soothed his head. Muted night sounds were still audible, but distant. There wasn’t another moving creature for a hundred yards around him, having vanished at his noisy entrance.

Ever so slowly, rational thought started to intrude. As his fight or flight receded, the changed teen noticed a strangeness to his body. It didn’t feel right. His legs didn’t burn after the long run. Everything burned. His breath, no longer pants, emerged foggy from his mouth and yet he wasn’t shivering. With a distinct alien feeling, Stiles slowly pulled his weird sharp hand away from himself.

What he saw was incomprehensible. Dark claws sprouted from his nail beds. Colored and rough and sharp. He shook the limb hard, trying to erase the image, but it stayed. He blinked hard, focused and told himself it wasn’t real. But when he opened his eyes they were still there.
Reacting without thought, he reached out with his other hand to get off the ground and saw matching claws rake through leaf litter. His eyes watered and he pinched them shut again, this time clenching his teeth and feeling off in another way. His jaw closed differently, and he could feel sharp points against his lips. Fangs.

With a wretched noise, Stiles flung himself up but couldn’t escape the alienness his body had become. It must be a dream, he thought, it had to be. Clutching his head and trying to brace himself, the teen shouted as he felt bristled hair in place of sideburns and pointed ears brush his fingers.

“No,” he slurred around the elongated canines, and slammed his fist into the trunk of the tree. Pain radiated down to his wrist and blood sprouted on scraped knuckles. Bruises bloomed and receded before his eyes, and then he noticed...

More blood… under his claws. A tremble started to work it’s way down from his spine to his extremities as his heart raced ever faster. Sense memory started to return as he involuntarily took in the scent. The place he’d awoken, trapped under cloth, was his bedroom, and the presence that had shouted at him--it could only have been his dad. The blood--the Sheriff’s.

Nausea attacked his gut and he heaved, doubling over instantly, falling to his knees. The bile and the last meal he’d had tasted extra foul and tears started to stream from his eyes. Choking and heaving, Stiles’ mind raced in a spiral of self-loathing and fear. When the heaves ended and his stomach muscles stopped contracting he finally let loose the sob that had been kept at bay. He’d hurt him. He’d attacked his own father.

Where before his body had felt fine despite its foreignness, now the boy’s ribs ached and neck strained. As more fluids leaked down his face, he realized he hadn’t swallowed since vomiting, unable to with his tight throat. With every sob he never took a full breath. He was having a panic attack.

...and it wouldn’t stop.

Stiles felt the loss of control keenly but was powerless to stop the progression. His thoughts windmilled away from him: agonizing over his father’s attack and unable to remember how badly he’d clawed him, where had he ran to and was he a danger to anyone close by, would the wolf find him before another person did and would that be such a bad thing? His body broke into a sweat as ideas of his impending death lingered because he’d foolishly thought the woods were safe.

Stupidstupidstupid. God, it went on forever, so much longer than he’d ever felt. Still his chest pained and refused to fully expand, his throat stayed tight and tears and saliva fell to the forest floor from his
hunched form. Blackness edged along his vision as his blood became oxygen starved, but the comforting unconsciousness never came.

Long minutes passed as Stiles kept on the edge of passing out, never falling into oblivion and an even worse feeling sunk into his fearful mind. He could die like this.

He had to--he had to do something, the boy thought desperately. Trembling legs barely held as the changed youth forced himself to his feet. Whole body shaking, he picked a direction and tried to walk, instinctively desperate for safety despite the panic that engulfed him. That was when the skies opened up, at first a trickle, then a pour. Mild thunder rumbled around him, echoing through his tight chest. The rain only made it harder to breathe as it slowly drenched him. And still his short gasps came hot and his body felt little of the cold. Minutes later his painfully slow progress was tripped by a sudden stream bed, the round rocks hurting his soles and landing him in shallow water.

Clawed fingers sunk into the muck and Stiles strained against gravity, despairing of holding himself up high enough he wouldn’t fucking drown. His weak limbs barely held and as the water lazily settled around him the turned teen caught a glimpse of his inner animal for the first time, almost undisturbed in the curtain his body made under the storm.

Glowing blue eyes stared back at him in the black waters. His heart felt like it stopped; his trachea closed on an inhale. Fangs, hair, ears-- eyes-- and the new werewolf found the breath to scream, a howling scream full of fear and pain to the forest wind. Arms thrust him away from his reflection as he cringed and shrunk back on his knees. Instinct drove the boy to wrap his arms around his ribs, fighting to breathe, and claws involuntarily dug deep. Deep enough to pull gouges down his own ribs, and the pain shocked his system into a first deep breath.

Stiles went light headed at the rush of oxygen. Panic still gripped his thoughts and his body shook in protest of the abuse it had taken. Still, the renewed airflow and rainwater tasted sweet on his sour tongue and he sunk more fully into the ground, uncaring of the cold water that trickled around his legs and hips. Weakness of limb and a heavy lethargy made Stiles fall back further, letting gravity work its will on him. His very human fingers twitched, still partially stuck to his own flesh and cold rain ran the blood away from him.

His head had landed hard on the little river stones, but it didn’t hurt. Not like everything else did. Not like his own mind had hurt him. He kept taking shuddered breaths, grateful for each one and still afraid the panic would come again. And in spite of all this: the fear, the pain, the cold, the rain...

Stiles passed out.
Derek Hale couldn’t sleep. He couldn’t sleep because he despised himself. He despised himself so fully the thoughts wouldn’t make way for the nightmares. The ruined Hale house on the edge of the Preserve would only fuel his night terrors and spark more self-loathing, but he couldn’t leave it. It was like a hook in his chest, stabbed so deep his body had healed around it, unable to pull it loose or dissolve it, and attached to that fucking ruin of his childhood home. Unable to leave it, unable to sleep in it, just… Stuck. He hadn’t felt such pain since he and Laura had celebrated his mother’s birthday a month back. If running wolf-wild till they passed out counted as celebrating.

He stared out at the rain, at the house getting further destroyed by the elements. Why couldn’t Laura have ordered it demolished? Hell, why hadn’t the county? It was technically county property now after all. Just like the half-finished subway station and the abandoned mall, and the old mill… The Hale legacy. A ruin.

The young wolf almost didn’t want to be in the safe confines of the Camaro. Didn’t feel like he deserved it. Should be curled up in the house, in a corner somewhere, fighting to keep the chill out with the smell of death in his nose. But he hadn’t slept on that red-eye flight to Sac that early morning, hadn’t slept for forty-eight hours. And he couldn’t avenge Laura on no sleep, no matter how much he didn’t want to. And the passenger seat of his older sister’s car might be the only place he could pass out. It still smelled like her…

Derek breathed through the grief, forced it down and ignored the ache in his chest, focused on his anger. Another family member-- gone. Forever. His fault. Again. Why the fuck couldn’t he have sucked it up and come home with her? Why couldn’t she have told him there was another wolf around? Someone had gotten the jump on her, had stolen her powers because they hadn’t gone to him. On the off chance Peter would be Alpha, the hospital would’ve called him to proclaim the man’s miraculous recovery.

Someone killed her… And he was going to hunt them down and murder them in turn. An eye for an eye. Revenge with two graves and all that bullshit. Not like he had much to live for anyway.

A sound carried through the storm, making him inhale sharply. A howl. Derek listened, hard, taking in the nuances and length. They were in pain, terrified. Desperate for help—not the rogue Alpha. It wasn’t his uncle, couldn’t have been. That meant… The boy, the blood he’d scented from the scene of Laura’s death, had survived the Bite. And something, or someone had hurt him.

Despite knowing he should, that he would eventually get up and investigate, the wolf was reluctant to move. He didn’t owe this new Beta anything. He wasn’t an Alpha. And the only reason he could
see to helping the boy would be to track the rogue. Hell, it could be an Omega getting hunted out there. Though he was unwilling to believe that. Not like Beacon Hills was attractive to Omegas, especially since the Alpha was far too new to have gotten attention.

With a sigh, Derek zipped up his leather jacket and opened the door. After a quick study, the young man set off at a distance eating sprint, the type of run his kind could keep up for hours if not days and retain their strength to fight. The rain soaked through him in minutes, pouring down his neck and under his collar despite the coat. He couldn’t rely on scent in the middle of a storm, not unless he tripped over the boy. He’d have to use his hearing to the utmost, listen for the fast heartbeat that howl had promised over the pounding raindrops.

When he’d ran for about three miles with no sign, the Beta started to get suspicious. A wolf being hunted would make more noise, not to mention the hunters behind them. He should be stumbling upon something by now. The storm had blown itself out for the most part, become a mere drizzle within the hour, the echo of drops falling from trees to the wet ground all he could hear. Derek’s breathe fogged and he slowed to a stop, listening hard. Ever so slowly he was able to clear the sound from his focus until it became white noise. A bird shook its feathers out. A couple deer stragglers crept along a quarter mile back. Hazel eyes closed and he paused on his next inhale, easing the exhale out of his nose noiselessly.

A soft rhythm. A heartbeat at rest, less than a mile further. Black brows furrowed in confusion; the heart should have been racing. It should have sounded like it was getting closer, or farther, but it was stationary. The wolf wasn’t moving. Unconscious?

Derek decided to move lightly from then on; his footsteps were inseparable from the drizzle around them and his pace a cautious trot so he could find his target before he was seen. The stretch of unnatural light blue among the leaf litter was obvious fifty yards out. He made out the shape of a shirt and trousers first, and took a few seconds to recognize them as hospital scrubs. Shit. Well, it made sense, didn’t it? The boy had obviously called for help, which explained all the human scent trails he’d found earlier that day around the site of Laura’s attack. They must’ve rushed him to the hospital. Derek could only hope that the kid didn’t have a manhunt running roughshod behind him. Then again, he didn’t see why a person wouldn’t be wearing regular clothes after they’d left a hospital. Just his luck.

The only thing that he could really wish for, was that no staff had gotten a look at the magically disappearing wounds. Which, given the last Hale’s luck? He wouldn’t bet on it.

The Bitten boy appeared unconscious, maybe passed out. Not that Derek could fathom why. He still approached cautiously, silent in the wet leaves and circled around closer. The kid was definitely young, maybe early high school years although it was harder to tell with the cropped close haircut. He was tall, long limbed, but rangy like he hadn’t grown into his body yet. Blood was drying at his sides, but a quick sniff told the born wolf it wasn’t from anyone else. He’d done it himself? The
The boy’s face was tilted towards him, instinct ensuring that he wouldn’t drown in the rain. He had a tall nose, upturned and almost big, though it suited his face. Full, bowed lips and an average chin and clean cut jaw; rounded ears, low sideburns and full, dark brows. The dark fan of eyelashes were rather girlish, and a constellation of freckles dotted his skin. If the boy grew his hair out he wouldn’t be out of place in one of those teeny-bopper boy bands that were all the rage lately.

The thought made him grimace. Wolves going through puberty were Hell. His own may not have been that long ago and centered around grief, but he’d lived through his sister Laura’s and heard horror stories about Peter in particular. When the born wolf finally crouched next to the Bitten there was no indication he’d noticed: no inhalation of scent, muscle twitch, or heart beat skipping to be found. The boy was out of it. Even humans instinctively reacted in unsafe environments, probably something leftover from being a prey species. For a moment, Derek couldn’t decide whether to speak or to shake the kid awake. Speaking was never easy for him, but he felt he couldn’t abide the touch of another. Not so soon after Laura…

“Hey,” he called softly at first. His voice was a little rough; he hadn’t spoken since telling his work he’d be absent on account of a family emergency half a day ago. It was amazing how much people spoke without really looking for an answer, or caring at all if they got one. Clearing his throat, Derek tried again a little louder, “Hey,” and got a twitch in response.

Lean muscles flexed and the stranger’s heart rate quickened; he’d wake up in a moment. The change had worked swiftly and being unconscious brought the wolf instincts to the surface. Nostrils flared, taking in Derek’s scent before bright blue eyes snapped open. Shit. It felt like his heart stopped while the boy’s went racing. He’d killed? He’d already— fuck. Fuckfuckfuck.

The shift came on in increments while the boy sputtered and dragged himself backwards, away from Derek. Claws dug into the soil and ears went pointed before the last Hale got over the revelation and spoke authoritatively, “Calm down.”

“C-calm,” the boy sputtered indignantly. Teenage defiance reared its head, “Yeah, r-right. Easy for you to say!” Almost despite himself, the teen’s body was calming. Derek hadn’t moved from his crouched position, balanced precariously on the balls of his feet to keep the knees of his pants from getting soaked and arms crossed on his knees. Instinct was still driving the younger wolf and even with the inherent threat of being a stranger, wolves were still more comfortable with each other than human strangers. Even when they weren’t pack, there was a kind of wary potential with Betas.

The brown haired boy finally stopped crawling back, a good yard between them, when he noticed the dark claws on his fingertips. Then he glanced at Derek, who purposefully looked bored, before back down at his hands. His heart rate was slowing and his breathing eased as rational thought seemed to return. The born wolf kept his voice flat as he sardonically asked, “You calm?”
The kid took a deep breath, turned it into a sigh and said, “Enough.” There was a thoughtful silence emanating from him, but the hormones leaking from his pores were starting to take on a hint of sour fear. Blue eyes met hazel before he spoke, “Did you bite me? Turn me?”

“No,” Derek immediately shot back, never looking away. Despite being a stranger, the boy seemed to trust his answer. He gave no physical indication of his thoughts besides a twitch of his fingers, but the fear scent was dissipating quickly, “Only an Alpha can turn humans.”

“So I won’t eventually get all big and ugly like that thing?” Finally some emotion was starting to come through, a hint of a sneer on the boy’s lips and anger in his scent. All Hale could think about was that the Alpha was apparently deformed and that could only be evidence of a twisted mind. Either a genuine psychosis and trauma or just freaking psychopathy. Great. Just… great.

“No, you and I are Betas,” he answered and offered a flash of his own blue eyes. Stiles blinked in response and leaned forward, as if intrigued. If the boy had lost his mind in the change then he wouldn’t have seen the full shift on himself, but they could deal with that later. Derek was in no mood to be some newbies’ test dummy, “You got a good look at the Alpha?”

The teen snorted and the anger intensified, “Up close and personal. His breath was rank,” probably because it smelled like Laura’s— “Right before he almost tore my arm off.”

Assuming the kid was exaggerating, Derek pictured a non-fatal though savage injury, “So he meant to give you the Bite.” The rogue was trying to start a pack then. He probably wouldn’t be satisfied with just one Beta…

“Oh no,” the kid interrupted, “I’m pretty sure he meant to kill me.” Confusion made the born wolf’s eyes narrow and brows furrow. “Don’t look at me like that, I know what I’m talking about. He aimed for my throat, but my arm got in the way,” the last said with more than a hint of sarcasm. Kid really was lucky then. And admittedly Laura had often complained of what she called ‘Derek’s resting bitch-face’ but this was just his face. He wasn’t about to change it for some punk. And the kid was still going. Great. A chatterbox, “He clawed my leg, broke a couple ribs, and bit my shoulder. Couldn’t feel my arm below it, or move it, so if that had been my neck… I took his eye before he could finish me off.”

Which explained why the boy was still alive. Derek’s full brows rose in spite of himself; he was a little impressed, “That’ll take awhile to heal, if it ever does.” Which meant looking for the human form of the Alpha would be that much easier. Who would miss seeing a one-eyed man? The new wolf likely hadn’t noticed, but he was calling the Alpha male despite first saying ‘thing’. Derek took it for instinct, a Bitten Beta sometimes had innate knowledge of their maker, insignificant things but helpful all the same.
“Good,” the kid pronounced with satisfaction, his scent became almost hateful in its anger and the last Hale couldn’t help but feel hostile in response. The Alpha was rogue, had killed his sister, but he understood the situation. The Omega had gone mad, taken power where it could and was starting a pack. It was instinct, and as grief stricken as Derek was, he understood. This was an easier kind of grief than losing his family to that woman. And this boy was happy about mutilating another wolf, his own Alpha. As the boy started to shift into a more comfortably seated position, smearing mud along his scrubs, Derek let loose.

“Is it really so bad?” he started with a sneer, “You’re stronger, faster--you’ll never get sick again. Hearing, smell, vision, all of it ten times as strong. You’re better than you could ever achieve as a human. The Bite is a gift.”

“With no return policy I’m guessing,” was the quickfire response. Derek grit his teeth, resisting the urge to fang out and press for submission. “It’s kinda like when someone gifts you a pet you never wanted. Asking first would’ve been nice!”

And that… took the ire out of the born wolf quickly. The Bitten were always a sore subject with Derek. No matter who it was, it made a small part of him ask, ‘Why you? Why you and not her?’. A question no one would ever be able to answer. This boy--this young man was the lucky one. He’d been just like Paige. Attacked, and Bitten with no prior knowledge, terrified out of this mind, and he hadn’t even had anyone with him to help like Paige did. But somehow, by the mercy of the Gods, he’d turned instead of dying. Derek’s tongue felt thick and he swallowed down the old memories, keeping his physical body neutral by long practice.

“Consent is…” he didn’t know how to explain, not in a way that made sense. He’d read everything he could get his hands on after Paige, but he didn’t know how to talk about it with a traumatized Bitten, “The Alpha’s gone rogue. You were lucky to survive the transition. Without prior knowledge, the bite kills as often as it turns.”

The boy blinked and for some internal reason his Beta form began to recede. His wolf faded away and left light brown eyes, rounded ears and flat fingertips behind. He’d never fully shifted, but it was only now it’d retreated. The boy’s gaze became distant, and a whisper fell from the his lips, “Fifty-fifty…” Derek mentally cursed again, knowing he’d said the wrong thing. “I nearly--God, never say anything to my dad. He’d flip.”

Right. The born wolf could imagine. His own parents had reacted with wolfish paranoia when Derek and Peter had finally returned after hiding from hunters for a full day. They’d hidden the family in the basement and hunted the Preserve, patrolling the land and the town until it was confirmed the hunters were gone. It’d been a very aggravating twelve hours for a fifteen year old Derek, stuck with his sisters and baby cousins. Human children were much more vulnerable and he’d seen those
parents panic over near misses in public.

“You’re stronger than you know,” he acknowledged, trying to right his earlier misstep, “When you were attacked you didn’t deny it happened, or rationalize it away. You accepted it. In that way, you accepted the Bite.” At least according to his family’s old books, that was the best theory available. The boy truly was lucky, even if he didn’t want to hear it. Traumatic turnings had the worst success rate.

Drawing a knee to his chest, the teen wrapped an arm around it to rest his chin on before speaking sullenly, “Well, better than leaving my dad all alone I guess…” Something made him frown, then his scent turned sad. Derek had a moment’s thought to wonder where the boy’s mother was before he spoke again, “Shit. I-I hurt my dad.” His voice was softer and tremored, then he wrapped his other arm around the same leg, refusing to look at Derek.

The born wolf felt a chill down his spine, clenched a fist and tried to stay calm. If the boy remembered, he couldn’t have hurt the man too badly, couldn’t have been too out of control yet. Right? No, Derek was fooling himself. The boy had blue eyes for a reason. “He make you angry?”

“No,” the kid answered dully, still not looking at his audience, “I had a nightmare.” That… Actually that sounded about right. If the attack was forefront in the Bitten’s mind, he’d probably woken up shifted and clawed his father to get away from everything. Being new to all the sounds, smells, and shift in vision probably made it so he couldn’t recognize his own parent even. Hopefully, that meant the man was still alive since the new wolf would’ve focused on fleeing. But Derek’s thought process was interrupted again by the boy’s subject change, “Christ! I-I think I went through withdrawal.”

“What,” Hale said flatly. He hadn’t expected this. The Bitten was a freaking teenager, what kind of drugs could he have been on? And what the Hell did that have to do with nightmares?

But the boy didn’t respond to what the older wolf wanted to know, instead whining, “Dude, this going to suck. Fucking ADHD werewolf--I’m gonna be so bad at this…”

Derek recognized the term, but the definition escaped him. Diseases were cured by the Bite so he had no clue what the boy’s problem was, “Back up. Drugs? And what withdrawal are you talking about, the Bite cures almost everything.” And what it doesn’t cure, it kills.

“Adderall,” was the sniped, pointed answer. It didn’t mean anything to Derek who still only vaguely recognized the term as a human household word and stared blankly at the boy, “For attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder. Exactly what it says on the tin. I’ve had the prescription for like--six years now? Oh my God, two daily time release capsules over six years, never mind the times I took too
many to pull an all nighter.” Wonderful. That showed fucking great impulse control in a Bitten, Derek thought sourly. “That’s a freaking lot. So yeah, withdrawal. Increased appetite, lethargy—mental and physical, headache, and… Ding, ding, ding! Really vivid, fucking nightmares. So, yeah, I just went through a twenty-four hour withdrawal. It was a bitchin’ time.”

The older wolf grit his teeth and resisted the urge to smack the boy upside the head. It did sound like an awful turning, but honestly! How the Hell did he pack that much sarcasm and that much lip in one skinny package and survive middle school? Derek took the important part of that spiel and, ironically, focused on it, “You can’t focus.”

The boy nodded in agreement, and one arm fell to his splayed leg to tap out a rhythm without any appearance of thought, “Mostly. But I can multi-task like a boss.” The incessant movement was beginning to get to the wolf, predator instinct making him hyper aware of the boy’s every move and agitating him.

“Well you’re going to have to learn.”

To put it shortly, the kid… Blew up. His heart rate thundered, his scent went furious and the claws came out. It was an odd contrast to the boy’s weirdly cold first words, “I don’t think you understand,” and blue eyes flashed at Derek, “I am chemically incapable of focusing on one thing at a fucking time, Derek.” The Hell?! Hazel eyes widened and his own heart double-timed, “I still have a year and a half of school; I’m almost genius smart but I’m academically fucked right now, do you understand that? Being a fucking werewolf—”

Hale pounced. Being in a ready crouch made his movements swift and unblockable. One clawless hand landed high on the boy’s chest and pushed him to the streambed, hard. The young wolf lost his breath and flailed uselessly at the attack. Derek’s legs pinned the other’s just above the knees and his right arm held his balance over the kid. With a quick pull and push, he slammed the boy into the stones again, turning the anger scent into fear. Clawed fingers gripped his leather jacket but didn’t pierce it. Derek knew he hadn’t done enough to hurt him, he hadn’t intended that and the boy’s instincts were good. The teen raised his chin, still looking at Derek with wide blue eyes, but showing his throat and not fighting back. He probably didn’t even realize what he was doing. But it saved his skin.

“Calm. Down,” the born wolf grit out, controlling his own shift from surfacing with an experienced hand. When nothing changed for several long moments, he realized the boy hadn’t inhaled and rolled his eyes. “Breathe,” he ordered. And the boy did so, shakily, but continued to take oddly measured breathes like he’d done some sort of meditation before. Derek couldn’t picture it, had no idea where a kid like him would learn something like that. “Now, how do you know me?”

The Beta-shift began to retreat, showing Derek light brown eyes again which seemed to go soft and
sad as they looked at him. Gods, he hated it when strangers looked at him like that. Like they had some right to know what had happened to him. The boy took another measured breath and calmly confirmed, “You’re Derek Hale. And I’m Stiles,” he added quickly as if just realizing they hadn’t exchanged names in their long conversation, “My dad’s Sheriff Stilinski. He was a deputy when you knew him.”

The name didn’t ring a bell. But it made sense. There were several deputies that had seen to him and Laura after the fire… Also, Stiles? Really? He hoped that wasn’t the teen’s legal name, good God. Also, “I don’t remember you.”

If Stiles was a junior now, he had been in elementary school when the fire happened. How did he know a much older Derek Hale by sight alone? With economic movement, Derek released the young wolf and rose up to his feet. The teen started to brush himself off as he made his way up as well, “Yeah, well you wouldn’t. I don’t think you noticed much at the time. I was in the station too, but…” Derek looked away, unable to acknowledge this boy who’d been witness to his past grief. “I should get home.”

The born wolf focused on calming his heart and lungs; he couldn’t stand that old familiar sting of tragedy. “Yeah,” he said inanely, ready to go back to the Camaro.

“Come with me?” Derek whipped around to stare, “Er--I-I mean, I literally have no idea where I am right now. Help me find a road?”

Oh. Okay, that made sense. More so than the offer to open his home to a stranger. The older wolf wanted to clear his throat, felt the urge to cough at the emotional whiplash but resisted with a thick swallow. With a brisk nod, Hale oriented himself and set off, “Come on.”

Stiles followed in his wake, much louder than the born wolf’s tread. Their path was slick with wet leaves and muddy underneath but at least it was off the beaten path. Derek preferred to keep his balance over slippery detritus than have his boots sink in the muck the nature trails would be. But from the sound of things, Stiles could’ve used the sticky substance. The kid was as clutzy as a newborn foal, all long limbs and no coordination which was very strange for a werewolf. Hazel eyes rolled while the boy couldn’t see him, as he heard and sensed a third slip and catch of balance. Though it was likely his quick pace didn’t help matters. Feeling reluctantly guilty and pitying the boy, Hale paused to let him come apace and said, “The instincts are there, just walk normally.”

The teen made a rude noise, blowing air between his lips before he started their walk again. “That is normal,” he said dismissively.
Derek grit his teeth, told himself to try again and practically growled, “Take off your socks.” The filthy cotton wasn’t doing the Bitten any favors and were probably slimy with mud and algae. Stiles scowled back and didn’t pause to follow the order.

“Dude, I know they’re gross, but they protect my feet.” The born wolf pointedly stopped, made sure he had those brown eyes on him before staring down at the awful pieces of cloth and then back up with raised brows. The kid seemed to read his face well enough then and blushed, “Oh. Right.” Good, Stiles should get used to the healing sooner than later and bare skin would grip the ground better. He bent at the waist to quickly toss the rags on the forest floor. At Hale’s unimpressed look, the boy indignantly said, “What? They’ll make some small and then large animals a warm home someday.”

Derek sighed through his nose, shook his head and continued towards civilization. Stiles had spoken like the older male should know what he was referencing, but he honestly had no clue. And he had a feeling that would happen in the majority of their conversations... The teen moved quicker, though no quieter, on bare feet, so the born wolf learned to tune out the rustling in favor of being aware of his surroundings. No other humans were in the Preserve this early in the morning, but one could never be too careful of hunters and their traps.

All around them the sky was lightening, warm shades of pink and yellow filtered from the East and dappled sunlight arrived through the mostly leafless trees. Animals and birds began to awaken, chirping, chittering, and fleeing from the predator’s path. Stiles was often jerking his head from side to side, and the born wolf quickly realized it was at the different sounds and movements he could see with the enhanced senses. A dilemma soon occurred to Derek: he’d never trained a new wolf before. He’d been born with his senses and grew into his temper and powers. How in the world was he going to explain the unexplainable to a former human? Some scents just were, like the trees, rocks, small animals and people scents. They couldn’t be properly described because they were essentially the object in question. Humans were literally what they ate, where they’d been, who they were around, and the scent of chemosignals which varied by mental state. Sure some of them had a more animal musk and others were oddly sweet but it didn’t correspond to personality or moral traits. People just were. Like Stiles was all the things he experienced from yesterday’s food to lycanthropy, but he also smelled a little like ozone. A rarer scent, but not uncommon; almost like having an AB blood type.

Here’s to hoping most of the enhanced senses were instinctual, Derek thought pessimistically. The Hale wolf had resigned himself to training the Bitten, though he wasn’t looking forward to it. He’d have preferred to hunt the Alpha on his own, and probably still would but didn’t like the complications the other Beta brought with it. Sure, eventually the teen would be skilled enough to track the Alpha, but the Alpha would also be able to sense its own Bitten and manipulate him. It almost wasn’t worth it.

“So...” Stiles began reluctantly, like he felt compelled to talk and didn’t know what to say, “What’s being a werewolf like in--never mind. I was trying to think of a movie reference, but most of them end kinda tragically.” Since Derek had never seen werewolf-centered cinema he wouldn’t know. But
he figured that wasn’t wrong. After all, his own life was nothing but tragedy, and most wolves he knew had suffered. This was as good a time as any to warn the kid.

“It was hunters.”

“Huh?” the other Beta intoned curiously, and also interrupting. Derek grit his teeth, wished the rogue hadn’t Bitten such a socially awkward teen, and tried again.

“Hunters killed my family. Because of what we are--were. Some of them were human too.” Because a former human who had seen werewolf movies probably saw his species as monstrous. It was better that Stiles realize hunters were ruthless enough to kill associated humans as well.

“And kids,” the boy surprised him by adding. Derek glanced over and his gaze stuck. The new wolf was looking ahead of them, into the sunrise, and his eyes had gone honey yellow in the light. Like a wolf’s. Jeez, this kid was going to break hearts; probably have to chase the she-wolves off with his claws. And they still might not leave. Stiles glanced at him and the light vanished, leaving his eyes almost ordinary again, “I know the facts. You don’t have to… So these hunters aren’t very particular then, huh?”

The last Hale practically ground his teeth while answering, “They say they have a Code. They don’t follow it.” A part of him shrunk away, pained as the guilt hit him again. The familiar hurt centered around a group of thoughts he still hadn’t managed to avoid: that even if the hunters usually followed their Code, it was still his fault. He was the wolf with blue eyes. He’s the one who asked to have Paige turned… He’s the one who killed her.

The silence had carried longer than he thought, when Stiles forced the conversation to carry on with a semi-impatient, “Gonna tell me what it is? Or if they have a name? Is it a family business or a network?” The list of sincere questions surprised Derek. And impressed him, a little.

“Both,” was his quick answer. The Argents and other hunter families tended to gather connections by reaping the benefits of genuine Omega attacks, “They’re only supposed to hunt wolves that hunt humans. They’ll attack a wolf to make them fight back.”

The teen nodded in turn, “Claim it was justified after the fact.” Good, he was following. Smart kid.

“The name you want to look out for is Argent--” Stiles froze. Shit. “You’ve heard that name before.” His heart skipped a beat and he took a calming breath, almost missed Stiles subconsciously
“Yeah. Allison Argent got enrolled at Beacon Hills High this week,” the middle of January. Odd, “Said her family moved here after New Years for her parent’s work. But that was actually a little after the poaching started.”

“The what?” Derek scowled. Stiles rolled his eyes and started walking in the same direction as before, then letting the born wolf herd him to the right. He didn’t want to have to go through a person’s yard to get to a road.

“There’s been deer, at least once a week, in the Preserve. Just killed and left there, with a spiral carved on the side. Wounds looked like a mountain lion attack, but could’ve been a knife, given the spiral,” here the teen finally noticed that Derek’s scowl had shifted from confusion to anger, “That mean something to you?”

The Beta growled softly, “It’s the symbol for vendetta. For vengeance.” This was Hale territory. There were only so many options given the circumstances. A wolf in Hale land making that symbol could have a history with the Hales, be angry with them.

“Of a ‘dig two graves’ kinda revenge, I’m guessing,” Stiles said in a questioning tone. Derek could only nod, too busy thinking. But Laura came to Beacon Hills and told Derek nothing about it. If she planned for war, she would’ve brought her only Beta along. Maybe she thought the revenge was for the Hales and she planned to either stop it or help. But the wolf, likely Omega, had been insane and killed Laura. The lack of sanity was evident in Stiles’ description, also in the wolf’s attack of the boy who had nothing to do with any possible vendetta--for or against the Hales. Stiles Stilinski was a civilian casualty. “God, what the Hell does this Alpha want…”

At the teen’s mutter, Derek decided to use his quick mind and his perspective. Maybe he could see something, or say something, that would help Derek figure it out, “He may not have been an Alpha before… my sister came to Beacon Hills first. Without me. She was my Alpha. He killed her, and took her power. If he had been an Alpha first, the ability should have passed on to another Hale. Either he meant to kill her or he needed her strength against someone else.”

A sharp breath and wide eyes followed him for a couple paces before the new wolf winced and said, “The girl in the woods… You can--” here Stiles forced them to stop, not a hundred yards from the treeline and where Derek could stop talking about this, “I mean, just talk to my dad. The police will release her to you, like this weekend maybe. Or well, to a funeral home to…” he winced again, stopped himself from gesturing by scratching the back of his neck. Goddamned humans, the last Hale thought viscously. His fists clenched, and he resisted letting his claws loose. Stiles would smell the blood and probably say something.
Why couldn’t they just leave the dead as they were? Hale family tradition didn’t embalm their dead, or even traditionally put them in coffins. There was a meadow behind the old house that was beautiful in spring, and the traditional place of their dead. But… at least Laura would be made whole if a funeral home prepared her, he thought. At least he hadn’t stumbled across one of the sites before the police did and be left to bury only half of her. Maybe, even if he was forced to buy a coffin, he’d be able to lay her to rest the right way.

Derek started walking again, no desire to speak anymore. Sadness started to permeate the new wolf’s scent and he didn’t want to go over anything more. They could always discuss it later. To his surprise, Stiles followed quietly along, a step behind on his right. Oddly enough it was probably instinct, a way of the animal to be deferential to another. The behavior soothed him. By the time they reached a park that abutted the woods and thus a neighborhood street, the born wolf was able to bury his grief again. A cool numbness had taken hold.

The lack of sleep was starting to get to him, making him curt when he asked, “You know where to go from here?”

Walking around to face him, Stiles met his tired eyes and said, “I was serious about you seeing my dad. I think we can help. Derek--”

He was already turning to go. God, even hearing someone say his name hurt so much now. Now that he’d never hear Laura say it again. Now that he was holding on to her last words to him so tightly. Without raising his voice above normal volume, Derek dully responded, “Tomorrow,” and left it at that.

It was a long walk back to the Camaro. But he couldn’t find the energy to run. It took all he had to focus on his senses and avoid morning joggers, people unaffected and unaware of the world around them. Unaware of Laura’s death in these very woods… By the time he reached the car the grief was starting to rise in him again. He wanted to howl with it; more than he wanted to cry, he wanted to howl.

But he couldn’t. With the rogue still around he couldn’t risk giving up his location. So Derek choked back that sound, all his grief. Choked it back and was left dry eyed while he curled up in the driver’s seat despite the discomfort of the steering wheel. He tilted the chair back, turned into the seat, pressed his nose to the headrest, and finally--finally--slept.
Apologies for the huge delay in getting this up guys! After getting my car back and fixed I've been working almost non-stop and boy! are the holidays busy for my work. ::: I'm so tired. But I etched this out between sleeping and working, and the single day off I've had in two weeks. Happy holidays!
Chapter Four

Chapter Summary

You should know, I'm no superhuman... I got power in a little secret...

(Big Bad Wolves - Walk the Moon)

Chapter Notes

Apologies that it's been so long between chapters, when I had such high hopes of getting these out much faster. The months of December and January were super hectic for me. And I think I took February off mentally to recover... Though I did get about half of this written in Feb, then stopped and erased half and rewrote it. Hope you all enjoy it though!

On another note, I'd like to address something that has been pointed out to me: yes, the teenagers are a different age and grade year than on the show. Actually, it should be pointed out that they are actually the -correct- age for what details the show gives. For example, California drivers have to be 16. I'm using the birthdays given by MTV/twitter/wherever media the show gave them on: Scott in October, Stiles in April, etc. So as a sophomore, Stiles actually wouldn't be able to drive until April of that year. U.S. sophomores are generally 15 turning 16 within the school year or after in the summer. Making the main cast juniors however, fixes that little driving problem. And the fact that Jackson claimed the team went to the State Championship three years running, and Lydia seemed to be helping him take credit as Captain when he was just a sophomore and the season hadn't -started yet-. Dumb writers...

I could get further into it, many more details and such but those are the main arguments for my changes. Please expect that any further timeline or character changes have been carefully thought through and all canon evidence considered before altered. :) And enjoy the ride!

The Long Day After

Friday, Jan. 21st

It wasn’t a pleasant walk home. Stiles’ bare feet seemed magnetized to every bit of gravel or glass they could find along the sidewalks. A quick sting and then gone, warmed by the tingling sensation of healing, the tiny drops of blood before the flesh sealed. He just needed a damned cross to carry, he thought with half-hearted blasphemy. Except his feet didn’t tire, despite the sting, and the mid-morning sun was warm on his skin making for surprisingly good weather given last night’s turn.
Still, it wasn’t a nice walk. Derek had pulled them out of the woods two miles from the Stilinski household. And the teen wolf couldn’t figure out if he’d really been so turned around in the woods last night or if Hale had dragged him the long way around out of spite. Dumbass, Stiles self-chastised.

He hadn’t thought the other werewolf was very expressive, except for anger; not until he’d brought up his sister. Stiles’ fumbling attempt at comfort, at wanting to help but being utterly useless about it had made the man’s face go still and pale. It was only a few minutes later, alone in the park that the young Stilinski realized he had probably been trying to say something important about the Alpha. Something about how it took power from another lycanthrope. Maybe even a connection to the weird poaching. Stiles could only think of exactly where Derek’s sister was and saw her again in his mind’s eye. The body. Laura Hale.

Grimacing again at his turn of mind, Stiles sighed and let the thoughts circle, unable to keep up the effort of ignoring them. He’d had his moment, his conversation with the living relative of the dead girl he’d found, and he’d blown it.

Not that there was a good way to go about it, probably. And the wolf thing complicated matters too.

It was no longer the awkward, yes, I found your sister’s body, I’m so sorry. It had evolved into: I found your sister’s body and now I’m a werewolf, help? Stiles scuffed his heel just to feel the sting along with his inner recriminations, then raised a hand to scratch the back of his sun beaten neck. He wondered what Scott would’ve done or said, had he been the one turned after finding Laura. The boy had always been the kinder and compassionate of the two; he’d have thought of something better. Scott always knew the best way to support Stiles after his mother died. Whether it was just being there in the quiet, cuddled under the covers on a school night, or letting Stiles run his mouth about nothing at lunch when he’d just finished crying his eyes out in the bathroom because the Miss Hutchinson had ruffled his hair just like his mom had.

Stiles Stilinski had run the entire spectrum of grief stages, and Scott had been there for him through every step. He supposed the only thing he could do, being a complete stranger, was to try his best to do what Derek needed him to do. Whether it was watch what he said, say nothing at all, or a hug, the turned wolf determined that he would try his best for the grieving Hale.

The familiar shadow of his house instinctively halted his bare feet. With a sigh, Stilinski glanced up then guiltily away. He knew—he believed his father wouldn’t hate him, was probably more worried than anything. But some small part of him wondered. Wondered if the man might flinch from him. If his father would fear him now… But he couldn’t just stand there forever.

His blue, mud spattered scrubs had already attracted enough attention. He was lucky he missed the morning rush; it was bad enough the suburban homebodies got a good look at the Sheriff’s son
making his way home without shoes and covered in muck like he’d escaped from an asylum. Straightening his spine with false confidence, Stiles hopped up the few steps and wiped his feet of most of the debris and blood before trying the doorknob: unlocked.

The teen hesitated, letting his hand hover before gripping into a tight fist and then shaking it out. He took a deep breath to steel his nerves and opened the door, stepping in quickly and locking it after. His father called out from deeper in the house, earnest and worried, “Stiles!”

“Yeah,” he answered waveringly. Involuntarily gulping, he stepped down the hall to meet his dad coming from the office. The man never slowed his quick pace making Stiles hesitate, only to be suddenly wrapped up in strong arms. A rush of adrenaline flowed and ebbed through his veins, relief chasing for a heady cocktail in his blood. Stiles slumped into his father’s embrace, grateful and slowly returning the hug. His senses went into overdrive, and the new shifter could feel a pulse in his ears that he couldn’t tell was his own or not. A quick step pulse that slowly dub-dub--dub-dubbed slower and slower. Gun oil, salty sweat, and a hint of whiskey hit his nose and soothed him, until he recognized a more copper smelling undertone.

The young man involuntarily tensed, then he closed his eyes and gritted out, “I’m sorry.” Sheriff Stilinski leaned back, holding onto his son’s shoulders to keep him close and watch him with a furrowed brow.

“You alright, son?” he asked, and slid a palm to cup the nape of Stiles’ neck. The hand and concerned expression calmed something inside, something with hackles and fangs that had gone tucked tail until this gesture. Stiles didn’t know how to describe it, except maybe as the beast within, the wolf in the werewolf. But it was inherently him too, something inseparable from his own very human reactions. And he took a weirdly large amount of reassurance from the commonplace gesture.

“Yeah. Yeah, I’m okay, Dad,” he muttered, then reluctantly pulled back further out of his father’s touch. His gaze unerringly found the short, awkwardly wrapped bandage on his father’s forearm. Stiles couldn’t control the wince across his face and crossed his arms close to his body. “How bad is it?”

The Sheriff sighed and held up the arm in question, “It’s fine, Stiles. Barely a scratch.”

“Liar.” The word slipped out without thought, making Stiles cringe again. Freaking mind to mouth filter on the fritz. Probably out for a while as he adjusted to being off his meds, if he ever learned such a thing. The elder Stilinski looked back at him sternly, and the turned teen shrugged a shoulder, offering, “Your heart jumped a little.”
The officer gaped in surprise for a second before huffing a short laugh, and wiped a hand across his forehead, scratching through his hair back to his neck. He asked ruefully, “You can hear things like that now?” When Stiles nodded, he continued with, “Well, that’ll make things interesting.”

The youth nibbled his bottom lip then put forth, “And I can smell the blood.”

His father raised his brows, looking down at his bandage with an impressed expression. It was pure white, no blood leaking through the thin gauze. Blue eyes stared back up at his son and he clarified, “It really is more of a scratch. No worse than if a big dog broke skin, didn’t catch any veins or anything. I cleaned it up just fine, kid. Sounds like you’re gonna have a lot of new things to learn though. You having any trouble?”

Stiles took the inquiry with gratitude and shrugged, arms loosening, “Just a lot of information at once. I can’t help—” a dog barked a few houses down, catching the new wolf’s ears before he zeroed in on the music of a jogger’s iPod moving down the street that must’ve set it off, “—getting distracted.” He shook his head and forced his sight back to his dad, “Mostly sudden sounds I can’t help but pay attention to. And new smells. Lots and lots of new smells. Old smells smell different, that kind of thing.”

The garbage from the kitchen was more intense, he noticed distantly. A scent other than himself and his father was somewhere in the air, distant but comforting as well. He didn’t even know how to describe it; it was too faded to make much of. “Well,” the Sheriff sighed, dragging Stiles back into a serious conversation, “where did you end up last night? You finally calm down somewhere?”

The teen scratched at his elbow, contemplated sugar-coating it and how much to explain. He’d tell him about Derek, no question. The rest? He only realized he was biting his lip when he glanced back at the Sheriff and saw the man’s disappointed gaze. Warily, Stiles shrugged and looked at his bare, dirty feet, “I had a panic attack. Got to the forest and calmed down, then… I couldn’t stop it. And I passed out.” Cut and dry. He knew that his dad knew there was more to it. But it could be left unsaid. Some things didn’t have to be told to be explained. Sheriff Stilinski probably knew more about panic attacks than most people who actually had anxiety disorders after the first time his ten year old son couldn’t breathe so long he passed out and scared his half-drunk father to death. He hadn’t touched alcohol for a month afterward. He met the man’s gaze when the Sheriff clasped his shoulder firmly.

“Alright, son. Anyone see you in all this?” The more formal tone, almost official sounding, turned Stiles’ thoughts away, and let him accept the comforting hand.

“No, sir. Or at least, no one while I was freaking out last night. When I woke up Derek Hale was there,” the Sheriff’s brows rose, his face one large question mark to his knowing son, “Yeah, he, uh--he’s back in town now. His sister, Laura, she… She’s the girl I found in the woods.” Father and son
grimaced in unison, expressions more similar than their actual looks. The elder Stilinski held his tongue to encourage Stiles to keep going, “He didn’t say that until after he walked me back to civilization. We um… The Hales were werewolves.”

“--the Hales?”

Lean arms bounced up unrestrained to gesture as he spoke, “Most of them anyways, some were human. Derek’s a werewolf too, and Laura was. She was attacked by the same one as me, took her--uh, Alpha powers?” Sheriff Stilinski observed his son with furrowed brows and pursed lips, intoning ‘Alpha powers’ with disbelief. “Yeah, so now the big ugly beast is all Alpha-ed up and can turn other people into werewolves. Namely: moi,” Stiles added with a dramatic tone and flare of the hands, opening up more now that the focus of conversation wasn’t about him or his mistakes. “Derek and I are betas. We can’t turn anyone, thankfully,” he involuntarily glanced at his father’s bandage, then hurried on, “And the Argents are werewolf hunters.”

“The Argents!?” The recently moved in family were well-known to the Sheriff’s department, having just begun negotiations on a small ammunitions contract.

The turned boy widened his eyes in an equal expression of outrage, “I know, right? Derek says they’re responsible for the Hale fire all those years ago. They came back now ‘cause of the poaching, which must’ve been the werewolf doing who-knows-what, and it kills Laura and attacks me, and now we don’t know what it wants.” He finished loudly, arms akimbo and reeling back on his heels in confused anger.

Stiles took several deep breaths, watching his father silently take in everything his son had blurted out so quickly. The man hummed thoughtfully, then placed his hands on his belted hips, looking down at the floor as he worked through what to say. If I have to listen to that dog all day, I might just go down there and do… something, the turned youth thought distractedly as his ears almost literally perked at the sudden, distant bark. He didn’t understand why he could hear it over the low hum of the fridge or every other house noise, but it was starting to get on his nerves. Finally his father looked up and asked, “You and Derek are ‘betas’? Is he apart of his… his ‘pack’?”

“No--” came the immediate response before he clicked his teeth shut. He didn’t know why that answer instinctively came to mind, but he wasn’t actually sure of anything about this. Derek had left before they could really get into the nuance of pack dynamics. “I mean, I don’t think so,” he squinted and shrugged broad shoulders, “Yeah, I was bitten by the Alpha, so I don’t know if that automatically makes me pack or anything. But even if the Alpha is supposed to be Derek’s after killing his sister, I don’t think that’s gonna fly.”

“Alright then,” the Sheriff nodded decisively, then shifted topics. “I’m going to head into work for a
short time. See how the case is coming along, what Sac’s lab says about the evidence we found.”

A cool feeling of dread wrapped around the boy’s lungs, “Evidence?” he echoed. His father tapped his chin with a sympathizing grimace.

“Yes, I’m not sure what they’ll find either. But I have to find out.” Stiles’ hands started to tremor. He shook them out and folded them firmly under his elbows.

“Shit,” he muttered, earning a half-hearted stern look from his dad. Shuffling on his dirty feet, whiskey brown eyes flickered over the hall, instinctively following the buzz of the furnace in the walls, “Dad, I told Tara it was a freaking bear.”

“And you were traumatized,” the blond Stilinski emphasized with raised eyebrows, “by the attack, and certainly could have imagined the bear in the first place. The hairs looked animal, so we’ll probably be finding wolf DNA. But if not, if it’s something unknown we can call it an unknown hybrid of some kind. And if the sample is human: fine. People have come up with stranger things than using an animal as a tool for murder. Could say it was a person with a bear on a goddamn leash.”

Stiles couldn’t help but snort at the image. If someone could keep that monstrous Alpha on a choke chain he’d be so grateful he’d worship at their feet. However temporarily. But coming home to see his dad, dressed for work and ready to leave, reminded him of his own usual obligations. School he wouldn’t mind skipping if it didn’t leave him alone in the house all the livelong day. And Scott he could never forget, “So if you’re going to work, am I going to school?”

The Sheriff hummed in consideration, then answered, “No, I don’t think so. The doctor was right that you should’ve stayed the night at the hospital. Better that you keep up the pretense of being injured since we’ve got werewolf hunters to be on the lookout for.” Stiles involuntarily winced. God, Scott will never believe me. Or at least, when Stiles figured out the transforming bit, he’d believe him about werewolves—but not about Allison being apart of an evil supernatural-hunter family. Not until something bad happened anyway. That idealism, seeing the good in people, was one of the reasons why Scott was even still friends with Stiles, and God knew Stiles knew that he took heinous advantage of it. But it would also turn around and bite him in the ass when Stiles took a dislike to someone and Scott would defend them.

Hell, sometimes he even defended Jackson. The tool. Just because he was friends with Danny didn’t mean he had to have a good side. Everybody loved Danny.

“Oh crap, lacrosse tryouts!” Stiles almost shouted at himself, pressing the heel of his palm to his
forehead, “I don’t even know how Scott’s doing.” Looking up at his father, the boy gave the best puppy-eyes he’d learned from his best friend to the man hopefully, “Can I at least be there for him after school?”

With a gusty sigh, the Sheriff watched his son’s for once genuinely earnest expression for a silent moment. Then gave in. “Fine.” He waited with amusement for the sudden expression of joy, the arms flung up in victory, and then amended his statement, “But there’ll be conditions.” Stiles froze, then pretended to act more subdued and obedient which the elder Stilinski accepted with another sigh, “You can’t tell anyone but Scott that you were bit. I don’t want it getting around that you were anything but scratched by that beast, got it? And you gotta wear the sling.” The young man groaned dramatically, but was nodding as well, “I know you don’t like being restrained, but Melissa was right. Without the pain killers, your movement should be more painful.”

“No arguing,” Stiles muttered, “I guess…”

Sheriff Stilinski nodded definitively, then slapped a palm on his son’s scarred shoulder before cupping his nape again. Stiles suppressed a pleased hum, God, I am never getting used to that, and leaned into it slightly. He was going to have relearn body language or something, now that he was a little more animal than most. His father finished with another order, “Now go get cleaned up. You’re a right mess, son.”

“I smell like a creek, I know,” the werewolf chirped back. Ducking under the raised arm for fun, Stiles bounded up the stairs happily enough with the results of his homecoming. He was still feeling guilty, but at least his dad wasn’t acting any differently.

“Stiles, is that blood?” a panicked voice called up.

“Nope!” he shouted back in a rush, “Nope, nope! Nothing to see here!” And hopped into the bathroom before his father could make a fuss about it, slamming the door with enough force to shudder the walls. Wincing at the unexpected strength, Stiles looked for cracks in the drywall and was relieved to find none. Close call.

Stripping the hospital scrubs expediently, the brown haired boy considered burning them and then wondered exactly how people went about that. He’d heard the phrase in books and television often enough, but how many people actually kept lighter fluid and some kind of flame-safe outdoor burning device on hand? A fireplace just didn’t have the right dramatic flare. A barbeque seemed even worse. He imagined turning over a pair a pants with long metal tongs. It was an oil drum or nothing, the teen decided distractedly as he soaped and scrubbed. His hair was an easy fix, although it was half an inch longer than usual now in all the drama of the last few days. The blood and mud took a few passes before the water finally ran clear. As most teenagers did, he considered taking himself in hand for a short time, then decided against it.
His father was already waiting downstairs, and while it wasn’t quite the end of the school hour, they’d likely get lunch first before going to the high school and the station. Lacking any sense of shame, Stiles didn’t much care about the fact his father was still in the house while he thought about masturbating, but he wasn’t going to be rude. You don’t do that when someone is waiting for you to get ready. At least if you like them.

He towed off quickly enough with a spare towel in the linen cupboard from the hallway on the way to his room, leaving water as he walked. A quick dressing of jeans, T-shirt and plaid, was followed by socks and sneakers, before Stiles spied the hospital issue sling on his desk. He grimaced at it, looked instinctively for his phone, then rolled his eyes when he remembered it was in evidence. The younger Stilinski grabbed his wallet, left next to the sling thankfully, and jumped when his father shouted from the bottom of the stairs.

“...You better mop up that water!” Giving a frustrated sigh that was more impatience than irritation, the water will evaporate seriously, the boy swiped his used towel to fling it against the closest puddle. With the grace of a toddler learning to walk, Stiles maneuvered the cloth out of his room and down the short hall to the very first puddle with just his foot. Back at the bathroom he was about to leave it in a corner when another shout echoed through his skull as if coming from right next to him, “Hang the damn towel, Stiles!”

Oh my God, he grouched, stooping to grab the stupid thing, and shouted down as he did as ordered, “You don’t have to yell! I can hear you just fine down there!”

An evidently normal leveled Sheriff spoke to himself, “Oh fantastic. Now he can listen in to my conversations from anywhere in the house.”

Stiles grinned and barely resisted shouting back down a sarcastic response. He snagged the sling before he left the second floor. When the turned teen reached the top of the stairs, he contemplated the single flight. He had superpowers now, right? Could he jump it, and stick the landing without braining himself? Would it matter if he did? He’d probably heal pretty quick.

“Don’t even think about it,” his father muttered crossly from the front door ahead of his son. His smile turned guilty before he raced down the stairs so fast he might as well have jumped, having skipped the last three in his haste. With an exasperated roll of his eyes, the Sheriff opened the door for his son, stopping him before he got all the way out with a gesture and pointed look at the sling. Stiles scowled, but obeyed, sliding the fabric on over his shoulder and adjusting his elbow inside while walking to the cop’s vehicle. He spared his own prized Jeep a pat of acknowledge, with mental thanks to the Deputy who’d been given the task to drive it home, before hopping into the front seat.
His dad had locked up and was putting the Crown Vic in reverse before Stiles stopped fidgeting with the placement of the sling. And then started to fidget with the placement of his seatbelt under the hampered limb. Trying to pay closer attention to the road and the empty chatter on the radio over his son’s actions, the Sheriff eventually made a turn off towards his favored burger joint only for the teen to suddenly snap still like a scent hound. “No,” the boy said decisively. He got a raised eyebrow in response. “No more greasy burgers, Dad. Na-uh. Nein. Nada. You want it in in Spanish? No.”

With an irate sigh, the adult offered, “I’ll get a salad.”

“No you won’t,” his son said knowledgeably. Then pointed out the closest place of suitable sustenance, “Stop there.”

“Subway?” the Sheriff asked in disgust, wrinkling his nose and baring his teeth. Even Stiles preferred Togo’s like his father, but he would work with what he had. Glaring at the man next to him, his dad spent precious seconds huffing and then surrendered to the inevitable by turning the wheel at the last second.

As they walked towards the building, Stiles decided to point out something he’d needed only his short time as a lycanthrope to figure out, “It’s not just pretty good hearing now, you know,” saw the interest catch in his father’s blue gaze and continued, “I can hear your freakin’ heartbeat, like all the time. When you were downstairs and I was up. So now I have an early warning system. Nevermind how I’ll be able to smell the fast food on you now.”

“Great,” the blond man muttered as he walked through the door his son mockingly opened for him, “Just… great. My son, the werewolf food Nazi.”

Stiles gave his back a toothy smile, that was probably more threatening than it used to be, and went up to the glass bar to order personalized sandwiches for both of them. No, his father did not get to make his own or order the Italian Sub with meatballs. No, he wasn’t getting anything but turkey and cheddar, no mayo, and a variety of veggies— shut up, you’ll like them, no really. And then they were back out in the squad car to eavesdrop on the radio chatter while they ate their mediocre meals. Well… They were decent quality for the price, especially with all the stuff Stiles liked to layer them with. The Sheriff was probably grateful his sandwich was a bit more subdued than the odd collection Stiles had stuffed his own with.

A speedster was called in over the radio, and Stiles couldn’t help twitching a hand towards the console with a grin only to be slapped away by his exasperated father. “What?” he tried to ask with his mouth full. He’d likely have been incomprehensible over the line anyway. His dad didn’t even bother to roll his eyes, too used to the habit of curtailing his son in his official vehicle.
When the elder Stilinski had managed to wolf down his disdained meal, he started the car, barely waiting for his son to buckle up before heading towards the high school. Stiles was still picking jalapeno peppers from the wrapper and sucking mustard off his long fingers when they pulled into the school. Eating mostly one-handed had made for a messy lunch and left his father openly hoping, “Please tell me you don’t eat that way in public.”

“What?” he asked, distracted by the sudden alarm bell and activity of hundreds of young people slamming doors and hurrying to get off campus. The bustling confusion of sound was almost like white noise across his brain and took several seconds to sort through and label. He barely noticed his father palming his face with a sigh, absently thinking that he needs a picture of that to write ‘literal face-palm’ under, as he tried to focus on the side field where students were already filling the stands in preparation of supporting the lacrosse try-outs. *Freaking yuppie sport…*

“What?” the Sheriff sighed, and tried to tell his son, “Depending on the case’s progress, I might be back before the end of try-outs. But I should be able to get your phone out of evidence by now. They’ll have copied your SIM card. And I won’t be finding anything I shouldn’t on that, right Stiles?” he ended meaningfully.

The boy automatically nodded as he tuned in to Coach Finstock talking to himself-- *dumbass kids don’t know how to weave a damn net if it got them an ‘A’ on--* as he crossed the field, “Uh huh. Totally,” then finally registered what his dad said and turned to him with wide eyes, “Wait, what?”

“Get outta here,” Sheriff Stilinski finally ordered, flinging his arm out in frustration and rubbing his forehead with his free hand.

“Yes sir!” And there came the mad scramble as Stiles hastened to follow through, only to fight with the seatbelt as it refused to give up his sling-wrapped arm and nearly fell out of the car. His cheeks flushed as he heard the minute sigh his father gave along with the distant snorts of laughter from the few students who still paid attention to his fumbles. So mainly freshmen. The teen did the only thing he could do: ignore it. *Nothing to see here,* and slammed the door before tapping the top nonchalantly. When he felt the Crown Vic start to reverse, he waved goodbye and headed towards the lacrosse field.

A quick scan told him most of the former team was geared up save for Jackson, and that told him Lydia wasn’t in the stands yet either. Finstock was mostly assembled though and had finally stopped talking to himself. Stiles gave a single thought to wondering just how many people talked to themselves and how much he was going to overhear, before deciding he *really* wanted to learn how to tune out the world first thing. You just can’t unhear some things.

“Stilinski!” the Coach called suddenly alighting on him as he got close to the bench. The turned wolf was so surprised the man got his name right, he froze like a deer in headlights, “Why aren’t you
dressed, what the Hell is all… this?” the man gestured to the sling with an annoyed look.

Stiles blinked. He’d been out of school for two days, you’d think the news would’ve gotten around. Sheriff’s kid--in the woods--attacked. Something. “Uh, Coach I got mauled. By like a bear or something.”

“That was you?” the teacher accused. Bushy eyebrows glared down at a clipboard that Stiles assumed had all the signed up players’ names, “So are you still playing this year or what?”

The young man stared at him, then pointed at his shoulder with his index finger, “Mauled, Coach. Those claws were vicious, man. I swear I almost lost feeling in my arm. I’ve gotta do, like physical therapy and shit.”

“Uh huh, fine,” the wild haired man muttered before giving the field a quick scan. He turned back, “Sure you don’t want to just be on the bench or something?”

Stiles couldn’t help laughing, finally realizing what his Coach was getting at. And a little proud that despite his mediocre talent, the man still preferred him to teaching the newbies, “Nope. Sorry, Coach,” he gave Finstock a manly pat on the shoulder, belatedly realizing that was too much force as the man bent under him, “You’re stuck with the young bloods this year.”

Bobby Finstock huffed under the strong, though affectionate gesture and squinted at him in suspicion. The turned wolf used the hand to scratch his neck and grin dopily, hoping like Hell the man let it pass. He was lucky, someone out on the grass caught Finstock’s attention. Coach walked out to the middle with a passing, “If you’re not on the bench get your ass on the stands, Bilinski!” and started to rally the new and old players to him for the second day of try-outs.

A sixth sense, a familiar wheeze, a scent on the breeze, or a combination thereof had Stiles going alert and turning towards the gym’s locker room entrance. Jogging ahead of Jackson and his friends was the one and only Scott McCall. Grinning unashamedly, Stiles waved his free arm wildly to get his attention and was rewarded with a wide smile. The boy put on an unlikely amount of speed.

“Stiles!” he shouted over the Coach’s initial speech and muttering youths, garnering all of their attention. Finstock rolled his eyes and kept talking, letting Scott slide for the moment as the gathering was ignored in favor of pouncing on his best friend. The turned teen laughed as he caught a slightly breathless Scott, returning the bear hug as best he could with one arm and being wary of his strength. “I’m so glad you’re alright!”
“Yeah, gonna have some wicked battle scars though,” the young werewolf couldn’t help but proudly admit as his best friend leaned back, staring at the sling with a bit of awe.

“Dude,” Scott replied, finally getting his breath back and scanning Stiles, looking for more injuries.

Just before they could get into a lengthy back and forth about that night, Coach Finstock interrupted by yelling, “This is not a tea party! You girls can gab later. Stilinski! In the stands before you break something else. McCall! Ass on the field!”

With a harried look between his beloved sport and his best friend, Scott told Stiles, “You can tell me all about it after try-outs, drive me to work?”

“Only if you wanna ride in a squad car,” Stiles rejoined, watching in bemusement as the torn teen walked backwards towards the field and scooped up his fallen stick. He added, “I’ll tell you after you make first line!” which got him a straight out beaming grin that he couldn’t help but smile back at. Such a puppy.

Then those chocolate brown eyes slid to the side of the turned wolf and lit up with a new emotion. Scott gave a fierce, happy wave to someone in the stands before peltting to the attacker position of the scrimmage with enthusiasm. Nonplussed, Stiles looked over his shoulder and saw about what he expected.

Lydia Martin and Allison Argent were sitting on the middle height of the stands. What did surprise him, was catching the tail end of Allison waving back with a soft smile. Confused, Stiles glanced back and forth between his friend and said friend’s crush wondering when the heck did that happen?

Coach set the players into motion and Stiles retreated before he could get told off for being on the wrong side of the player benches again. He couldn’t help eyeballing the young Argent as he chose to sit on the first rung of the stands, closest to the players’ equipment. Obviously, Stiles was going to need his phone back, pronto. Because this was not cool. How did him missing two days of normal life cause a popular-- werewolf hunter-- girl to look at his shy Scotty?

A shiver itched down his spine with accompanying paranoia and the teen wolf rubbed his neck while trying to look behind him. No one was staring at him, or seemed to be looking in his direction. He turned a little to look back up at the girls, the likely hunter. Nope. Not paying him one iota of attention. It felt like his hackles were bristling still. With a small scowl, Stiles rubbed fiercely at the fine hairs on the nape of his neck and refocused on the field.
Scott was actually on Jackson’s team for this scrimmage, on the boy’s left and completely ignored. A quick glance told him Danny was in the net. And… what was that kid’s name, Isaac? He was a defender. Stiles winced as the ball was intercepted from Jackson and the poor guy flinched away from the sprinting attacker. *Jeez… Someone give that guy a hug.* Or at least get him off of defense. Danny seemed to think the same thing, as he caught the ball with ease and ran forward a few steps to throw it to Matt. The wolf’s lip curled involuntarily; he’d never liked the guy for some reason unknown to him. Just rubbed him the wrong way. Probably because he was friends with Jackson, Stiles figured as the play quickly turned on the offensive again.

With poor Scott stuck running back and forth, freaking Whittemore was stealing the show. There was a moment where all the sounds around Stiles, the conversations, breathing, the pens on paper and backpacks on metal, the wind in the trees and cars idling in the parking lot, all turned to white noise. And then his hearing hyper-focused with his inhale. *Scott,* the young man thought with a worried look, listening to the rapid heart rate and overworked lungs. There was a slight crackle, getting worse as he listened and turning into a wheeze with each exhale.

Instinct drove Stiles to his feet, staring wide eyed at Scott while he fumbled for a certain backpack. His own heart quickened and he licked his lips nervously. Finally palming the breathing aid from a side pocket, the werewolf jogged to their coach but didn’t speak yet, hoping.

It was no use. Scott refused to slow, chasing the athletic Jackson up and down the grass to stay open for a pass that the team captain absolutely refused to give him. A subsonic growl started in Stiles’ chest, eyes glinting blue for a split second as they turned on Whittemore. He snarled, “Coach!” The man startled, looking surprised to see who’d been standing next to him for a full minute. He barely got to raise his brows in question before Stiles insisted, “Scott needs a break. And maybe a different position.”

Finstock opened his mouth angrily, but stopped, finally registering the inhaler in Stiles’ hand. Teeth clicking shut on a nod, the lacrosse coach lifted his whistle for a long screech. The turned boy felt like his teeth were rattling in his skull as the sound echoed much louder than it would against human eardrums. Forcing himself to unclench, Stiles shook himself then rubbed and pulled on his ears to ease the pain. He barely caught the end of the man’s surprise repositioning of the players, “--Danny! Get on Jackson’s left. Wanna see if his majesty will deign to pass to you. Scott, c’mere and grab a long stick. You’re in the net…”

He continued to rearrange the opposite team of the scrimmage, but Stiles stopped caring, tracking Scott as he wheezed over to the bench. “Dude,” he scolded with a concerned look, and waved the life-giving steroid about. McCall gave him a weak smile, and quickly took two puffs from the device.

“It’s… okay, Stiles,” the boy breathlessly started, and grabbed the large goalie stick from Coach’s pile of equipment. Danny had already been and gone, replacing his own quality stick for an offensive one. Scott had a personal offensive stick in opposite to Danny; he had probably never considered
defense because it was less glorious on the high school totem pole. With a slightly easier smile, Scott added the tidbit, “I did pretty good in the net yesterday,” before hightailing back to his temporary team.

The easy-going, though ambitious, boy clacked sticks with Matt, who had been switched to defense, and settled into position. Stiles showed a glimpse of human sized fangs in distaste, then retreated to the stands. Just as he sat down, it felt like his ears almost perked up at the sound of his best friend’s name. On a certain lovely young woman’s tongue.

“--Scott McCall, huh? He’s sort of… Puppy-ish. If you’re into that sort of thing,” was added on derisorily. The teen let his face express his inner disbelief as no one was close by or paying attention to him. Sometimes he didn’t think Lydia even knew Scott or Stiles existed.

“I thought you said you didn’t know him,” Allison teasingly rebutted. Ah, yes, that made more sense… The werewolf watched the field of play with a jaundiced eye, only wincing at particularly vicious checks or tackles. Poor Isaac was doing better as an aggressor, but still wasn’t hostile enough to force his opponent off their feet.

Lydia seemed to speak almost grudgingly, but Stiles resisted turning to look at the cold, strawberry blond goddess, “He did do well yesterday. And I know all the first line boys, he could be one of them. If he actually does something worthwhile today.”

Grimacing for the fact it was more truthful than hurtful, the young Stilinski started up an inner mantra, C’mon Scott, you can do this. For once, Stiles thought his best friend had a chance. That guy had run drills all through last summer and forced the lanky youth into more after school practices than was appreciated in the fall. His catching was excellent, and his throws were pretty darn good. It was just putting it together with the running had always been Scott’s problem, through no fault of his own.

Jackson caught Danny’s assist and swung his stick, putting the ball in the net with a frankly beautiful arch. Stiles scowled as the people behind him cheered and the team captain jogged back into position with an unbearable smugness. Yes, Jackson, we all know you’re an over-achieving ass. Let someone else take the shot sometime, the young man thought caustically, then had to shift gears as Scott’s side was suddenly on the defensive. They’d put a man behind Isaac that had managed to swivel around Matt surprisingly well. Stiles wondered if he should put more effort into learning these guys’ names when he wasn’t going to be on the team anymore. C’mon Scott...

Unconsciously biting his knuckles, the boy’s heart rate matched rhythm with Scott’s as the aggressor approached for the shot. A red tinge filled his vision and the field’s movements slowed in pulses. He could see the shot lined up clear as day from across the whole field, could see Scott step forward and bring his net up to intercept…
Stiles was jumping up in excitement a second before Scott even had the ball. “Yeah!” he shouted, as his best friend caught a pretty damn good throw. McCall’s confidence obviously peaked as he gave the net a little twirl before sending it off to another player with a smile. Stilinski barely restrained from using both hands as he waved enthusiastically, “That’s my friend! Woohoo! Way to go, Scott!”

Behind him he could hear Argent on her feet, clapping loudly and shouting. As he settled down to watch once more, Stiles decided she couldn’t be all bad if she genuinely liked Scott. The second she broke his heart however, she was dead to him. See if he cared if a werewolf ripped her heart out. Then he winced at his callous thought, even as it was probably true. Stiles knew he had a very limited range of compassion. He loved his family and friends. And he’d try to help anyone within his abilities to do so, which were admittedly moreso now than a week ago. But he wouldn’t do it at the expense of own loved ones. Although… Ah, Hell, the amber eyed teen inwardly sighed as he realized if Scott fell in love he’d never allow Stiles not to help, even if they broke up. He’d never forgive Stiles otherwise.

Here’s hoping their relationship was a flare and fade kind of romance. The shifter went back to gnawing on his right hand with anxiety whenever the ball turned towards Scott, unknowing that his eyes occasionally flashed blue whenever his vision enhanced. Eventually over the thirty minutes of playtime, short water break, and team switch up for the last half of tryouts, Stiles began to realize that Scott was definitely going to be first line.

He didn’t know what it was about being in front of that net, but his friend was on fire! The only time a ball got by him was when his defenders were taken out and the aggressors had switched sides of the field too quick for him to react to the shot. And that was obviously a failing of the whole team, rather than Scott’s fault. Nevermind, that it had been the duo Whittemore and Mahealani to do so. Apparently Coach Finstock could only switch up the teams so much without ruining Jackson’s edge. Still, Stiles was on his feet more often towards the end, cheering and shouting abuse right alongside his economics teacher who barely noticed.

Coach’s timer went off, giving the new wolf very little warning before the man raised the whistle to his lips. Wide-eyed, the teen ducked his head and firmly clasped his ears just as the shrill sound blew, barely saving his hearing that time. He still ended up shaking his head and muttering to himself, “Gotta learn to tone it down, Jesus…” as many bodies crossed the field.

Bobby Finstock had a rather unusual way of coaching, never mind how he ran these two-day tryouts. Some coaches had three-day tryouts, spaced by a day in between to let their potential players rest. Others managed week long sessions depending on positions and number of players. Finstock held quick and dirty tryouts that were almost like practices, picked at least half of his returning team for first line with one or two surprises, and let the rest know who was on the bench the Monday after. It was a bit sadistic in that it let the anxious little freshmen stew, but Stiles also knew the man took careful consideration to who he’d have to keep company with on the bench. Somehow Greenberg always managed to at least make the bench despite Finstock’s best efforts. “Alright, here’s the
starting line-up: Jackson Whittemore, Danny Mahealani…” After two seasons, Scott and Stiles were well versed with this sudden announcement, but the wolf could smell a sudden sour stink of anxiety coming from the younger boys. He wrinkled his nose and stepped up to Scott, thudding his hand down on the shoulder pad.

Scott grinned back up at him, for once confident in himself. It was strange, feeling good about lacrosse, even if for someone else. For so long Stiles had viewed it as a chore. But the curly-haired teen’s excitement was palpable, though growing a little more nervous as Coach Finstock wound down. But Stiles, while not recognizing half the names, knew for a fact none of those players had played goalie. Well, besides Danny, who was assuredly going to be on offense this season. And sure enough…

“... and Scott McCall, in the net.”

The named group grew rowdy, whooping and hollering, Scott right alongside them for the first time. After a quick jump and shout, McCall glomped onto his best friend and Stiles returned it the best he could with one hand. Scott turned around to clack sticks and slap backs with the rest of his team, obviously knowing all of them in a manner Stiles didn’t. *Hell, some of them don’t even know Scotty,* he noted with amusement as the earnest Scott congratulated a few players who didn’t seem to recognize him.

A chemically floral scent caught his nose, making him sneeze just as he registered strawberry blond hair at the corner of his vision. Lydia was dressed adorably warm today, with a beanie that only served to make her curls look even bouncier somehow. Stiles blinked away as she tumbled full tilt into Jackson to give him a victorious kiss. God, how the fuck did she put up with him? Gritting his teeth and shoving the thoughts aside, the turned teen decided he wasn’t going to get annoyed on such a good day for Scott. Speaking of, where had he ended…

Ah. The boy was receiving his own congratulations kiss. Coming from Allison it was on the cheek, of course. Which had made the both of them blush sweetly. Throwing his head back with a groan, Stiles felt a rollercoaster of conflicting feelings about this. The couple looked like a regular Disney royalty couple, complete with dimples and animal magnetism. As in Scott could probably call a bird down to his hand if he tried hard enough. *Good God.*

With an aggravated sigh, Stiles slapped on a smile and moseyed over, only managing to hear their conversation at a normal level as everyone chatted about the lacrosse party before dispersing. Scott was offering, “I could pick you up if you want…?”

“Yeah, I mean. That’d be great,” Allison dimpled up at him.
Stiles awkwardly clapped Scott’s back, having to come at him from the side of his sling and so forced to use his opposite arm, startling him. “Stiles!” he yelped.

“Dude, you are going to be awesome this year!” the werewolf started, his smile becoming more genuine before he affected a faux feminine accent, “You are so coming over tomorrow though. You gotta dish about your new honey.” He ended with a cheesy finger gun over at Allison. Which amazingly enough made her laugh out loud, while Scott just blushed and pushed Stiles’ ‘gun’ out of the conversation.

“Hi Stiles,” the young woman started, surprising him. Her smile turned compassionate and she gestured to his sling, “Are you doing okay? Scott didn’t know you’d be out of the hospital yet. If you need him, we could pick another day to--”

“No!” Stilinski shouted, having watched his best friend’s face begin to fall in disappointment. It was also partial shock at the undue kindness. “I mean, no, no, I’m fine. Really. I’m just scratched,” he started to gesture with wide spread, hooked fingers to show an approximate injury which actually made both teens wince at him, “I’ve got drugs and--and stuff. I’m good. I’ve got more time at home to police my dad’s diet now.” The half lie, half truth tumbled from his tongue without forethought, but it worked so he didn’t backtrack and Scott nodded gratefully.

Puppy brown eyes glanced between Stiles and Allison though he responded to the ‘injured’ youth first, “I’ll definitely come by, first thing tomorrow Stiles. I promise.”

“Not first thing,” Stilinski complained with a displeased groan. The couple laughed lightly at him, “Let me sleep for Christ’s sake.”

“Okay, okay. Noon then.”

“Two o’clock.”

“Noon.”

“Scott.”

“Stiles. I’m not waking you up for practice anymore, jeez,” the newly made first line player said with exasperation. “And I work tomorrow.”
He squinted at his friend as if to test the truthfulness despite knowing his schedule by heart, then acquiesced. “Fine,” but stuck his tongue out at him petulantly. Allison giggled.

“Oh!” she started, surprising the guys. They followed her gaze to a light haired man leaning against a red SUV patiently, “That’s my dad, I gotta go. Bye Stiles, see you tonight Scott!”

The couple was so caught up watching each other as she left, that Stiles’ freezing went unnoticed. He turned abruptly away, giving the man less than his profile if the Argent looked in his direction. Swallowing thickly, the worried wolf twitched anxiously then realized he accidentally rolled his ‘bad’ shoulder. Scott finally looked over as Stiles hovered his right hand over the sling, hissing in faked pain. “Stiles?”

“Fine, fine, just moved what I shouldn’t, you know me,” he rambled and acted up adjusting the sling around his arm. Scott hovered in a concerned fashion, asking if he could help, but thankfully a particular SUV was getting into gear and out of the parking lot by then. Stiles pushed him away playfully and told him he’d be late for work. The goalie began to collect his water and gear, extolling each of his more fantastic saves as if Stiles hadn’t been right there on the sidelines.

They were some of the last students to leave the field and lot, but the Sheriff only just arrived, squad car prowling around parked parents and empty student vehicles. Stiles waved until it stopped, only half listening to Scott’s excitement. The black and white automotive beeped in acknowledgement, scaring several students who had been driving out of the lot. The werewolf grinned at the sudden screech of brakes around them, just distant enough not to be painful. His father was a slick son of bitch sometimes. And definitely enjoyed those kinds of reactions just as much as Stiles did, though not so openly. Stiles knew he should never go into law enforcement. As much as it appealed, it would also be tons of trouble for him. Or rather… He would probably get into tons of trouble.

The younger Stilinski paused besides Scott’s bike, exchanging a manly bro-hug and promise to see each other the next day before letting the happy, normal teenager go to unchain his bike. As Stiles crossed the parking lot, he felt yet another brush of paranoia, hairs rising along his arms and neck. He shivered, then met his dad’s gaze through the windshield. The feeling was still there.

Unnerved, he rubbed the back of his neck and instinctively glanced back towards the field. It took half a second to recognize the dark figure by the field seating. Surprised, Stiles gaped for a second, then awkwardly waved at Derek Hale of all people. His eyes flickered blue as he took in the man’s details from a distance. Dude looks pissed. His arm dropped and he hustled toward his dad, feeling like a scolded dog, tail tucked against his belly.

Stiles fairly slammed the passenger door shut, but for once his dad was too distracted to scold him.
Having seen who he was waving at, the man was leaning forward and asked, “Is that--?”

“Yep!” the teen chimed, then rolled his hand in ‘get on with it motion’ to helpfully speed the older Stilinski along. The Sheriff looked unimpressed, but shifted the car into gear anyway. “Derek Hale. Looking like I pissed in his cereal for some reason.” His father cringed in disgust at the mental image. “I don’t know what I did, but I’d rather say hi when he’s not going to Hulk out at me.”

Sheriff Stilinski snorted, glancing at his son with a raised brow as he finally merged into traffic. Stiles knew that look was for the rather cowardly comment, but what the Hell. Sometimes ignoring a problem did make it go away. Sometimes. Once in a while… “Did you happen to get his number this morning?”

“No...?” Stiles drew out the vowel to give the single syllable a question intonation and watched his father closely.

“Hmm,” the man muttered and went quiet. Stiles stared. And stared. Then pulled the seatbelt around himself so he could sit more comfortably facing his dad for a full on glare. You can’t just ask a question like that and then drop it! Finally with a groan, the Sheriff ordered, “Sit properly for God’s sake, I’ll tell you.” Then held his tongue until Stiles did as stated. However reluctantly, because his father was not above using such tactics to create deflections. But this time his words proved true, “We got identification back on Laura Hale this morning. I tried to reach Derek’s last number, but either he’s not answering or it’s going somewhere else that doesn’t want to pick up.”

Here Stiles hummed in thought, before quietly offering, “If it’s not an old number, he probably doesn’t want to answer it...” The Sheriff grunted in agreement and silence filled the car. It was a mix of sympathy and old pain, that silence. It stung. There’d been days in his youth where silence had hollowed out his home, stealing his voice and freezing in its intensity. He longed to get rid of it, and cleared his throat, trying to think of something to blurt out to ease the tension.

“DNA analysis came back on the animal hair found at the crime scene,” the elder Stilinski offered, stunning his son with his forthrightness. Stiles gave an interested acknowledgement to say he was listening, and the man continued, “It was wolf hair.” The teen winced. “Which doesn’t negate the fact we know there was a person involved.”

“What?” he asked almost shrilly, then coughed hard and added, “I mean, how does the evidence say there was a person? We know, because werewolves, but how would the Sunnydale police force know that?”

“Stiles,” the Sheriff complained in a single word. His son waved his sling covered arm impatiently.
They could get into inappropriate references to terrible fictional cops later. The man sighed, “Because with both halves of the body, the medical examiner determined she may have been attacked by a wolf, but she was *cut in half* by a blade.”

Amber eyes went comically wide, “Holy shit.”

“Yep,” he was answered dully. The blond Stilinski looked visibly stressed despite sagging against the driver’s seat for a moment. Stiles felt a pang of guilt and looked away, slumping against his own seat in turn.

Several silent minutes later they arrived home, but neither tried to leave the car. It was odd, the teen wolf thought. Usually silence drew them apart, each of them instinctively going to their own spaces to deal with their hurt. But this silence… The quiet as each thought over Laura and her murderer, was almost companionable despite the heartache. Stiles could swear it begin to resolve around them into an air of determination. He looked up just as his father reached out to clasp his son’s neck.

The Sheriff gave him an affectionate shake, “You know what you have to do tomorrow, yeah?”

The werewolf sighed. But answered with finality, “Talk to Derek.”
Chapter Five

Chapter Summary

If you hear him howling around your kitchen door, better not let him in... Little old lady got mutilated late last night: werewolves of London again!

Werewolves of London - Masha, covering Warren Zevon

Chapter Notes

Huzzah! I'm not dead! Apologies for the extra long delay, I wont turn these notes into a diary entry or anything, but suffice to say life was regularly kicking my ass for a while. My chapter progress slowed to just a paragraph a day sometimes and considering this chapter hit 21 pages... Yeah, I was having a hard time coming to a stopping point, lol. That and my Beta had her own life troubles, so any and all mistakes are my own doing. I did all my own editing this chapter, which stressed me out a bit. I've stared at these words for so long I'm not sure I'd recognize mistakes or awkward wording anymore... So feel free to tell me where I could improve if something glaringly takes away from the story for you!

The Beginning of a Week’s End

Saturday, January 22nd

Stiles didn’t get to sleep in near as much as he’d hoped. His father typically woke up in the AM hours, even without a shift to get to. The beep of the coffee machine and pop of the toaster made him flinch awake from a heavy sleep. The new werewolf caught a glimpse of his bedside clock and groaned. 9:07 AM. Who the heck wakes up at nine when they don’t have work or school? With an annoyed grumble, the teen pulled his comforter over his head and tried to force himself back to sleep.

He’d stayed up late after finally watching the Westerns with his father, the man long asleep when Stiles went to bed after several hours of werewolf research. It had been interesting just how much of the werewolf mythos was developed in Hollywood or early fiction. That being almost all of it, to Stiles’ frustration. The wolfsbane, the silver, the only turning on a full moon, the bite of any lycantherope and killing the one that bit you: all had ties to pieces of fiction. As far as he could tell every culture around the globe had shapeshifters based on their local predators. And the folklore varied with how enlightened a place was. Christianity could be a really scary religion.

The ancient Greeks recorded other people’s origins of werewolves, either through the sacrifice of a
child or a natural transformation that occurred for ten years or the like. But the Greeks themselves treated lycanthropy like a mental disease. Which Stiles was pretty sure was a legit business. Some people were just nuts. And some ate moldy bread. Although the ‘remedies’ weren’t pretty in any culture and usually killed the victims. The accused werewolves during the Dark Age witch trials were either likely serial killers, politically chosen victims, or… maybe the genuine article. If the pattern of confessions were given some grain of truth, it read like a person transformed by an Alpha and left to their own devices, which were naturally violent. That kinda sucked…

The Beast of Gevaudan’s reign of terror reminded him of the Alpha, though the histories claim it was simply a pack of over-large wolves. The Navajo feared witch-wolves. The Haitian je-rouges spread their transformation by biting children volunteered up by their half-asleep mothers. Lycaon killed his own son for Zeus to eat and had his entire clan turned into wolves.

But then there was the lauded Prince of Polotsk in Belarus, and the French story of Bisclavret, the gentle Breton noble-wolf, the Viking Ulfhednar soldiers who answered to Harald I of Norway, or the Turkish shamans who became Kurtadam revered as the totemic animal of their ancestors, the Arcadians that transformed into wolves and without harming a person changed back years later, and Thiess who was called the ‘Hound of God’. The stories all ran the gauntlet of violence to pure peace. Here and there Christianity dogged the folklore, making the lycanthropes only turn on holy days or full moons. Sometimes there was a belt or pelt that turned a person, or salve, an ointment, or a magical stream to begin the transformation. Sometimes it was divine retribution. A deal with the Devil. A victim could be cured by driving nails through their hands, or just calling their name three times. Sometimes they came back from the dead unless you decapitated them.

Needless to say, Stiles didn’t get a lot of sleep.

The stories ran through his head concurrently with the many pages on his browser, mixing and meshing until he would get characteristics mixed up across three or more cultures. Eventually, though not very tired, Stiles couldn’t stand to concentrate any further and decided to give up in favor of sleep. He felt lucky he hadn’t had more nightmares. Dark brows furrowed as he rethought that. No, being on trial in a modern day court for lycanthropy was just weird, not scary. Downstairs the strong smell of coffee started to permeate to the second floor.

The younger Stilinski groaned, this time in reluctant want. Maybe he should keep a single-cup coffee maker in his room, then he’d barely have to leave his bed to make a cup and be right back under the covers. With a sigh, he kicked off the duvet and took his time getting upright. He wasn’t even mildly sore, like a usual all-nighter at his computer left him. His bare feet touched the cold hardwood and he didn’t flinch, skin too warm to be bothered. Stiles shivered at the strangeness, then turned his thoughts toward organizing what he’d read.

Body automatically making it’s sleepy way down the hall to the restroom, he wondered if he’d saved all those pages and organized the bookmarks in his usual fashion. By the time he made it to the
kitchen and beloved coffee maker, Stiles figured he’d have to go back through his history and check himself. Some of them had been more summaries than original sources, and he’d prefer to save the specialist sites over generalities like Wikipedia.

“Morning?” Sheriff Stilinski asked skeptically. A raised brow implied the obvious question, what was his son doing up before noon on a weekend? The teenager wished it weren’t so, and growled in annoyance. Then stilled in shock while reaching for a mug. That sounded way scarier than it usually did. An embarrassed blush rose to his cheeks when he sensed his father’s stare intensify.

Stiles cleared his throat, “Sorry. Uh, the appliances woke me up.” He absently grabbed two slices of bread from the open packaging and dropped them in the empty toaster. Then poured coffee into his mug with his right hand and cranked the toaster dial with his left. Used to his boy’s haphazard manner of kitchen prep, the Sheriff gave an acknowledging ‘huh’ and turned back to his newspaper.

The officer’s son sighed when he saw the thickly layered newsprint and shook his head while he added a touch of milk to his brew. One of these days I’m getting him a tablet, he thought despairing of his father’s ‘old school’ habits. Instinct had him manually popping his toast up before the dial indicated, and Stiles gave his own curious hum. There was the smallest hint of burnt bread in his nose and the pieces came out perfectly browned. Score one for the werewolf.

With a grin, he started to smear honey on each slice, pleased for the first time that morning. His dad rustled the paper, letting keen ears pick up the subtle sound of it landing on the table instead of rubbing against callused fingers. The Sheriff started, “So, any plans for the day?”

“Scott’s coming over,” Stiles answered without thought, and a combination of happiness and anxiety swirled in his stomach. He took a bite of the prepared bread to settle it, then spoke with his mouth half full, “I gotta find Derek somehow, maybe get him over here so you can do your official Sheriff thing.”

“My official Sheriff thing should really be done at the station, kiddo.”

“No it shouldn’t,” he countered, then turned to face a blue-eyed glare, “What? It shouldn’t! We gotta talk about werewolf stuff and I know your office isn’t soundproof.” Whoops. The glare narrowed intensely on him, making Stiles gulp and hurry on, “We’re going to have to talk about the Alpha and his sister, and you know, the whole story about his sister. Which is probably werewolf-y.”

His father sighed, lines creasing his wearied face when he raised a palm to his forehead. His son could read the ‘ I’m too old for this shit ’ as clearly as the Batman symbol in Gotham skies. He went quiet, sipping his coffee and trying to ignore the guilt that panged in his chest. Collecting his two
slices of sweet bread with one hand, Stiles started to gesture as he changed topics and moved towards the stairs.

“You know, apparently the whole full moon thing is bullshit. I mean, it’s in stories sometimes, pretty rarely, but it’s mostly Hollywood. Other times it can be the new moon, which I get because you know, darkness is scary and all,” the coffee almost slipped over his mug and he hastily corrected, making his movements even more awkward, “But, yeah, most of the time it’s either at night or permanent for years, or just dealer’s choice. I mean, the werewolf chooses to take off the girdle or whatever, you know?”

His dad was watching the monologue with a jaundiced eye, and answered sardonically, “No, Stiles. I didn’t know because I didn’t spend an all-nighter looking up werewolves. I would’ve, oh I don’t know, gone to the library?”

Which is all the Sheriff needed to say on what he thought of Stiles’ interweb sources. “Oh, like books aren’t written by the victors. I could find plenty of mistranslations or outright lies in just as many paper-printed books, Dad.” He leaned a hip on the balustrade, raising his voice just a little for clarity outside of the kitchen, “Besides, it’s not like it’s the Sunnydale High library. I’m probably not going to find any Watcher’s diaries in there.”

As he climbed the stairs and drank his morning addiction, trouble waiting to happen really, he caught the soft sigh of all exasperated fathers and a sarcastic, “And it’s not like all those preconceptions you’ve filled your head with aren’t going to annoy an actual werewolf.”

Stiles opened his mouth, then shut it with a clack of molars. He just realized something very annoying. If he could hear his father anywhere in the house, and the man was obviously going to use that, then he was always going to get the last word. Unless Stiles felt like yelling and even then the man might not hear him clearly. Goddamn it, he thought with mild irritation. The teen didn’t actually want to yell all the damn time. His new hearing disapproved of loud noises in general. He still hadn’t figured out how to turn it off.

He also never realized how often he got the last word until he was never going to have it. Harrumphing to himself, the gawky boy kicked his computer chair enough distance from the desk to sit and emptied his hands before kick-starting his computer to check where he left off.

He would never admit it, but he spent an embarrassing amount of time looking for evidence of genuine werewolves on social media thereafter. He’d dropped his mythos theme in favor of trying to figure out if there were people like him on Facebook or Twitter. It’s hard to tell if someone was hiding a wolfy secret in only a hundred and forty characters. He ran out of coffee after the first half hour and didn’t notice when he finished his cold toast except that there were crumbs in his keyboard. Probably the only reason he took note was for the disturbing crunch that stilled his long fingers as he
typed in another search tag. Looking at his work space, Stiles grimaced and warily raised his sticky
digits away from the abused appliance.

Groaning at his own inattention, the shifter quickly wiped his hands clean on a dirty piece of laundry
then picked up his mug to take to the kitchen. Absently taking in the sensory information around him
while working out his search troubles, the bitten identified his father in his office as he made a
second cup and hummed thoughtfully.

Derek didn’t seem like the type for social media. Hard to picture him taking a selfie, Stiles thought
with amusement. But there had to be other wolves somewhere in the world. It’d been pretty much
established universally that all teenagers at some point felt misunderstood by their families and
searched for validations elsewhere. In modern times, that meant the Internet. If they weren’t making
all their profiles private, which Stiles had to face was a likelihood in the presence of hunters.

Listening to his dad’s heartbeat and clacking of the keyboard, he realized he could refine his
parameters further: searching for posts specifically after this last full moon. If wolves were going to
chat online, they’d probably make plans before, not be on the computer the night of, and chat about
the full moon the day after. Wetting a paper towel with a little water, Stiles collected the canned air
from the hall closet and slipped upstairs again. Cleaning up the mess took less than a minute, and the
boy quickly put away those items and went back to work, resetting his search to people recovering
after a Wednesday party.

…There were a stunning amount of people that shared his father’s birthday. Really, that was all he’d
discovered. The teen wolf’s frustration mounted, making his fingers rigid, his molars grit, and his
concentration falter. Where before he could hear and smell everything around him as a sort of white
noise he’d gotten used to in the background, in his agitated state every noise or passing scent was a
flare gun to his senses.

Finally, unable to take it anymore, Stiles snarled as he pushed his laptop away a little too hard. It slid
across his desk and hit the wall with a frightening thud. Immediately regretful, he involuntarily
whined and hesitantly reached for the device again. The screen was fine, the back saved by its
flatness. Lifting the bottom revealed a small crack though, along the battery casing. He winced at the
damage, then groaned as he started to reach in his drawer for the duct tape.

Instinct stilled his hand. Unsure at first, Stiles took a deep breath before realizing he was hearing a
third heartbeat close by, an extremely fast one. So intent on his sensory analysis, the bitten wolf was
startled by the loud ring of the doorbell and jerked from his leaning over posture--straight to the floor.
He yelped before he hit the ground, and cracked his chin over the open drawer while his chair spun
in the opposite direction. Dazed and annoyed, the clumsy teen belatedly tapped at his chin to find
tacky blood and no wound. It had already healed.
“Stiles! Scott’s here!” his father bellowed from below.

He sighed. Then started to get up with an exaggerated moan despite a lack of sore muscles. A quick trip to the bathroom washed away the blood, leaving none to remark on the incident save himself. He met Scott in the hall before his bedroom and greeted him warmly. “Scotty!”

“Hey man!” his best friend responded with a quick hug and shoulder clap, then entered Stiles’ room as confidently as if it were his own. The place looked no worse for wear than usual and Scott immediately took a seat on the unmade bed to get comfortable. Acting as nonchalantly as possible, Stiles snatched up his tape and flipped his laptop to start patching the crack in his electronics.

“So, how was the party?”

Scott’s lips slowly parted in a dopey grin, “Oh, it was amazing. Allison is just so pretty, and smart, and kind, and…” a slight pause as dark brown eyes glazed over in memory.

“Amazing?” Stiles filled in, amused and smirking as he tore a piece of silver tape off the roll.

“Yeah… She’s really sweet, and we talked almost the whole time,” the boy ran on, fingers fidgeting with the comforter as he looked down. A small blush was barely visible across his tan cheeks and the shifter sensed a new scent in the air. Stiles smiled, unable to identify it but pleased for his best friend. He slapped the tape onto the bottom of his laptop, covering the crack, then swung his computer chair around so he could sit on it backwards.

“Almost?” he teased, “Well, what else did you do then?”

“Um, we danced too. For a while.” Scott’s smile grew and his blush darkened.

Stiles mimicked the grin leeringly, “Oh yeah? You kiss her?”

The new wolf heard the boy’s heart rate leap, the blood rushing to his face ever faster, “At her door…”

“Aw yeah… That’s my boy!” Stiles loudly encouraged, bro-nodding his head and leaning forward to
ruffle the curly hair into an even bigger mess. Scott sputtered and protested, but both kept smiling, especially as Stiles almost lost his balance when his wheeled chair tottered to one side. His best friend caught him with a laugh, righting him easily, when a glance to the side seemed to subdue him. “What?” the wolf started and followed his gaze.

The sling. Oh. Right. *Shit.*

Concerned puppy-brown eyes refocused on him, “Are you okay, man?”

“Yes,” Stiles tensely answered, “Yeah, I’m okay dude. Um…” God, how was he going to put this? He wasn’t even sure how to make himself shift. Everything he’d done so far had been involuntary.

“I mean, I feel like everything is suddenly going right for me, but you got all my bad luck instead or something. Getting mauled in the woods?” the Hispanic teen ducked his head to his chest, scent changing and making Stiles get up from his chair to instinctively sit closer. Scott’s face was all guilt and the change in pheromones made the wolf feel a need to comfort him. *Pain,* he thought, *emotional pain giving off the same signals as physical pain.* “I’m so sorry, Stiles. We, uh, we don’t have to talk about the party or anything anymore. Did you want to talk about that night in the woods?”

Stiles clasped his best bud’s shoulder, holding tight for a moment and swallowing thickly. He wanted to tell him, he *did.* But… Scott’s life *was* going right for him. First line on the lacrosse team, the girl he’d been crushing on for a week going to a party with him and kissing him… “Nah. Not—not yet. C’mon, let’s go play some Black Ops.”

This problem wasn’t going to go away just because he didn’t say it out loud. But he could put it off, just—for a little while. While he drummed up the courage to blurt it out as he usually did important things.

Scott agreed easily, and they trooped downstairs to the living room PlayStation 3. The bitten set up the game by habit, barely paying attention to small talk as his human friend chatted about what he was doing at the veterinarian’s office that day. Something about assisting with a teeth cleaning; Stiles missed the majority while he fidgeted during the loading scenes. He didn’t even realize he’d asked and confirmed the zombie feature for the game with Scott before he was playing the first round with him.

But when the game started up, the teen wolf automatically started dictating their character movements as he usually did. Only, he realized he was faster at it. *Much* faster. “Scott, on your left–”
“Dude, good catch, I didn’t even see that one!” Scott would variably exclaim. Stiles bit his lip, then stopped and straightened up tensely instead. It would do him no good to bite through his lip in front of his friend. Heck of a way to convince him of the truth though. Maybe he’d get a knife from the kitchen when it came time.

Still, the shifter couldn’t help but keep up the strategy. Every small movement on their split screens seemed like a flare, every creaky board or zombie groan a siren call over the TV speakers. It felt like his senses were almost back to the same sensitivity as when his concentration blew on his research, but this time it was working for him. They were doing even better this way than they ever had before, but the lycan was too distracted to enjoy it. Even Scott seemed to sense the disquiet, when after a few catcalls at the screen his best friend never bantered back.

They ended on a new high score. Both boys stared at it in silence.

“Man, that was--”

“I’m a werewolf!” Stiles practically yelped.

Scott laughed faintly, disbelievingly, “What?” The bitten winced in response and felt his shoulders rise up to his ears involuntarily.

“I’ve got all the super senses, Scott. Seeing, hearing, smelling,” he trailed off, finally hearing the minute creaking of plastic that prompted him to release the game controller before he wrecked it with his white knuckled grip, “And I’m like, super strong and I heal so fast, dude, it’s ridiculous.”

McCall was still watching him in confusion, obviously not understanding a word, “Is this, um, a new feature on the game or something?”

Stiles shook his head with emphasis, “No!” Noticing the trembling of his hands, he shook them out before trying again, “Dude, I got attacked by a wolfman monster, under a full moon, okay? And it bit me. I got freakin’ infected.”

Now his best friend finally looked more concerned than confused, “Infected with what?”
The turned teen stared for a second, wide-eyed and baffled, “With lycanthropy, Scott!” The Hispanic boy flinched back at the shout, but his blank expression caused Stiles’ rant to continue, “It’s really bad, man, the worst. But only once a month,” Scott mouthed the last phrase with a furrowed brow, “You know, on the full moon? When I’ll turn into a mindless, bloodthirsty beast?!”

Stiles didn’t know, not really, if the moon would affect him so deeply, but years of horror movie cinema had indoctrinated those fears into his subconscious. Deep brown eyes followed his face cautiously, like Scott was watching a stranger going off his rocket. The werewolf clenched his jaw, then his hands, thinking it was about time to get the kitchen knife. Or… Well, there was something that had already healed. And probably wouldn’t give his friend an asthma attack, or make Mrs. McCall slap him again.

“Here, I’ll show you,” he started again after a breath and silence in response. Stiles started to yank on the collar of his shirts, but realized he couldn’t reveal the massive bite radius through the small hole. When he threw off his plaid overshirt, Scott tried to protest, but fell silent as Stiles lifted his second shirt without pain. The dramatic background music to the military game upped the tension, and made the lack of words, lack of belief so obvious Stiles’ eyes burned. His teeth itched. Stiles suddenly remembered that he hated being naked in front of people, felt oddly vulnerable despite the fact he wasn’t hideous. Nevermind that his best friend had never incited that particular quirk before now...

Scott stared at the massive healed bite, and the shapeshifter could only helplessly look back at his friend. Anxiety crept through his veins, feeling his heartbeat in his fingers and ears, in the points of his teeth. He curled his fingers into a tight fist and bit down on his inner cheek. A horrible darkness fell across his friend’s face.

“So why’d you have the sling?”

The anxiety didn’t dissipate. Instinct kept it ramped, something in the lines of Scott’s face, or his scent? Something told Stiles that the other boy still didn’t believe him, wasn’t coming to terms with what he’d been told. He couldn’t open his mouth to answer, jaw clenched like lockjaw on a pitbull until he tasted copper on his tongue.

“You were barely even hurt, weren’t you? Why would you--why would--” The human looked helplessly angry, stuttering and heart starting to pound. Stiles wanted to whine, but Scott suddenly spat questions even more quickly, “Is this because of me being first line? Because of Allison? Because everything’s good now?”

“What?” Stiles croaked, with barely the breath to speak. He didn’t know why he couldn’t--why he couldn’t keep trying to explain. It felt like his brain was boiling over, like his heart was simultaneously cracking and burning at the same time. Maybe because he didn’t know why his best friend wouldn’t even try to believe him. Believe he’d been attacked and irrevocably changed.
Ire etched across Scott’s expression, carried in his voice as he stood, “Everything is perfect in my life, why would you try to ruin it with this stupid story? With trying to make it seem like you were more hurt than you were?” That was probably the worst part to Scott, the new wolf realized with numb understanding. He believed Stiles was barely hurt, maybe just a little nibbled on. Nevermind that he’d probably still have scabs after only a couple days’ healing. Scott saw scars. He saw only that it must have healed already. What other logical reason could there be?

Werewolves? Yeah. Right.

Stiles shuddered, finally getting up to follow after his longest friend, “Scott--dude, wait, please!”

“I have to get to work.” He didn’t even look at Stiles to say it, just kept walking.

“Scott!”

The door slammed and his heart spiked in tempo. The beat he could feel in all the places he now knew signaled the change upped into a bass drum. It felt like how he thought an echo would, reverberating through him. His vision reddened, fingers tightened and teeth burned. His breath blew through his nose like he’d run a marathon, every muscle in his body clenched up in a useless attempt to restrain the change in his blood.

“Stiles?” came a soft, concerned voice from the hall.

His dad. No, no, no, no--

He couldn’t do it again. He couldn’t hurt his dad. His limbs were moving before he even realized what he was doing. Avoiding the hall to his father’s office, the wolf clambered for the stairs, legs swift but clumsy with the supernatural strength restrained by sheer force of will. The red wouldn’t leave his vision, and his heart pulsed in his ears, blocking out his father’s voice.

But when he pushed open his bedroom door, Stiles’ first reaction was to snarl. Intruder! his instincts screamed at him. He didn’t get the chance to react.

The human form he’d seen through the haze rushed him, a black blur with a pale face snarled right
back and slammed him into the wall. He was held up by the shoulders, pinching his skin with every finger, and Stiles grabbed for the wrists holding him almost off the ground in a grip stronger than he’d ever had before. Whatever good it did him. Stiles growled in helpless rage when he couldn’t budge the trespasser. Then words carried through the racing blood, though it took long seconds before the bitten could decipher any meaning to them, “--tell the kid dating an Argent? What the Hell were you thinking?!”

“He’s my best friend,” he uttered absently, automatically, around a mouthful of growing fangs. His fists weakened a fraction then locked tight enough to make the small wrist bones grind. The new werewolf’s mind had finally focused on a target, remembering Derek Hale and his tragic loss. Remembering Derek and their last scuffle that had ended with Stiles belly up in a creek bed. His lip curled back. A righteous growl started low in his throat, vibrating through his chest. Intruder… Derek pressed him harder against the wall despite the pain he must’ve been in.

“He’s human, Stiles. He won’t understand.”

And from the prior rejection, from the fear of losing his only true friend the transformation was fed. The red rage grew. Stiles realized he was staring at the other man’s neck. His claws lengthened and dug into flesh as he zeroed in on the flash of carotid artery pulsing under the skin. A beastly voice murmured, “He will.”

“Look at me, Stiles,” Derek’s right hand went to Stiles’ jaw, ignoring the creaking in his arm in favor of directing that bright blue gaze to meet his own, “Look at me. Tell me what you’re thinking right now.”

“Gonna kill you…” the teen mumbled around his fangs. The blue-hazel, no--the human eyes stared back at him without blinking. And Stiles noticed then how utterly calm his opponent was, how in control even as he held another werewolf aloft against the wall of their territory. Derek wasn’t showing a hint of fang or claw.

“Why?” he asked forcefully. The question jolted Stiles into finally blinking. No answer came to his tongue. The haze started to retreat, and with it the rage.

“You…” Because Scott left? “I don’t…” Derek didn’t make him leave. His hands loosened though the claws stayed. He could smell the coppery sting of blood, practically tasted it on his tongue, and couldn’t help glancing down at the small cuts and bruises already healing on the older wolf’s wrists. He pulled away in apologetic surrender, eyes widening with the sudden onset of regret, “I don’t know.”
“Hey,” Derek said, giving him a small shake to redirect their eye contact again, “It’s going to be okay, Stiles. You’ve got me. I’ll teach you everything I know, alright?” The big hand on his jaw eased off to curl around the nape of Stiles’ neck. At first he tensed without knowing why, but when Derek refused to look away or blink, he relaxed into it. The turned wolf nodded acknowledgement, sighing as the tension running through his whole body eased for the first time since Scott had seen the sling.

The last Hale observed him closely, scanning his face and then looking down the length of him. Without removing the hand on Stiles’ neck, his other palm smoothed down to rest on the soft flesh of the teen’s belly and then he held their stare once more. Oddly enough, Stiles didn’t feel vulnerable anymore. If anything, his body had relaxed even further, slouching into the wall and letting the older wolf lean into him. It felt strange, the way Derek had settled the rage in him with a few pointed questions and body language. But then, Stiles had never felt such a strong emotion before in his short life and was just grateful there was someone around to curb it.

“You know,” came a dry voice from the doorway, making the boy jump and Derek release him suddenly, “as much as I appreciate the rescue, we do have a front door.” The Sheriff stood in the hall with his arms crossed, and though he was out of uniform he still radiated authority while assessing the two younger men. “Everything alright now?”

Derek remained silent, eyeing the elder Stilinski with a stubborn look on his face. Like maybe the Sheriff was too human to be involved. Stiles wondered if he’d really expected a scared teen not to tell their parent they’d been attacked in the woods. “Yeah. Yeah, I’m--” he started to gesture, then was startled by the look of claws incongruously grown from his nail beds, “--still wolf-ed out. Huh.”

He barely noticed Derek taking a step back and shoving his hands into leather pockets as he wiggled his own long fingers and carefully tried a few gestures. The couple times he’d been in his right mind to notice he’d grown claws, he’d been too distracted to play with them before. Sheriff Stilinski raised an eyebrow at a few awkward gang signs, blinking in confusion over the fact his son even knew them. When Stiles started to trail them over his forearm, getting a feel for the catch and length of them, the teen felt a pointed silence. He looked up to find two kinds of stares directed at him: exasperation from the new acquaintance and fond curiosity from his father.

“Stiles,” the Sheriff started and held out his hand in request, “Could I…?” Stiles grinned and held out his hand for examination. Hale huffed an irate breath, but said nothing. That seemed to be his default setting. The high schooler carefully curled the claws of his free hand into his palm and scratched at the skin to test the points. His dad was feeling the tops of the roughened nails, tapping them and asking if he could feel that. Stiles answered with an ambivalent shrug and a pleased expression as he watched his dad feel out the claws in a way Stiles couldn’t with both hands turned into weapons. The still bandaged scratch on his father’s arm appeared long forgotten. And Stiles never realized that human nails could actually feel quite a lot, not in the same way as skin, but close to. The claws dulled sensation; they were obviously there, a tiny weight on each finger, but he couldn’t feel the heat of his dad’s touch only the vague pressure. It was kinda fascinating. “So, uh, how do you--what, sheathe them?”
Stiles made his ‘dunno’ face, eyebrows lifting and lips in a pursed frown, before facing Derek for answers. At first the man scowled at him, before apparently thinking better of giving a dirty look in the Sheriff’s vicinity and settled for mild indifference, “You want the short way or the long way?”

“There’s shortcuts to being a werewolf?” the teen blurted, then grimaced at his dad’s disapproval, “Um, tell me how to put them back real quick and we’ll make a lesson plan later?”

The raven haired wolf gave about half an eye roll, stopped with a sigh, and then paced forward to grab Stiles’ wrist. Thinking he was about to get a hands-on demonstration of some kind, the bitten wolf didn’t think anything of it, making him terribly unprepared for his wrist getting twisted in a bruising grip. He yelped embarrassingly like a startled dog.

“What the Hell!” the Sheriff exclaimed.

Derek quickly answered, “Pain. Pain makes us human before we gain real control.” He dropped the boy’s wrist like a hot potato, stepping back out of arm’s reach like he was expecting retaliation.

But Stiles was far too busy examining his own hands like he’d never seen them before. His regular old human nails were back and suddenly his mouth felt much smaller without the fangs. The mild attack was already forgotten in the wake of this new knowledge. Had pain been what had stopped his panic attack in the woods? How much pain would it take to pull him directly from a rage into humanity? And wait a sec...

“That doesn’t make any sense,” Stiles complained. His father gave him a dry look, silently saying ‘Werewolves, Stiles. None of this makes sense’, but the boy shook his head, “No, I mean, from like an evolutionary standpoint. Something pisses you off into attack-mode, but pain makes you lose your super strength? That’s dumb!”

Derek looked annoyed. Then again, Derek had looked distinctly annoyed over half the time Stiles had known him. “When a werewolf first begins the change, it doesn’t take much to set them off. Losing our weapons in response to pain is instinctive. It saves young wolves from killing themselves challenging the Alpha. Staying in the change despite pain is an indicator of control.”

Oh. Well... Fine. Make sense of the weirdness in my life then. Stiles blinked through this rationalization and dropped his hands with a quiet, “Huh.” The Darwinian implications were kind of mindblowing. He never would’ve thought of that. But he hadn’t thought being a freaking werewolf was a real thing either.
His thoughtfulness was quickly broken by an impatient father figure clearing his throat. Stiles jerked to attention, heart quickening as he realized that *talk* was going to be starting soon. At least Derek seemed less pissed than he’d been on the lacrosse field. When the Sheriff looked at his son pointedly, Stiles raised his eyebrows then swiftly blushed as the man looked down at his naked torso. The turned wolf couldn’t help following the glance and resisted the urge to cross his arms like old fashioned maid. He cleared his throat too.

“I’ll—uh… Go get my shirts.” *And cover up my pasty, freckled chest. Jeez*… He couldn’t believe he’d been so distracted he’d forgotten he was half naked. His blush deepened halfway down the stairs when he remembered just where Derek had touched him, how he’d leaned in with that intense stare. At the time it wasn’t at all sexual, but looking back it started to heat his blood. A mix of humiliation and arousal which he wasn’t unused to, but couldn’t say he’d felt about a man before.

It was while he was gathering his haphazardly flung tops that he finally noticed the adults upstairs were starting to talk. His father was apologizing for his nudity, “Stiles can be… absent-minded at times. He thinks about too much at once and forgets what his body is doing. Or in this case, what he’s not wearing.”

*Gee, thanks Dad!*

“I didn’t mind.”

He dropped his shirts.

Stiles swore his mind froze for an instant. Like a computer’s ‘Blue Screen of Death’. Given the silence upstairs, he thought his father was having the same problem.

“I mean!” Evidently Derek noticed the issue with that statement. Or just that the Sheriff was looking at him like a sexual predator. “Nudity isn’t a big deal among werewolves. It’s not--I mean, no one cared. It was just part of…”

Sure his face was flushed entirely red, the younger Stilinski pulled on his T-shirt then started doing the buttons on his plaid. He could hear his father sigh, probably facepalming if he knew the man. The creaking of the stairs indicated they’d started coming down. “I understand. Must have different social norms, I suppose. *Werewolves*…” His dad and the last Hale entered the living room several feet apart; obviously someone was keeping a safe distance no matter that the officer wasn’t armed at the moment.
“So!” Stiles almost shouted in his awkwardness, a manic smile highlighting his embarrassment, “Where do we start?” Sheriff Stilinski grimaced. Probably just remembered his son could hear every word.

Clearing his expression and putting on what his son considered his ‘cop face’, the Sheriff turned to Derek and gestured to the couch, “Please, sit.” The other Beta immediately tensed, but slowly complied. Stiles decided to also sit on the opposite couch cushion out of werewolf solidarity, while his dad sat between and in front of them on the coffee table. “I’ll tell you what my officers have made of the crime scene, but first I’d like to hear everything you know. After that, we’ll discuss what would be safe to say as an official statement down at the station.”

Derek somehow went even stiffer than he’d been before, the lines of his body almost vibrating with tension. The teen reached out instinctively, then paused, uncertain where the gesture came from. He didn’t know the older wolf, not really. Still, he rested his palm on the closest leather clad shoulder and didn’t stare. Ever so slowly, Stiles could feel the muscle relax under his hand. The youngest man quietly offered, “You’re her next of kin. You have to talk to them eventually. But we’ll keep you in the loop too.”

The last Hale stared into the distance, but nodded and with a quiet breath began as Stiles let his hand slide back to into his own personal bubble, “Laura decided to come back to Beacon Hills last week. She knew I wouldn’t want to. Said she was going to take care of our property…” A slight pause made Stiles wonder if there was more to it than just checking on their old house, “She checked in every night except… Except that night.”

Sheriff Stilinski nodded understandingly and gently interrupted, “The officer taking your statement will want you to be specific. Tell them the date and around when you would’ve expected her call.”

“The full moon--Wednesday night. She would’ve called… around six I think. When the moon came up,” Derek’s lips tightened as he stalled again, censoring himself for some reason. Stiles wondered why, if maybe it was personal. “She didn’t. And I called her over and over until I just… Grabbed a Red Eye from New York and got here as quickly as I could. I got in Thursday morning, rented a car, drove up to Beacon Hills and--” the dark haired man bowed his head, gritted his teeth and went tense again, “I could smell the blood. And. The Alpha.”

The bitten wolf fidgeted; his instincts warring with his caution. He could scent something familiar, and it reminded him of Scott’s guilt when they were upstairs. Derek was in pain. And Stiles’ first instinct was to get closer. Actually he wanted to cover the older male with a blanket, hide him away from the world that had treated him so harshly. A glimpse of his father’s sympathetic face made Stiles realize that that desire might be more compassion towards his fellow man than wolfy need. He gave in, reaching for Derek once more and holding still when Derek tried to flinch away. The young
wolf didn’t give up, just holding Hale’s shoulder in silence despite him resisting comfort.

The Sheriff took a slow, audible breath, trying to ease around Derek’s grief without drawing attention to the prickly man, “You’ll have to come up with another reason you were in the woods yesterday. And you can simply mention the crime scene tape, rather than what you sensed. Here’s what my department will know… A couple joggers spied Laura close to a path. The part of her without means of identification was placed closer to the public, meaning she was more likely to be discovered but belatedly identified. Whether this was out of pathology we don’t know yet. There were no signs of remorse in the placement of the body. It fully appeared to be an animal attack, and had no indicators of a human element except for one thing.”

Stiles got a good look at Hale’s profile when he turned that intense stare on the Sheriff, and retreated from arm’s reach instinctively when a new scent came to him. “Hunters,” Derek sneered. Based on the sheer hatred in the born wolf’s voice, Stiles would bet that scent was anger.

His father gave a considering nod, tilting his head just so in a way that Stiles realized showed his neck. Was that purposeful? Or intuitive? Either way, the strong scent of anger eased as the human began again, “She was cut with a blade.” In half, Stiles thought involuntarily with a grimace, grateful for his father’s kinder wording. “My Deputies collected animal hairs at the scene and they’ve come back with wolf DNA. If it were a natural animal attack, there’s no point in the mutilation after except psychopathy. Since there are no wild wolves in California, it’s currently thought to be purposeful. The theory is an assailant used a wolf as a weapon and then the blade afterwards to bring her to the attention of the authorities. This is backed up by the lack of scavenging thereafter.”

The turned teen couldn’t help curling up against the arm of the couch, feet on the cushion and arms holding his guts against the nausea and images that flashed through his mind. He hadn’t had heightened senses when he found Laura, but he remembered the look on her face, the curl of her fingers. The shine of blood and gore, slick and black under the full moon. He shuddered.

Guilt had Stiles turned away from the other men, unaware as they glanced at him. His father was concerned, wanting to shield his son from such memories, but also aware that he’d brought it on himself. Derek Hale was… Confused. And angry. Heartbroken from the loss of his sister, and angry at the Alpha, at the Argents. But also confused by the new wolf next to him, that had reacted so strongly to the relatively clinical description of death. He couldn’t imagine a human feeling compassion for a werewolf, even if they were now a werewolf themselves.

“Derek,” directed the blond Stilinski, trying to bring a little objectivity to the conversation, “Can you tell me why werewolf hunters would do that if they had nothing to do with the death?”

A grim expression formed on Hale’s face, and he placed his elbows on his knees to lean forward while he spoke, “They were hoping to draw out another wolf. The Argents have a history of cutting
wolves in half, their go-to among the various ways to kill us.”

Stiles lifted his head, distracted by the turn of conversation, “So we’re pretty tough to kill then?”

The born wolf nodded, instructing, “Our bodies will heal just about everything. The only sure ways are decapitation, destroying the heart, or cutting us in half like that.” Derek’s lips turned down and he added in a softer tone, “And fire. Fire works too.”

Both Stilinskis winced in varying degrees. For differing reasons. Stiles’ mind had skipped over the Hale Fire as too much grief and was listing the variety of things that could have killed him when he was mortal that would now heal. While he was just about able to bite his tongue on the million questions that would no doubt annoy both father and acquaintance, he couldn’t help blurring something that flashed like a neon sign through his skull, “Could Laura—could the Alpha not have killed her then?” And now he was treated to double the incredulous stares, plus a side helping of hostility from Hale. Stiles winced, but felt he had to throw out the option, “I mean, he could’ve attacked her and then fled when the hunters came, right? She would’ve been vulnerable while she was healing.” She could’ve even looked already dead from their perspective…

“No,” said Derek definitively, “If a human kills an Alpha, the power passes on to the next in line. It’s always family or the strongest Beta available. The Omega became an Alpha, which means he had to of killed Laura.”

His dad took the question off his tongue with a quick, “Omega?”

Hale glanced first at the Sheriff then to Stiles again, “A lone wolf. The weakest of us because they don’t have a pack to draw strength from.”

The teenager could literally see his father redefining that word in his head by the pursed face of concentration. He let a lip quirk up in mild amusement, but became serious again, “So were the Argent’s trying to trap you or the new Alpha?”

Derek scowled at the ground and gave a frustrated growl, “I don’t know. If they recognized Laura… They’d know about me.”

Stiles ran through the scenarios in his head with what he knew of the Argents and what little Derek had told him about the fire in his childhood. That was obviously a touchy subject, and the Sheriff would know more than he did. Amber eyes met blue while Derek was preoccupied. A mutual
respect kept them from asking the tragic man more about the fire. For the moment.

“So as far as they know, there’s only one werewolf in town,” his dad began thoughtfully, “And depending on their information, they probably don’t think it’s you. But I’m not sure how quiet I can keep the investigation. Having the wolf DNA means the Department will expect us to use the public to find the animal to find the perp. Information about the victim inevitably comes out.”

The born wolf kept his silence, not looking at either of them. Stiles didn’t know what he’d been hoping for. A promise the man would be okay? It sounded naive just thinking it. A plea for help? Obviously not in Derek’s vocabulary. The teen still wanted to keep the werewolf out of the Argent’s line of sight, and since he didn’t even know where the guy was bedding down for the night that seemed an impossible task.

Just as Stiles was getting over that thought, his body interrupted the conversation with a loud gurgle. He sat up, startled, and his companions stared with varying degrees of amusement. Then he realized, “I haven’t eaten since breakfast, and that was just—like, toast and coffee.” The sun had already reached its peak and was starting a Western descent. He hadn’t realized all his varied conversations had taken the entire afternoon. Cringing, the bitten added, “Man, and I haven’t even started my make up work yet.”

The Sheriff chuckled, “Well, there’s nothing in the fridge or I’d offer to cook. I’ll go to the store then. ‘Bout time we got good food in this house.”

His son’s nerves jumped with the words, what he considered his ‘health food instinct’ rearing up. He immediately countered, “Oh no. No, I don’t think so. I’ll get the groceries in this house.” Stiles tried to stare down his father, but the man turned nonchalantly to their guest.

“You don’t think Stiles should stay home? Being in public with all his new senses could be risk, wouldn’t you think?”

“Dirty pool!” the teen shouted, almost flailing himself to his feet except he felt the need to turn to the older wolf as well for an answer.

Poor Derek’s wide eyes were bouncing between them in obvious bewilderment. Finally, he landed on Stiles and seemed realize the Stilinskis were serious in wanting an answer. He stumbled at first, then tried, “It’s probably fine, I mean—I wouldn’t trust a new wolf around people so soon.” Hale continued to fumble between decisions as the other two began playing up their reactions, trying to tease him into capitulating to their side, “But Stiles was mostly good at the lacrosse tryouts. Still, he shouldn’t—I mean, he’ll be fine, just—” and finally gave up with a sigh, “He shouldn’t be left alone.”
Stiles shrugged, acknowledging that this was probably true since he’d just witnessed his own temper earlier. Turning to his father, he said, “Well, you know what that means.”

Sheriff Stilinski rolled his eyes in good humor, but agreed, “All hands on deck.” Though he did something his son didn’t quite expect. He looked to Hale again, “Care to come with? I could use a hand with this one, and I’ll pay you back with dinner.”

“You mean I’ll be paying him back, since I’ll be cooking,” Stiles rephrased, but wasn’t displeased. Most of his dad’s expertise in the kitchen revolved around red meat and quick manly sides. He almost wanted to keep talking, try to goad the young adult into coming with, but decided silence to let him answer the Sheriff could work just the same.

Derek still hadn’t lost that bewildered expression, much to the Stilinskis’ entertainment, “O-okay?”

Unbeknownst to them, father and son were both thinking that the man looked to be bulldozed into the decision but determined their tactics hadn’t reached the levels necessary for guilt or backtracking. And so, almost at once, the little family stood and absently began bantering as they collected the supplies for their outing. As much as Derek Hale wanted to be left in their wake, he was prodded along with short jabs from the younger and expectant looks from the older Stilinski, and so was inadvertently collected onto the list of people who were their self-made family.
Chapter Six

Chapter Summary

But I will hold on hope, and I won't let you choke on the noose around your neck. And I'll find strength in pain, and I will change my ways. I'll know my name as it's called again!

--The Cave by Mumford & Sons

Chapter Notes

The song isn't really a werewolf song like the rest, but it reminds me so strongly of Derek that I had to use it for this chapter. And everything's open to interpretation, yeah? Like how some believed that calling a wolf by it's Christian name would return it to human form. :)

Thanks so much for everyone's comments and kudos to the last chapter! They were very encouraging and inspired me to write relatively quickly. :) That and despite the holidays I'm actually doing alright for writing time. Sorry about any striking errors, I am still my own editor. Hope everyone is having a great holiday season no matter what you celebrate!

A Night to Begin Anew

Saturday, January 22nd

The supermarket had one of those automated entrances: the doors that opened on a sensor and a rush of cool air blasted over the patrons before they entered a store. Since it was January that wasn’t exactly pleasant. Since Derek was a werewolf, it made him sneeze. He couldn’t help it; no matter what store he went into that rush of stale air and influx of scents always made him sneeze, even when he held his breath. It seemed to be a conditioned response after twenty-two years living.

“Stiles?”

The Sheriff paused in front of him, grocery cart halfway through the entrance, but not seeming to care that he was taking up traffic space. Or at least, not seeing it as more important than his son. Derek steeled himself against the thought of family and turned back to see what the problem was.
Just a few steps behind him, the teenager was still like he’d been shocked and had a wildly dazed expression on his face. The born wolf had to restrain the hint of a smile on his lips, but then easily frowned when he remembered why it made him smile. Cora had done the same thing on outings. Not wanting to collect any more attention than those few seconds could have cost, Derek reached back and grabbed the boy’s free elbow to force him forward. When he spoke under his breath, he didn’t lean close to Stiles or even look at him, the enhanced hearing would take care of the distance, “Keep up.”

The boy breathlessly muttered back, “What the Hell was that?” with his bright brown eyes still wide and confused. Derek huffed, keeping a hand where it was to drag him behind the Sheriff.

“You alright, son?” the elder asked and received an absent nod in return. The born lycan belatedly realized he was still attached to the Bitten when they were halfway down an aisle full of deli supplies. Nothing like drawing attention than hanging on to an underage, faux injured officer's son. Good job, Derek… Jesus.

He was so preoccupied scanning the store and trying to orient the number of breathing people he could hear to the various exits that he missed when Stiles came back from the mess of smells buzzing his sinuses. The boy gave a sudden shake and jerked forward with a loud, “Nah-ah! I don't think so. No roast beef for you, it's chicken and turkey breast on your sandwiches.”

He became a blur of motion, surprisingly quick fingered for such a clumsy kid with one arm trapped in a sling. A glance at the boy’s father showed a fond smirk and Derek realized the man had grabbed the beef on purpose to shake his son out of his daze. The named meat packages made it to the cart and was quickly followed by Colby and cheddar cheeses, each sporting a 'low fat' label, a triangle of provolone and then a tin of goat cheese. Derek felt like he was missing something.

An indignant squawk interrupted his confusion and he watched as Stiles protested his father, already ahead of him, adding one of those individually wrapped sausages to the pile. The officer raised a dark blonde eyebrow at the teen, then claimed, “It's Sunday tomorrow, Stiles. We should have bigos.”

What? Hazel eyes blinked at the uncommon word and what Sunday had to do with it, but he determinedly said nothing. The teenager countered, “Hah! That's what you think. I'm making kiszczonka and you'll eat it and like it.” Derek's eyes went wide. Kich--kish-- what?! What the Hell was that?

The Sheriff took on a sly expression and glanced over Stiles’ shoulder at the older wolf, “Really, son? You think black pudding soup should be Derek's first taste of Polish cooking?” Stiles’ head
whipped around just in time to catch the-born wolf’s instinctive grimace at the phrase 'black pudding soup'. The boy’s mouth dropped open, not that it stayed closed often, but his indignant manner doubled along with Derek’s surprise. That was one clever and manipulative man. He watched while Stiles tried to negotiate from a disadvantage and noted not to stand between the Sheriff and whatever he was after if he could help it.

Polish dishes flew back and forth between them, the father finally dropping from whatever bigos was to some other meal using the sausage he still held to gesture, and probably show his determination to eat it. He wasn’t as wild as Stiles with his hands, but there was no doubt the two were father and son. Seeing that relationship so obviously stung a little. Trying to shove his feelings of guilt and sorrow into frustration, Derek interrupted, “I have eaten Polish food before.” He wasn’t prepared to have two expectant stares pinned to him with such intensity. Maybe he shouldn’t have spoken… “I liked the dumplings.”

Brown eyes narrowed on him and Stiles spoke swiftly, “Gołąbki or pierogi?”

“Uh…” He had no idea what they were called or that there was more than one kind. Around a year after they’d settled in New York Laura had gone on a foreign food kick, dragging him out to every non-American restaurant she could find in an odd attempt to bring him ‘culture’.

The Sheriff took pity on him, “Were they wrapped in cabbage leaves?” Derek shook his head, but kept his expression as neutral as possible in an attempt not to be used as tool in the negotiations again. “Pierogi then. Probably the cheese and potatoes kind, huh?” He gave barely a nod in return, “Well Stiles. You'll have to show him how it's really done, right?”

The boy groaned in mock agony, “Do you know how long dumplings take? I'll be cooking all freaking day!” He ran a quick hand across his scalp, left arm jerking in his sling like he wanted to use both of them. But he apparently didn’t mind, that much Derek could tell from his scent as Stiles grabbed the deli meat from his father and pointed it at him, “No sausage then. And you're just eating the mushroom ones!”

Obviously pleased with himself, the Sheriff countered, “As long as you don't skimp on the bacon bits.”

Groaning even more dramatically, the teenager rolled his eyes so hard his head rolled on his neck before resentfully grabbing the bacon for their cart. He grumbled under his breath and yanked the cart away from his elder to drag it behind him one handedly. Huh. Derek had never seen resentful grocery shopping before. Sheriff Stilinski chuckled at the drama, then some more when he glanced back at the slightly stunned Hale.
“Come on, son.” Derek jerked to attention, staring with a vulnerable expression as he continued down the aisle, “Can't let Stiles get too far ahead or he'll skip all the good stuff.”

Swallowing thickly, the wolf shook out the trembles in his hands, cracked his neck, and shoved his grief back down under his anger. It was just a fucking grocery trip. The boy was an annoying Bitten wolf who was going to cause more problems than he solved. And the Sheriff hadn't exactly been all that useful when the fire had happened, unable to even get the insurance investigator to call it arson.

There was no reason for Derek to get so damn worked up over the father-son duo dragging him along on a shopping trip… And including him in their dinner plans. He grit his teeth and caught up to the Stilinskis debating before the very next aisle. Looks like the Sheriff hadn't let the teen go far.

“And I'm saying we skip it because the only thing you'll find down that aisle is salt, empty calories, and more salt.”

“C'mon Stiles, I'll even get the baked ones. Those are supposed to better for you, right?”

The fine hairs on Derek’s neck rose on end when he heard a canine growl from the Bitten. His first instinct was to grab the boy, make him submit again, but what he saw made him hesitate. Stiles’ frowning face wasn't serious, and the Sheriff simply sighed at him. The Beta tensed again when the human clasped Stiles’ neck in a fatherly pat, but was instantly relieved that the boy ceased growling immediately. His sigh matched the exasperated one from Stiles who gave in with a snotty 'fine'.

He trailed them down the snack aisle, thinking about what he'd just seen. Dealing with a brand new werewolf might be easier than he'd thought. Derek didn't dare to hope, but the boy had submitted nicely to him in his bedroom, his own territory. And he seemed to treat his very human father as… maybe his Alpha? They’d see how long that would last when the rogue reared his head. But despite his misgivings, Derek couldn't quite squash that tiny bit of optimism that maybe, just maybe, this wouldn't be as difficult as it could've been.

The three men went down the next row, a family size bag of baked Lays added to their sandwich goods. There was no argument about the choice of bread or cereal and so a loaf of multi-grain oats wheat bread and a box of Cheerios with the little heart healthy symbol on the box followed the chips. The cart rattled around into the refrigerated dairy section instead of another set of shelves. Here the Stilinskis collected eggs, no-fat: milk, ricotta cheese, cream cheese and sour cream. That niggling feeling that he was missing something sprang up again. Then a flash of memory followed: the feeling of wolf warm flesh under his palm, the porcelain pale skin dotted with freckles and too skinny by half. Pale hazel eyes studied the teen as he clumsily banged his hip into a shelving unit full of tortillas and then flailed to catch one of the packages that slipped out. Stiles looked surprised to actually catch it and pleased, he decided to add it to the cart. There was lean muscle to him, but not a lot, and no fat whatsoever.
Derek's dark brows furrowed and he couldn't help speaking up before they moved on to the condiments, “You know, you're going to need more calories as a…” he trailed off, carefully watching a distracted mother passing by with her own cart and two children. Stiles peeked over his shoulder at him, brown eyes curious. “If you eat right, you’ll build more strength. You shouldn't cut out all the fat from your diet for--whatever reasons you had.”

“What?!” the teen’s voice cracked, nothing short of alarm on his face. But it seemed to be directed at his father, not for himself or Derek. He grew more confused as Stiles’ heart rate climbed suddenly, genuine fear kick-starting it for no discernable reason. “Don't you dare--”

“Okay, okay, calm down, Stiles,” the man interrupted, holding both hands up from the cart in appeasement. He looked slightly guilty, and stepped closer to the boy with concern, “Easy, son. I'm not going to let you deprive yourself of what you need on my account, but I promise I'll do better on my diet, alright?” His heart didn't stutter once, and gradually his son calmed. Derek couldn't tell if the teen had sensed what he had, but the Sheriff was genuine in his words. So the special foods and family banter hadn't been about Stiles being health conscious at all, but about his father's health. The elder Stilinski ran his palm over the boy’s short hair and turned to Hale, “Last year the doctor found I had high cholesterol, and with my job that can be a bit…”

“Dangerous,” Stiles bit out, still agitated but seeming to be studying the closest shelves to distract himself.

His father nodded, “I haven't had an incident, and I likely won't as long as I watch what I eat and make sure to get some exercise in.” Worn blue eyes watched Stiles for a moment, “Just like the doctor said, son. And I'll do it. I'm gonna have to keep up with you now, aren't I?”

The younger Stilinski huffed, shrugged and stomped down the aisle like he was on a mission. Derek felt his shoulders drop a little and tried to school his expression. He shouldn't feel regret on account of what he'd said. He didn't know about the Sheriff's heart trouble and had no clue why it was a trigger issue for the Bitten. A large hand clapped his back once, making Derek stiffen up like a board in an instant. The off-duty officer politely ignored it and offered, “Just give him time to cool down. He knows you didn't mean anything by it.”

The born wolf wasn't sure where it came from, but somehow he managed to say in the driest tone possible, “I did mean something by it. He's way too skinny.”

“I heard that!” Stiles yelped from the far end of the aisle. The Sheriff laughed and his son visibly relaxed. And weirdly enough, Derek felt a sense of accomplishment for the first time in a long while. He received another slap on the back, obviously telegraphed that time and Derek surprised himself
by not tensing. Stiles returned shortly, right arm curled around three jars that were just begging to crash to the tile floor. Accident waiting to happen this one. It was ridiculous that becoming a supernatural creature of the night didn't give the kid anymore grace. Or sense.

Scowling, Derek reached forward and tugged a couple from beneath the boy's arm. Then immediately regretted it. Grimacing, he dropped a bottle of horseradish to the cart in favor of holding out the sauerkraut by its lid like a dead rat by the tail. “You’ve got to be kidding me. You can smell this, can't you? Don't tell me you want to put this on your food.”

“Dude,” the Bitten emphasized, wide amber eyes catching the fluorescent lighting, “We're Polish. Mostly. Have you ever even had it?”

Face falling flat and unimpressed, the Beta hoped he well expressed his disdain for the sour-salty scent that reminded him of rotten seaweed then stiffly added, “Yeah. On a New York hot dog.” Again, thanks to Laura. It'd probably scarred his taste buds for life.

The Sheriff winced sympathetically and shook his head while Stiles made a hilarious face of disgust. He dropped a bottle of mustard into the cart haphazardly and then leaned on it in an odd, exaggerated motion, “Guessing it was way too salty. They probably didn't even rinse it once.” Derek blinked at him blankly. He didn't even know you were supposed to do that. The jar was in the condiments section. Didn't that mean you added it to food like ketchup on a burger? Suddenly the boy started to smirk, cheek twitching with restraint as he snatched that awful jar back to add to their items, “Man, your eyebrows can say so much. Don't worry, we'll cook it up and it'll be tasty. Trust me.”

At first his brows had risen in surprise then furrowed in irritation at Stiles’ rather personal comment. But then Derek had to turn away, pretend distraction from both the little family and the ice cold feeling in his chest. The second he'd heard those two words, his instinctive thoughts had sent a dull pain through his ribs. He didn't trust anyone. And they shouldn't trust him. It was safer that way.

In his peripheral vision he could see the Stilinski men seemed to shrug off his cold shoulder and turn to go to the back wall. Separated by an employee hallway from the dairy, the rows of meat and butcher sat apart from the next aisle of refrigerated items, of which Derek was more familiar as it held frozen dinners and ice cream. Laura had a sweet tooth. And no cooking skills. Well, neither had he, but he'd decided that food was her prerogative as the Alpha and provider. They'd had a lot of play fighting over it... Shaking the thoughts out of the forefront of his mind, he followed in the Stilinski’s wake to the fresh protein.

The Sheriff paused and hummed thoughtfully for a moment, “Well, since I've got a growing pup to feed now, how about the two of you figure out how much meat to get and I'll go pick out some cans?”
Stiles came to attention like he'd noticed a predator on his six as the older man stepped away.
“Remember to only get--”

“Low sodium. I remember, Stiles. You concentrate over here.”

The kid really had to stop overreacting like that. It was driving Derek’s sympathetic instincts crazy to have a new wolf next to him acting like there was danger in everything his father did. The tentative bond between them since Stiles had submitted was going to be extremely irritating if he didn't calm the Hell down. He huffed at his companion and glared, “Knock it off. He promised, didn't he?”

“Yeah, but--”

“Stiles,” he intoned firmly, catching the distracted teen’s eye. He was mildly surprised to note the boy was actually his same height when he straightened up. Derek continued, “You heard the same thing I did. He promised. And he meant it.”

The stress the younger Stilinski had carried since they came to the store dissipated with a sigh, “Yeah, he did, didn't he…” He absently itched at his covered left arm and finally started scanning the beef section. The way he had honestly relaxed made Derek think the kid really did hear what he had, the steady beat of a truthful heart. Stiles picked up a package of ground beef to compare against another while Hale slowly found the words he was looking for.

“Are you adapting alright?” He met the boy's raised brows with a single glance, “To your new… limits?”

Realizing that Derek was censoring himself on account of the human public walking around and completely ignoring them, Stiles snorted and kept absently figuring out the best deal he could find while answering, “No one's going to believe we aren't talking about fiction if you say werewolves, Derek.” He blatantly ignored the tense man besides him, going blithely on, “And yeah, I guess I'm doing alright. The smells are a little distracting; not compared to the way something moving too fast gets my attention is distracting. Makes me feel like a dog that wants to chase squirrels. But the hearing is actually the worst, that can get freaking painful sometimes. Is there a way to, you know, lower the volume or something?”

But Derek was distracted himself this time. A single breath had set his heart racing in a sense memory that spoke of pain. There was wolfsbane in the air. And goddamn this recycled air conditioning garbage because now he couldn't even tell what direction it was coming from.
“Derek?”

His fangs itched and every instinct was screaming at him to flee so his entire body was tensed for flight. Even a newborn wolf couldn’t miss his chemosignals. Stiles’ heart started to race in turn, anxiety flooding the space between them as he dropped the ground beef. “Derek, what is it?”

Still scanning each person in his vicinity for any sign they were a threat, the born wolf snarled softly through gritted teeth, “Can’t you smell that?”

And despite his stampeding heart muscle, Stiles managed to be a little shit and answer sarcastically, “You’re gonna have to be more specific. There’s literally, like a million scents here.” Growling subsonically, Hale ground his teeth and took another deliberate inhale, searching. The stinging floral scent grew stronger; they were getting closer. A hand clasped his shoulder, softly encouraging him to face the meat again—to put his back to the threat.

“Stiles.” A wolf-like growl echoed in his whispered word, making it doubly threatening.

But the young man’s heart was actually calming somehow, and his even breaths drew Derek’s attention back to the two of them. “Dude,” the Bitten started, “We’re in a high trafficked, public place with the Sheriff of Beacon Hills fifteen feet away. As long as whatever is freaking you out doesn’t want to be outed for what they are, they can’t hurt us. And you looking around for whatever it is, is just going to draw them to us faster probably, yeah?”

Closing his eyes and swallowing hard, Derek tried to accept the boy’s rationalization. Everything he knew told him not to leave a threat to his back, to find the hunter and get the fuck out of there as fast as possible, but that could also endanger them. Those very instincts could reveal them as werewolves. He didn’t relax, but the last Hale studied the variety of red before him, using the color to help fantasize about cutting into a particular Argent’s throat to distract himself. Derek tightly began, “First lesson on things that can kill you now. Take a slow breath. Smell something spicy?”

Stiles busied himself with shuffling some of the products around and tilted his head in a comically considering fashion while he sniffed. Ridiculous puppy. He hummed then answered, “Yeah. Like a weird, spicy flower. Perfume?”

Snorting, the born wolf was disconcerted to find the aerosolized weapon was already doing its work. He couldn’t smell anything anymore. “It’s not spice. It’s an allergic reaction burning away your sinuses. Wolfsbane.”
The Bitten went still, eyes widening while staring blankly ahead. He swallowed and absentmindedly confirmed, “Hunters,” in a whisper. Stiles stopped paying much of any attention to his price sorting and grabbed a package of lean ground beef to add to the cart. Then he continued on, body calm and smooth while his heart rate picked up again to a steady jog. Stew beef and a couple steaks joined the pile before he moved to the pork. Derek was reluctantly impressed with his reaction. Despite the signals of stress and fear the lycan could hear without his sense of smell, the new wolf was remaining visibly calm under the strain.

His attention towards the other shoppers refocused using mostly his ears. The squeak of metal carts was irritating and usually something a wolf would try to tune out, but Derek had been counting them as they walked. Shoes were a more accurate measurement of people, but not always easy to catch. The clack of heels was distinctive, as well as the squeak of rubber soles, but some persons had a lighter tread and still others just had softer soles that didn’t carry noise. Combat boots were heavy, and more prevalent among his enemies. He caught the latest person to begin walking behind them: a single woman from the heels, with a heavy shopping cart and moderately heavy, jingly purse.

The cart paused at the row of frozen goods directly behind them. Then Derek scowled as he noticed something odd. Why could he hear the purse? Most other women had placed theirs in their carts. All of the fine hair on his neck, arms and legs stood on end. Stiles sensed his mood, glancing at him in sudden awareness just as the woman spoke.

“You must be the Stilinski boy.” On the surface there was nothing wrong with her voice. Underneath it was cold.

Derek stayed still and tense, watchful as Stiles subtly took a calming breath as he turned. Bambi brown eyes widened and his tone was absent confusion, “Ah, yeah? That's me?”

The lycan twisted only his head, doing his best to look disinterested though not sure he accomplished it in the face of what could only be the Argent matriarch. Dyed red, cropped hair made her stand out from the crowd, and her makeup and accessories were Stepford wife perfect. The image of perfection was completed with deadly, ice blue eyes over a faux friendly smile that raised his hackles.

“I'm Allison's mom, Victoria. I heard about your little accident in the woods,” the edge of concern in her voice didn't match her eyes and he could hear Stiles’ heart start to climb as he obviously understood the underlying motive behind her approach. “I'm a little surprised to see you out and about already. Are you doing alright?”

“Ah, yeah, pretty much. I mean, it's been three days so it's not as bad as yesterday. Plus painkillers are a marvelous invention. I figured they'd give me vicodin at first, but turns out that that would
“Stiles,” Derek scolded, wondering how long and how personal the teen would let this conversation go. As amusing as it was to see a hunter’s eyes get that wide, the quicker she was gone the better. The kid chuckled nervously and scratched at the back of his neck with his free hand, smiling in apology.

“Sorry. Ah, yeah, I didn't know they made ibuprofen that strong, so I'm okay for a grocery trip. And my Adderall is starting to wear off about now. So... yeah.” God, this teenager. Was that on purpose, a kind of strategy? Drive people away by getting too personal?

“I see.” Victoria let a little genuine emotion bleed through. She seemed a bit repulsed, actually, even as her face attempted to still look concerned, “May I ask, do you know what attacked you in the woods? I know a number of people like to jog on the trails and the Preserve is still open to the public.”

Was that a dig at the Sheriff? Who went jogging in the woods, someone she knew? Or did it only mean the hunter's were patrolling there? Derek let himself turn towards the young wolf, trying to keep himself from watching Argent too noticeably by studying Stiles in turn. The boy licked his lips and looked around a bit before answering, “A bear. I mean, it was dark and I didn't get a great look, but I'm pretty sure it had to be a bear.”

Before Derek could begin to wonder about the choice of predator, Victoria frowned at them and spoke with thinly reigned intensity, “Not a mountain lion? I hear those are more common around these parts.”

Stiles put on an air of shared confusion. It was pretty good in all fairness. “Yeah they are, but I had, like, the supreme bad luck to stumble across a black bear out of hibernation or something. It was so big,” Derek dodged back a step as the teen’s free hand made a grand sweeping motion, “I thought it had to be a California Grizzly, but those are extinct. Did you know 'black bear’ is actually a misnomer? They can have brown fur too. And while they're the smallest species of bear in North America, the largest one killed on record was about eleven hundred pounds. I mean, that is just—phew!” He puffed out his cheeks with a juvenile breath of air and shook his head like he just couldn’t believe the natural world.

The sheer amount of information served to keep all of the female hunter's attention and not in a good way. The unrelenting words finally cracked through her mask of geniality, and she frowned with an extremely unimpressed expression. “You’re certain it was a bear, simply because it was large?” Her entire demeanor said she was already writing the younger Stilinski off as an idiot. Derek wasn’t sure if he wasn't about to do the same. He really hoped the rambling was deliberate.
Stiles carefully shrugged with only one shoulder and acted like he was pretending to be unconcerned as he splayed his free hand across his covered upper arm, fingers hooked like claws, “Well that and the claw marks. Bear claws are that much bigger and longer than a cougar's. Pretty obvious difference there.” And now he was frowning at the Argent, visibly disliking not being believed as most people would. Hale silently sighed in relief as Victoria's shoulders relaxed.

The woman nonchalantly placed her purse in the child’s seat of her cart and stepped over to the whole frozen chickens at her side. “Yes, I suppose that would be a strong indicator of the animal involved. But I'm sure since it's a bear in January it must've returned to hibernation by now.” Her entire demeanor was dismissive, and Derek belatedly realized the reason she had been holding onto her purse when all other women hadn't. There must've been a weapon inside. He barely kept himself from eyeing it and felt his stomach turn as she perfunctorily examined a bird before sliding it into her cart. He had the sudden idea that she was very handy with a knife. Those dead blue eyes barely scanned them as she turned to leave, “Well, I'm sure we'll see each other again sometime now that Scott and my daughter are dating. Have a good night. Sheriff.”

Derek startled, looking a little further ahead to where the man was coming out of an aisle with an armful of cans. With his sense of smell diminished and all his focus on the threat in front of him, he'd missed the elder Stilinski’s approach. The Sheriff greeted her with a politely distant, “Mrs. Argent,” and didn't try to keep her in conversation so she continued on her way.

Both of the werewolves took deep breaths, partially instinct to try and catch a scent unaffected by wolfsbane and partially sheer relief, as the hunter disappeared from view. The human man gave an elaborate shiver and grimace, “That woman scares me.”

“You and me both,” Stiles added flippantly. Despite the fact that Derek knew his fear had been truly genuine, he couldn't help the instinctive swipe he took at the boy's scalp. The teenager curled away, raising an arm defensively, “What?!”

Hazel eyes glared at him, and he moved half a step closer to intimidate the kid in the hopes of a less sarcastic answer, “Do you do that on purpose?”

Stiles gave him a very contrived innocent look, far too expressive to be sincere and almost cartoonish for it, “I have no idea what you're talking about.” His heart, still slowing down from their encounter, gave an obvious skip that made Derek frown harder at him.

“Did he babble at her? At the head hunter in charge?” the Sheriff asked with measure of resignation. Hale nodded shortly, still staring at the recalcitrant teen. The father just sighed heavily.
Stiles grimaced at him, turning defiant, “So what? It worked, didn’t it? She barely even looked at you, so I didn’t have to do the polite thing and introduce you. And unless you can speak fluent Spanish, I don’t think you can pass for my cousin Miguel from Me-xi-co.”

The name and location were obviously chosen off the top of his head. Jesus, was this kid ever serious? Even his father was rolling his eyes and Derek felt the urge to one up the boy and put him in his place. He answered with a sneer, “Yo hablo español, idiota. Probablemente mucho mejor que tú.”

The teen’s jaw dropped and his eyes glazed. His first thought was that the rapid fire Spanish had turned the Bitten wolf on, but that couldn't be right. Derek was unable to confirm without his sense of smell healed, but it’s not like this was the first time Stiles had stared at something with his mouth open, the lanky geek. He'd probably just stunned him silent with the sudden knowledge that he could speak something other than English, unlike most born Americans. A rattle of cans disturbed their standoff, and both turned to see the Sheriff already moving on with the cart, collecting a couple chicken packages as well. He gave them a resolutely calm look over his shoulder.

“Well? Come on then. We're almost done and the quicker we're out of here the better, right?” The mature adult was done arguing about the nature of the confrontation between wolf and hunter evidently. Stiles chased after him and Derek covered their backs, scanning behind them as he moved, ensuring the hunter matriarch didn't double back to watch them.

Without prompting the younger Stilinski began filling in the older almost exactly word for word of what had been said between wolf and hunter, along with a description of the woman’s terrifyingly annoyed mien. Once again a little impressed with the kid, Derek only nodded whenever the Sheriff glanced at him for confirmation. The Bitten quickly finished rehashing the relatively short incident, and his father simply hummed consideringly, scanning the nearby shelves without speaking immediately. Where the teen tended to think out loud when he could, the officer thought before he spoke and was the type to plan a course of action before attempting. Given how Stiles impulsively ran into the woods at night to find a dead body, Derek was going to assume there wasn't a lot of planning aforethought in the process. The fact his father was the opposite was a reassuring if interesting difference between them.

The Polish family collected a number of spices, most of which Derek in his limited cooking experience had never heard of. Some had simple names like 'allspice’ or odd ones like ‘vegeta’. His sense of smell was slowly healing, and Stiles’ too based on the way the kid suddenly dropped a plastic container with a huge sneeze. Sheriff Stilinski shot him a disgusted look and the boy shrugged apologetically, wiping the seasoning off on his shirt before tossing it in the cart.

The trio finished with the spice and variety aisle and turned into the large fresh fruit and vegetables
section. Here Stiles rubbed his palms together like he was about to manage a huge undertaking and Derek grimaced when he remembered the Sheriff’s promise to eat healthier. It was probably safe to assume they would spend just as much time there as in the rest of the store. He could only hope their hunter drive by would install some urgency to the task. But before the teen could dive in, the off duty officer began to speak.

“So the Argents moved here to find a werewolf threatening revenge. They know one person was killed, but not who she is yet, because Victoria didn't know Derek on sight. They know Stiles was attacked, but he's probably assumed human. And they might or might not figure Stiles’ description of the wolf for an Alpha,” the summary was concluded with a tapping of fingers along the cart handlebar. He tilted his head and raised a blond brow at first his son and then the last Hale. “The Alpha’s going to be looking for Stiles. Maybe even before he begins whatever vengeance he wants to take. As troubling as that might be,” the Sheriff clasped his son's neck, “I actually think we're at an advantage at the moment.”

Stiles gave a morbid grin, wary but believing his father. And even with the danger ahead of them, Derek felt a kernel of hope grow within. A sense of unity was taking hold despite his attempts to stay apart. The calm wouldn't last forever, it likely wouldn't last the night. But that moment with the Stilinski family… felt like Pack.

Returning to Normal Days

Monday, January 24th

Polish night was a rousing success. At least, from his father's perspective. But then, he had much lower standards for social gatherings apparently. Stiles couldn't stop thinking about it. That and a hundred other things that morning, a veritable tornado of thoughts assaulting his mind from every angle. Jittery fingers swung his car keys over and over while he stayed in the safety of his Jeep, feet tapping in the footwell without rhyme or reason. He'd arrived early with the intent to see Scott as soon as he got in. But he was lucky to have gotten there safely at all. Or early. When the newly turned wolf had slammed on the brakes for a leaf, heart rate threatening to make him wolf out, he’d quickly realized it was going to be one of those days… He’d had to drive at a freaking crawl to make sure he didn’t flip his baby. The nervous energy causing him to fidget at every movement, jerk with every scent, was rapidly devolving his ability to think coherently at all. Not that that was his best skill anyway, but he usually managed to follow a railway with only a few pit stops, trained with his prescription. Right now his mind was off the rails.

Sunday had a been a practice in concentration that drained the energy out of him, but being a werewolf meant he had a lot more to give apparently. When he’d finished most of his school work, triple checking he hadn't crossed subjects and assignments after doing so about a million times already, the teen had tiredly set out to make several kinds of Polish dumplings. He’d proactively made the pork stuffing the night before after their grocery shopping, along with soaking his mushrooms, but that only saved a little time compared to the massive amounts of pierogi he had served up. He still wondered if Derek had really liked them or just had an enormous appetite. That
‘so beautiful he could be marble’ face of his could really be as still and cold as stone.

The practice of stuffing dumplings was actually meditative, or maybe it was just that he’d been so exhausted his brain had quieted to a dull roar instead of a class five hurricane. Cooking should not help his attention problems; doing the same task over and over again before the all-important Bite had been a job for his Adderall and taking a variety of breaks to ensure the food wasn’t ruined by inattentiveness. But he’d found the repetitive acts soothing to his senses. It required little brain power, letting his thoughts whirl where they would as long as his hands kept to the same tasks. The kitchen had been calm and still except for his movements, and his nose full of smells that reminded him of good times, the quiet sound of his father’s music and working in the office had been his rhythm. The Sheriff entered and when blue eyes had widened in surprise, Stiles was startled to realize he had finished and was staring into space. Maybe it was relaxing because cooking was a highly sensory experience for his new abilities.

Some douchebag jock slammed on their horn, making the teen flinch and his attempt at consistent thought shatter. Almost dropping his keys mid-flip, the new wolf leaned back in his seat to toss them to his free left. Going to school without his sling was a risky decision to his dad, but Stiles had been reluctant to essentially be restrained while at school with Allison Argent. Scott was a huge part of his choice as well, though he still hadn’t told his dad about their argument. Scott: who hadn’t shown yet. Swallowing thickly, Stiles took a shaky breath and wondered if he could do what he planned. Or, was trying to plan.

He still wavered, back and forth. Was he going to try and convince him he really was a mythical creature? How could he do it without scaring him? Would he apologize instead? Let his best friend have his so-called perfect, normal high school life? Stiles wanted his longest friend, his brother, to have his back and support his new supernatural lifestyle. He also wanted Scott McCall to have the best high school years of his life, like he’d always wanted. He scanned the parking lot again, wondering if the boy had managed to borrow his mom’s car instead. Still nothing. A small part of the pessimistic teen felt guilty; he’d never believed Scott would make first line. Lacrosse had always been so hard, too athletic for the asthmatic boy who wanted to be the hero, scoring the game-winning goals. The guilt mixed with uncertainty. Would Scott be happy in the net? It was his least favorite position. Would success there be enough to satisfy him?

Wait, had Stilinski looked at the bike rack already? No, he’d missed it, he’d missed-- oh, false alarm. Groaning irritably as every minute felt stretched into an hour, the attention deficit teenager wavered back onto Polish night. While the Sheriff had been certain Derek Hale would show up, Stiles had been surprised. The born wolf had vanished in the parking lot after their grocery trip. But he’d arrived right as the boy was dishing up, which made him think the wolf had been hovering just outside their property listening in on them. Creeper. By then, Stiles had regained some momentum and managed to keep up the majority of the dinner conversation.

To Derek’s benefit, he’d tried all three types of pierogi on the table and hadn’t cringed once. The guy had very much preferred the pork kind, but hadn’t avoided the mushroom and cabbage ones, ie mushroom and sauerkraut. As in the guy had probably eaten half of everything all by himself.
Admittedly Stiles had made a whole ton more than usual, but even his new wolfish appetite couldn’t compete with Hale’s. Did it have to do with being home-made? Was he staying at a hotel and no kitchenette? Or could he even cook at all? One of the few expressions the older werewolf had made had been startled pleasure at the first bite of Stiles’ desert dumplings: lemon and blueberry with spiced sour cream.

He dropped his keys.

“God fuckin’ damn it.”

Even just the memory of that face was enough for his heart to skip a beat. He started patting around the footwell for the handful of metal. The majority of the night, Stiles had fought irritation at the stoic presence across the table from him. His father hadn’t seemed to mind. On one level, the new werewolf was aware that grief was debilitating. He knew the Stilinskis had had their share of disquieting moments. Though not usually in company. The Mc Calls had been a godsend when his mother passed. What was he looking for again?

Oh right! Keys! Ducking his head to look around, he finally snatched at the ring of keys that had somehow managed to climb all the way up behind his brake pedal. On a second level his annoyance rose over his understanding, making him provokingly sarcastic. He hadn’t meant to be, he didn’t mean to snark and snap at the brooding man. But his reticent behavior had urged Stiles’ contrary nature into trying to bring the man out of his shell. By any means he could find. The distracted teenager absently scanned around him after straightening up in his seat.

An animal whine leaked from his throat, startling Stiles into the present. Wait, where did everybody go? The school bell rung loud and shrill; his hands started to shake. The parking lot was empty. Where was--was that the five minute bell or--Scott was absent, no--that was the first period bell wasn’t it--Scott’s bike was right there! How could he have missed--

“Stiles!”

The boy yelped, limbs jerking and pushing him bodily away from the sudden presence at his driver's side door, heart thudding a mile a minute. When it was yanked open, he instinctively started to struggle and kick but was easily manhandled out and then pinned to his baby blue Jeep.

That's when he finally recognized his attacker. A shuddered breath of relief escaped him, “Derek…”
“What's wrong,” the man growled out, scowling at him but not giving off that adrenaline laced scent Stiles had begun to associate with anger. Was he scowling in concern? Or was that just his face?

His jittery hands finally stilled when he clasped Hale's forearms, and he tried to slow his breathing and heart rate, “Just a bad day. This is what the Adderall was for, you know? When I can't think straight and--what are you doing here again?”

Had the wolf told him he'd follow him to school? No, he couldn't have. The man had barely said a word on Sunday. And all of them to the Sheriff. Stiles had just gotten scowled at. Like right now.

“You weren't like this the whole weekend. It's not about your ADHD,” Derek frowned at him in an unimpressed manner. The teenage wolf felt a growl vibrate his teeth, defensive anger sparking up his spine.

“I'm always ADHD, it doesn't fucking go away.” Shit, he was turning, wasn't he? Shitshitshit. Claws started to dig into the long sleeves of the older man’s shirt and fangs pinched his inner lips until Stiles snarled involuntarily. “Perfect, just perfect! How awesome is this, I can't go to school like this! Although maybe Scott would believe me now that I'm that much more likely to kill him. And then his little girlfriend could kill me right after and--”

A hand pinning him moved and the bitten wolf flinched back, only to be shocked when a large palm curled around the back of his head and tilted his fangy face into Derek's neck. Immediately the born wolf's scent filled his next breath, and then he took an unintentionally deeper one. His hearing seemed to sharpen, or maybe just focus, and he could hear the steady pounding of Derek's heart directly under his cheek. An unconscious whine escaped as the new wolf stepped closer, eyes drifting closed to shut out visual information in favor of his nose and ears.

“You were anxious,” Derek said, voice soft and curious though still vibrating his chest. Stiles realized his hands had shifted to hold onto the man’s shirt and his claws had retreated. Was he supposed to respond to that? Of course he was anxious. Who wouldn't be in his shoes… Still, the younger wolf supposed Derek didn't have any reasons to help him, to be at the high school except for him. And here he was anyway.

Since the last Hale was probably there to look out for him, Stiles decided to offer more information with a resigned sigh, “I had a nightmare last night. Couldn't sleep after. I dreamt about the Alpha attacking me.” Derek tensed up but Stiles wasn't sure what to do about it. His short brown hair bristled softly against a stubbled neck as the boy tilted his head down, forehead against a strong shoulder to avoid the older wolf's gaze. He kept talking, “Only this time I was paralyzed or something. Couldn't move. Woke up howling. My Dad was right there trying to calm me down, but him being so close made me panic. I didn't want to hurt him again. So I clawed myself.”
The hands on his head and shoulder tightened, but didn't release their hidden weapons. Stiles frowned at the ground, finally opening his eyes and wondering if he should care about just how close they were standing. He absently added, “Dad didn't like it either, but I stopped turning.”

They shared a moment of quiet. The teen wolf listened to their hearts and lungs, slowly coming within range and then seconds of each other. He wasn't even trying to focus, it felt like his mind was expanding, awash with the white noise of their synchronized bodies. He had no idea how long it was before Derek suddenly jerked back. The man’s respirations jumped, making Stiles’ follow suit until they were out of rhythm again.

Derek looked stunned. And not in the good way, like he had over the dessert pierogi. He watched the boy with wide hazel eyes, uncomprehending and uncomfortable. Just as Stiles was about to speak, brow frowning in confusion over what had happened seconds ago, the other Beta beat him to the punch.

“You need to get to class. I'll be off campus but close by. Don't turn in school.”

And then he stalked off, stiff and angry again. Stilinski's jaw dropped, face offended though his mind was thoroughly weirded out. What the Hell was that about? How did the other wolf manage to calm him down so quickly again? He glanced at his phone when it vibrated with an email alert. Crap, he was fifteen minutes late to first period. Not long enough to justify skipping it entirely.

Stiles turned on his heel, snagging his backpack from the passenger seat, slamming his car door shut and wheeling around to sprint up to his class. The subject of Derek and their odd moment was put on the back burner. For now.
Chapter Seven

Chapter Summary

In touch with the ground, I'm on the hunt, down after you. Scent and a sound. I'm lost and I'm found. And I'm hungry like the wolf...

(Duran Duran - Hungry Like The Wolf)

Chapter Notes

Warning: Self-Harm. Canon typical for a werewolf though.

I'd like to take a moment to thank everyone who has read this story and left me feedback, either by commenting, pressing kudos or the subscribe button. It really means a lot to me and is one of the reasons I haven't given up trying to write this story. :) You guys are amazing, the Teen Wolf fandom, particularly Sterek fans have always been my favorites.

I'm very sorry for the long break away from Thrill of the Night. I kinda set myself up for failure when I started editing the chapters within an inch of their lives last year. Doing that, being my own editor, critiquing it all, really burned me from writing this story. In contrast, I told myself that my TWD story, Bare Bones, was just for fun and barely read the chapters twice before posting them. As you can see if you check my profile, I actually managed to finish that one, no matter how short it was... So apologies to all the Thrill of the Night readers. I really hope that you guys are still around and willing to read this next chapter. It's not heavily edited and all the mistakes are my own. :) Please enjoy!

And Happy New Year!

Not Even a Little Ordinary Day

Monday, January 24th

Stiles Stilinski had a love-hate relationship with his first class of the day. Or rather, with his first teacher. Ms. Blake who taught English and, by unanimous decision, was declared the hottest teacher on their staff. She was also the youngest if speculation was accurate. Given that she had started her career by mass texting a specific group of Juniors her number and then adding it would be the last text they received during her class time, everyone was excited by her hipness. Stiles found it a bit creepy. She was a bit creepy. He couldn't immediately figure out why, though he really didn't like the idea of his teachers having his cell number. Were those even in their student files?
Ms. Blake never did anything… wrong. She didn't flirt with anyone, didn't wear inappropriate clothing, no matter how fashionably she dressed. She didn't punish overzealously like Harris. All around Jennifer Blake was in the running for one of the nicest, most helpful teachers in Beacon Hills. Honestly, Stilinski had no freaking clue why his skin crawled whenever she looked at him.

Catching his breath outside her classroom, the new wolf gave a quick shake of his head and adjusted his backpack from where it had almost fallen off. He could hear the woman lecturing on last week’s assigned reading of Atlas Shrugged. Pursing then rolling his lips, he sighed and opened the door slowly, to make as little noise as possible. There was no getting to a seat without being noticed, but it interrupted the authority figure in a less offensive way.

Dressed in a purple blouse, black skirt and pumps today, her pretty face gave him a concerned look then ushered him along to a desk with barely a pause in her sentence. See? Super understanding! So why did her sweet brown eyes send shivers of fear down his spine?

Settling into the free chair closest to the door, Stiles withdrew the novel and a notebook then risked getting singled out by pulling his hood up over his head. Folding his arms on the desk, pen in hand and waiting for whatever great insight the teacher could dredge up from their morning-afflicted class, the new shifter rested his chin on forearms with a soft groan. He knew school wouldn’t be a cake walk, nevermind the drama with Scott or his attention disorder, his senses were probably going to give him a headache by lunch. Scents radiated off of teenage bodies; everything from deodorants and breakfast to mouthwash and last week's socks. Their skin, hair, clothes, shoes, breath… Every single person was radiating smells into a small enclosed space, along with every single movement he could hear and see. Papers shuffling, pens tapping, phones vibrating, heelsclicking, shoessqueaking, lungs wheezing heartsbeating--

Heart beating. The teen took a shuddered breath and tried to reach further than just the classroom. Further than the classes next door, than the gym across the way… There.

A steady rhythm, strong and familiar, echoed alongside his own. Coming from the direction of the woods, so most likely Derek. The idea calmed him. Reminded him that he wasn’t the first goddamn werewolf around. Derek had gone to high school here. Even if he’d been born with his abilities, he’d still had to learn how to be in an enclosed space with twenty other people all by himself at some point. Hell, Stilinski had been looking for teenage wolves on social media only a couple days ago. There were probably a hundred others just like him, going through the same exact thing.

Most people got off on being special. Stiles knew special was just another word for abnormal. Like ADHD and anxiety disorders. Like getting a little detail on your driver’s license saying you can’t drive without your prescription. When the bitten wolf thought about the possibility of so many other kids going through this, he was actually comforted by it. By the idea of being normal. He let the scents, the sounds, the quick little movements of note-taking or fidgeting, roll over him in waves until it became less overwhelming. Like stepping into a wave pool; the further in you went the easier it
was to tread water, to keep your head above it all.

And ever so slowly, everything came to have meaning again. Ms. Blake was responding to a comment that he’d missed with a wide, showy gesture and, “...that’s good, that’s exactly what the author has been implying, I think. The mechanical things, the locomotives, motors, even the architecture: it’s all a representation of the rational mind. Of these rational characters and scientists that are disappearing within the novel. Can anyone speculate on what they think will happen next based on this foreshadowing?”

The subject matter wasn’t important today. Stiles was going to focus on keeping his head above water; on not drowning in the myriad of sensory stimulation around him. To that end, he kept Derek’s heartbeat in the back of his head, whether or not he was really hearing it or just remembering now he wasn’t sure. But it helped when he finally uncapped his pen and started to write. At first it was just notes, quick reminders of what he’d read, the connections he’d made while doing so. Then he expanded in little bursts of words whenever Ms. Blake praised a student for their comment, switching to yellow highlighter to emphasize them since whatever she pointed out would likely be used again later on a test.

The stink of the highlighter put him off at first, but then he noticed it was blocking out a majority of the human odors around him. Resisting the urge to take a deep whiff and short out his nose for a bit, Stiles coughed lightly against the chemical harshness and let his constantly moving hands write and tap away his distractions. That’s when the boy observed a portion of his sporadic notes included which students were wearing heinous perfumes or colognes and which hadn’t brushed their teeth that morning. Jesus Christ.

Stiles let his head fall onto his desk. He hadn’t even realized he was writing that shit down. Yeah, school was going to be fun today. A shrill bell had him jumping a foot in the air, desk, papers and writing utensils going every which way with him. The young lycan’s heart throbbed in his chest from the sudden adrenaline and silence fell over his ears thereafter. He didn’t temporarily lose his hearing. Lungs still expanded and hearts still beat, but all conversation and movement ceased.

He barely gave the other students a second to look. Gritting his teeth against the discomfort, Stiles turned his back to the room and went about collecting his supplies, ignoring the students behind him. He shared first period AP English with the ‘cool kids’, the Golden Trio: Jackson Whittemore, Lydia Martin, and Danny Mahealani. As he shoved everything haphazardly into his backpack, he could hear Whittemore start in what might account for a whisper if not for his recent abilities. “God, what a freak.” The sneer was palpable in the bastard’s tone. Stilinski felt a muscle in his clenched jaw twitch.

“Good old Danny-boy stepped up for him, “Ease up, Jacks.” See, that was why everybody loved
Danny.

“Why?” His strawberry-blond Goddess drawled. Stiles cringed, hanging his head low and his ears on her every word. “Even you have to admit, that was freaky. Paranoid much?” The turned teen froze, both hands on his zipped backpack and unharassed by other students as they pointedly went several feet around him to get to their next class.

The Hawaiian jock’s next whisper was even quieter, in deference to the group walking right by his desk on the way out the door, “Guys, he was attacked in the woods last week. Give him a break.”

Even through the wall he could hear the love of his short life’s response. “Well, maybe he shouldn’t have been out there in the first place,” Lydia sniped, undoubtedly flicking her perfectly curled hair over her shoulder.

Stiles knew his heart hadn’t stopped; he could feel it pounding away. But it felt like something in him stalled. Something that should’ve been his heart. *God, way to hit the nail on the head, dearest Lydia.* He felt his eyes burn and dropped his bag to press the heels of his hands against his eyelids, finishing the gesture using nails to scratch his scalp back and forth a few times. Turmoil itched his chest: a raucous mixture of frustration, disappointment and resignation bubbling in his guts. He knew compassion wasn't her typical public response, but… *It's not like she's wrong,* a cynical inner voice hissed. With a sigh, the werewolf swung his backpack around and made to leave right as his name was called.

“Mr. Stilinski?”

*Ah crap. Crappity, crap, crap.* He’d forgotten he was late somehow. Nerves pricked his spine, flashing a wave of cold sweat along his body. Turning back to the seemingly harmless woman, the boy started immediately apologizing, “I’m sorry, I--Ms. Blake, it won’t happen, well, it might happen again to be honest, but I’ll try really--”

“It’s okay,” she smiled and the flash of teeth sent his hackles up, small hairs along his neck standing on end like he’d been shocked. He deliberately pressed his lips tight to keep from baring his own teeth at her in a much more unfriendly way. She went on, “I understand you’re still recovering and probably had a hard time this morning. I won’t mark you down tardy. *This* time, Mr. Stilinski.”

With a nod of dismissal, Stiles was released to his next class. But as he turned into the door, his English teacher walked over to her purse, hanging on the corner coat rack. That’s when he caught it: the scent. She walked within three feet of him, and he finally identified what made him so uneasy around her, what was turning his stomach now. Copper.
The scent of blood.

His heart started to double-time and he hightailed it out of there. But not to his next class. Making a pit stop in the boy’s restroom, the teen shapeshifter almost ran into the sink before turning on the cold water and splashing his face repeatedly. The tornado whirled. Questions spiraled around the disgusting notes of *eau de toilette* and rationalizations. Whispers of thoughts trailed outraged inquiries, but nothing brought him closer to any kind of truth.

Ms. Blake smelled like blood. And not like how his father had, recently clawed and bandaged with ointment. It was covered by perfume, but he managed to identify it—a lot of it. The odd… texture of the scent, like if he’d licked it, would be dry and flaky. Old blood. He hadn’t noticed any bunches in her clothing; she hadn’t missed work for a hospital stay. Why did she smell like that?

Breathing and heart rate calmed, Stiles finally stopped pouring water over himself to grip the edges of the porcelain sink instead. His face dripped, hair pressing dark and flat to his skull. He wouldn’t get any answers right now. He probably wouldn’t get any answers for weeks if the reason was supernatural an he wanted to keep his head. He hoped like Hell she wasn’t dangerous; how could she be when she’d been teaching them all month already? Didn’t the Beta have enough on his plate dealing with a psychotic Alpha werewolf?

Another bell went off and Stilinski groaned in tandem, bending over to let his head thunk onto the cold ceramic, pain echoing across his forehead to his ears before dissipating with the last shrill ring. He just couldn’t catch a break.

A quick pass with a paper towel and the wolf trotted out of the room, up a flight of stairs to the electives hall. The first door was his computer science class, and honestly, he was so freaking far ahead he might as well be teaching it. Well, assistant teaching it. Danny could be the professor. Yet another time period he shared with the handsome boy, but the only one in which he regularly sat directly behind him. The teacher, Mr. Greenwell, gave him a nod of acknowledgement as he passed by, and otherwise let him be as the man wrote down the day’s task. They usually took an average of ten minutes to complete, giving him the rest of the class to fuck around on the Internet.

And, you know, figure out back doors into other people’s computers. He’d learned a lot sitting behind Danny. Stiles kept his fingers off the keyboard until their teacher was done writing, knowing that his loud fidgeting wouldn’t be appreciated by the man or his fellow classmates until it could be covered by the rest of them working. Generally this was a quiet hour, with Mr. Greenwell spending almost all of it reading some science fiction novel at his desk unless asked for help. He was a very hands-off teacher, which would probably infuriate Stiles at any other subject. But when it came to computer basics, he held his own easily enough. The buzz of electronics filled his ears as computers fired up from resting modes. Quiet conversations started up, harmless things either asking each other
for help on the Excel assignment or making plans after school. Most of the students started up their programs right away, Stiles included, though he also dragged out his prior notebook.

Between loading sequences and breaks for thought, he started slashing out the notes on people's hygiene. Jeez, he never realized just how invasive being a werewolf was until it was written down in front of him. About halfway done, a shift in the rhythm of students made the young wolf look up at Mahealani. The boy rested his fingers on the space bar, scanning his work before he'd turn it in. Stiles did his best to scan what was available on the screen. Not outright cheating, just making sure he had the right idea, double-checking his work. Even doing that was a distraction though. It made him think about what Danny had said, how he'd stuck up for him and what that probably meant about what the rest of the school knew.

Biting his lip to the point of real pain, Stiles was barely able to finish his faux-payroll assignment and save it before he leaned around the aged computer. “Hey, Danny?” he hissed.

Advanced hearing caught a barely audible sigh, and the lycan remembered that no matter how nice the guy was, Stiles was still in the running for the most annoying of his class. That only showed how kind the lacrosse jock was when he looked over his shoulder and asked, “Yeah, Stiles?” in a low voice.

God, it was unfair how attractive the boy was. Maybe he should grow his hair out? Stiles hardly remembered his question, or at least the one he meant to start with, “Uh,” he leaned a little closer to give himself a second to organize his spiraling thoughts, “What’re people saying? I mean, about… that night?”

He got a side eye from the teen, dark eyes calculating in a way that meant the Hawaiian native knew he was being used for information. Danny still answered, “Only that someone was attacked in the woods. A body was reported in the news the next day, and you were absent so Scott freaked out in the middle of class. He had an asthma attack and stayed in the nurse’s office for an hour.” Stilinski grimaced, guilt tangling his tongue. Ahead of him, Danny read his face easily and added, “I think his mom told him you were alive so he should stay in school and visit you after lacrosse tryouts.” Obviously what Stiles really wanted to know was as easy to see as the nose on his face. His guts churned and he leaned lower to the long desk of computers, ignoring and ignored by the person sitting next to him.

“So, but--no one knows anything else?”

With a quick eye roll, Mahealani muttered, “Not everyone is the son of the Sheriff, Stiles.” The new shifter tilted back into his seat, tapping his fingers agitatedly across the empty space for a second. His conversation partner started to turn back to his computer, assuming their chat was over.
Stiles noisily folded up against the desk to whisper his next incredulous question, “When did Allison Argent start making time for Scott?”

“Scott didn’t tell you?” Danny asked back with a confused frown.

Mouth dropping open with no sound, the werewolf searched for a half ass reason why his best friend hadn’t told him a thing about his crush finally speaking to him. Besides the fact that he’d passed out for the half day he’d been home from the hospital, he didn’t really get why it hadn’t come up either. Making a vague hum, Stiles tried, “My phone was in evidence, um… He told me about the party.” God, that was lame. A small wince crossed his face as he started to inch back into his seat.

Apparently taking pity on him, the lacrosse star consoled, “There was a lot going on. However they started talking, it happened after school.”

Nodding in gratitude, Stilinski turned back to his computer and let Danny do the same. He absently sent on his assignment to the teacher via e-mail, then rested his cheek on his palm. Damn it, he hated fighting with Scott. He couldn’t even remember the last time it’d happened. Well, the last time it wasn’t resolved within minutes and a bit of negotiations. They’d never really fought before. The idea made him anxious, started his feet tapping and fingernails to itch. A small thought reminded him the sensation was part of the change, increasing his anxiety.

Then he remembered Derek's words, so much softer than his usual growl. The way he’d grabbed Stiles and let him calm down using the rhythm of his heart and breath. The memory distracted him, putting his troubles with Scott on the back burner until they could be resolved. It had to be a wolf thing, right? Two bodies falling into sync like that only happened on TV, in supernatural romcoms or something. His life felt more like a supernatural horror show. Where it started with him almost killed and turned, maybe he can kill the wolf that bit him--whether that turns him human or not depends on the movie--with inadvertent help from a Hunter that wound up dead, and then his English teacher could pop up in a surprise twist to finish him off.

Speaking of… Stiles held that thought in his mind and started to log in to his own Google Account with his recently saved bookmarks. They were all shapeshifter oriented, but there were a few databases linked in that expanded to other creatures. And the databases were what he really needed to figure a species out if he didn't want to slog through every freaking page looking for the word 'blood'.

Oh my God, there was a lot of folklore about blood-drinking monsters. Though the couple day old lycan was pretty sure Ms. Blake wasn't a chupacabra, he wasn't sure he could rule out things depicted in only animal form. After all, neither he or Derek could transform into the Alpha’s wolf-
man evolution and they were still werewolves. Who the Hell knew if any of these ‘facts’ were legit either. Silver didn’t hurt wolf-shifters. His home experiments had taught him that. Stiles had never seen an upside down reflection in her eyes or heard a tik tik sound around the educator, but she could still be an aswang. Wendigo were supposed to be obviously non-human but what if they weren’t?

Sighing in frustration, the teen deflated in his uncomfortable plastic seat and slid down until he was almost eye level with the desk, ignoring a side eye from his tablemate. For all he knew the woman could simply be a vampire. Or at least a vampire with a less than noticeable kill count; a vegetarian vampire like on Supernatural. Oh, if he would be so lucky. Maybe she went out of town to make her kills, like a serial killer avoiding the cops tracking her down.

It was good he was already staring at his screen so he noticed it was the end of class. That damn bell was about to go off again. Scowling preemptively, Stiles shoved his supplies back in his bag and erased his history before logging off. God forbid by some twist of fate, Allison Argent used the computer and noticed his search history. The wolf still couldn’t help flinching when the alarm rang, signaling time for their third period.

I’m getting freakin’ earplugs before tomorrow. This is insane! Still complaining internally, Stiles didn’t bother to look for Scott in the halls on the way to the Language classrooms as he knew their paths wouldn’t cross without someone catching a tardy slip.

Mr. Stilinski’s class blocks for his junior year were fairly tedious, especially in the mornings as he didn’t have a class with his best friend, Mr. McCall, until fourth period. His third lesson of the day was third year German. There’d been a slight miscommunication their freshman year and Scott ended up taking Spanish. Because it was easier, obviously. Stiles still thought it had more to do with him not wanting to be schooled by his abuela. With Lydia guiding the cool clique to French and Scott in Espanol, the teenager was essentially alone in German. Well, with the exception of--

“Stiles!”

His first step in the door and he almost fell on his ass from the unexpected weight. Getting bear hugged suddenly could send even a werewolf off balance, no matter how petite the female. With a soft oof, Stilinski gracelessly held onto the girl in his arms to get back on his feet, then was slightly shaken when she quickly backed up and grabbed his shoulders to scan him up and down. The blond demanded, “Are you okay? How are you feeling?”

“Heather, nice to see you too. Don’t mind the shoulder, it’s totally fine. Not like I was just mauled or anything.” That was irony, right? Or was it just sarcasm? Either way, the statement was true, even if others took it the wrong way.
With an apologetic wince her hands flew off him, “Sorry, sorry, sorry.” Stiles had known her since they were in diapers, actually longer than he’d known Scott. She was kind of the epitome of ‘pretty girl next door’ in looks but wasn’t actually next door. If not for his Mom passing and the year he’d determinedly pushed the girl and her mother away, he might’ve considered her like a sister. It’s too bad he was infatuated with Lydia from a young age too, since if he didn't think of Heather as a sister, she was certainly kind and pretty enough to date. Though she’d never shown any interest, especially since creating her girlfriend clique in middle school.

Just past her shoulder, Emily was glaring at him, which he totally didn't blame her for. Most people who didn't know him took offence to his mouth. Hell, people who did know him often still took offence. Sighing in contrition, Stiles added, “It's fine. Really, I’m okay. The bandages are pretty padded and I have painkillers.” That he’s never opened. “Thanks for asking. Seriously,” he ended with a soft smile, trying to keep the words as unsarcastic as possible despite his habits.

Heather gave him a small smile in return, looking a bit rueful. Likely because this was the most they’d spoken since they did a group project together a full year ago. That had been incredibly awkward, but this was actually nice. It was a nice thing to know he had other people who cared besides his Dad and the McCalls.

Their teacher entered behind them, forcing Stiles forward. They ended the conversation with a mutual nod, Emily rolling her eyes and herding Heather to their usual seats. The class settled quickly, since a third year language course meant nothing but the kids that were serious about being there attended. Only two years were required to graduate, but as the teachers said: Universities liked commitment.

Mr. Douglas pulled out a stack of papers while greeting the class, “Guten Morgen, meine Schüler.” He didn't pass them out yet, instead leaning against the front of his desk to pick out students and ask about their weekend in German for participation points. Stiles noticed the man glance at him before deliberately looking away and calling on someone in front of him. Yeah, he didn't think the verb ‘attack’ was in the textbook either. About five minutes later, the teacher counted out papers for the first in each row to pass back and announced their usual Monday new vocabulary section. The lecture would be in both German and English, allowing for complex questions and a worksheet to help them take notes.

The routine was soothing without being dull, engaging the entire class so that Stiles could take moments to center himself against the sensory stimulation without looking like a moron. Or like he's taking short naps. He even managed to get all he needed from the lecture written down thanks to the way Mr. Douglas had organized the worksheet. Colored highlighters helped the young wolf sort which words he’d gotten right on the first try and which he’d need to practice with.

Maybe it was the stink of the pens or maybe he was just getting used to his senses, but German wasn’t nearly so bad as English period. If anything, now that his senses weren't getting in the way, it
was his own disorders distracting him from taking sensical notes the whole time. Going on three hours inside without his Adderall and Stiles started to stare out windows, distracted by the gnawing of his stomach, the wind rustling the trees, by worries about seeing Scott next period.

The margins of his worksheet took on a brainstorming pattern, bubbles of thoughts connecting one to the other. If Scott doesn't speak to him, he’ll just apologize. If Scott asks about the scars, he’ll take him out to the lacrosse field at lunch and try to get his claws out, make his eyes glow, something… If Scott--if Scott--if Scott--

This was going to drive him mad. Telling himself to stop, Stiles started fidgeting with the pen instead of writing and still half-listening to the lecture. He knew his best friend and had to stop second guessing himself. Odds were if Stiles tried to talk to him in class the boy would give him the cold shoulder, basically allowing Stiles to say whatever he wanted until he got a reaction. Or detention. Neither could tell where the tactic came from, Stiles or Scott, but both boys tended to use it against other people when angered. If he tried during lunch, he'd probably get a taste of Scott's explosive, though short-lived temper. Before he was Bitten, talking at lunch would probably have resolved things faster. But Stiles had something of a temper too when provoked hard enough, and that was something he couldn't risk anymore.

During class it was.

And to the new wolf’s dismay, he was realizing that he was going to apologize. It was inevitable, wasn't it? He couldn't reveal the transformation at school in guaranteed safety, if he even really managed it. But Stiles wanted his friend back. With an unusual amount of anxiety running through him at the prospect of losing Scott, he knew he was going to lie to keep his best friend. His brother. His Pack.

Brown eyes went wide as he instinctively turned to the window facing the encroaching woods. It felt like enlightenment, knowing suddenly as he did that his father, Scott, Melissa, and Derek were his pack now. That they were family and becoming a werewolf had pushed those protective emotions to extremes. It explained how sensitive he’d been on their last grocery trip. He teased and bought only healthy foodstuffs, but he usually didn’t get as anxious as he had over the Sheriff’s diet. Man, he hoped Derek could rein him in, or that he listened when Dad told him he was being an ass. Because Stiles was overprotective as a human teenager; what was he going to do as a werewolf?

The bell went off, causing the lycan to flinch and grind his teeth. Ear plugs, he thought viciously. Taking a deep breath to unclench his hands where they, thankfully, had not literally clawed the desk edges, Stiles swiped his supplies into his backpack and took off. He didn't have advanced placement in history, not least because of his sophomore essay on male circumcision in Finstock’s Economics class. Focusing on dates and narrowed history topics didn't come easily to him, constantly having to narrow down his home assignments and going off topic all the time on in-class essays just about guaranteed that he had a regular class with Scott.
He made it to the class door before he realized he wasn't even winded by the quick run. *Shit, way to lay low Stiles.* Checking the hall, then peeking his head around the door got him a number of odd looks. This was probably how he got his reputation as a loon. Not that he really gave a damn; it worked for him. Scott wasn't the most observant kid around. Especially because he seemed to be daydreaming.

With a roll of his eyes, Stilinski zipped over to the empty seat behind McCall before anyone else could take it. He saw the curly-haired boy straighten up, but otherwise that was the only indicator the wolf had been noticed. Biting his lip while getting his things out with more clattering than necessary, Stiles felt his leg shake in nerves as he considered what to say first. The teacher, Mr. Westover started writing topic points on the board in preparation. Finally, the teen just leaned forward and hissed a comical whisper, “Hey Scott.”

Dark brown eyes glared over one tense shoulder then looked forward again. Stiles’ stomach knotted. “My dad found out the animal hairs at the crime scene--they’re *wolf* hairs.” No response. His leg shook hard enough to audibly tap.

“Dude, there *are no* wolves in California. Not for like, sixty years.” Stiles watched the back of his friend’s head tilt, likely in confusion. Not uncommon for Scott. The tardy bell rang and their teacher closed the classroom door before beginning to lecture on the judicial branch of government.

He ignored it in favor of leaning forward even further to take advantage of Scott's lessening temper, “I’m sorry I thought I was becoming a werewolf, okay? I just freaked out.”

This time his friend’s shoulders deflated, an exasperated sigh following along. From pissed to upset, he could work with that. Stiles remembered what Danny told him about Scott spending an hour in the nurse’s office with no small amount of guilt. He softly added, “I shouldn't have gone out to the woods. I’m sorry, dude.”

The double scoop of sincerity and apology was probably the kicker. Scott finally turned around to clasp his shoulder, the scarred one as no one seemed to really remember which side he was injured, “Alright, I forgive you already. I’m sorry too.”

“Mr. McCall, is there something you’d like to share with the class?”

The poor boy’s eyes went wide as saucers before quickly alighting on the nearby Mr. Westover. *Whoops.* The man hovered by Scott’s desk, looking thoroughly put out with them. While Scott
gaped like a noob, Stiles sucked it up and took one for the team, hoping his distraction was sufficient
to delay any detentions.

“Ah, I was just begging Scott to go over my homework. You know, so you don't have to read about
the history of male circumcision instead of the Supreme Court.” Giggles erupted among the students
right on que, because all these teenagers had the maturity of a toddler. The well known off-topic
essay was the bane of every teacher's existence, especially when it sent Coach Finstock into a
frothing rage after reading. And by frothing, Stiles meant that he could barely get his angry words
out he was so frazzled and spitting annoyed, which was an impressive feat by Stilinski standards.
Though to be fair, it’s not like Finstock had to read every word and actually grade it.

Westover sighed, and shook his head dismissively, “Thank you for your sacrifice, Mr. McCall.”
More giggles and the class settled down into the rather dull lecture, or at least quieted down verbally.
With his enhanced senses, the wolf could tell there was a higher than average number of texting
going on and smartphone fidgeting this period than his last three. Sitting closer to the front, Scott
couldn't get away with that, but he did manage to get distracted anyhow.

Whiskey eyes watched with amusement as Scott’s pen slowed and finally fell still, hand going limp.
By the angle of his best friend’s head, Stiles could tell he was staring just above the whiteboard in
front of him but obviously not seeing it. Poking him with a pen and making the poor kid jump a little,
he teased, “You’re thinking about Allison, aren’t you?”

“Shhh,” the curly-haired mop returned, barely over his shoulder, “Shut up, Stiles.” Said boy grinned
and mockingly said the pitiful comeback right back at him. Because sometimes he acted like a child
too. Kids had more fun.

Scott resumed focus, or tried to anyway. His best friend could tell he was restless and more interested
in the clock’s second hand moving closer minute by minute to signaling lunchtime. As if by osmosis,
Stiles found he was growing more unsettled as well. His attempts to pay attention to the teacher grew
pitiful, and he completely lost track of the lecture as gold-brown eyes were drawn again and again to
curly brown hair. The wolf could see the individual strands clearly without aid; he was mesmerized
by how they vibrated with every shift of his friend’s weight.

Stiles leaned forward, resting his chin on tense forearms as he gazed ahead, vision fixed on his pack
brother. His fingers twitched in time with the boy’s movement. A low, playful growl started to
vibrate in his throat without conscious thought. The sound was inaudible, though it still gently rocked
the pen on his desk. He watched with fascination as tanned skin started to prickle under his stare, tiny
hairs standing at attention.

“Dude!” his best friend said under his breath, startling the new wolf from his concentration. Scott ran
a hand over his neck, straightening up in offense, “Knock it off, will you?”
“What?” Stiles blinked rapidly, thoughts stuttering and struggling to realize when he’d stopped thinking. A cold sweat broke out in his pits and down his back as he finally comprehended what he’d been doing.

McCall hunched forward over his notebook, getting back to being a diligent student at last. He answered absently, “I could feel you staring, man,” and shook his hair as if to cast off the feeling. The moment was already dismissed.

But the bitten lycan hadn’t just been staring. He’d wanted to pounce. Aw crap, Stiles thought nervously and began gnawing on his fingernails, desperately hoping they didn’t become claws. It hadn’t been a hostile desire, which was likely his only saving grace against transforming in class.

Yet his heart rate had sped up and wasn’t slowing down. He swallowed and involuntarily bit harder on his cuticles, tasting blood and the quick sting-heat of broken skin healed in an instant. When the action eased his breathing and the taste of blood on his second finger slowed his pulse, it dawned on the shapeshifter that he was developing an entirely different problem.

Releasing his trembling fingers, Stiles bit his lip in dismay and instinctively looked out the window. He couldn’t hear Derek’s heartbeat anymore. His eyes skittered away to the teacher, the clock, and the woods again. The minutes stretched like agonizing hours, every second a debate between his anxiety about shifting in class and his dread for his new habit of self-harm.

Not that it was a habit. It wasn’t. Really.

His father’s voice rang clear as crystal in his head. One’s an incident. Two’s a coincidence. Three’s--

The shrill school bell announced the beginning of lunch, and relief flooded his system along with a split second idea he ran with. Stiles slid his school supplies into his open bag, making a right mess, and clapped Scott on the shoulder, “Meet you at lunch, be right back!” He didn’t pay attention to his friend’s reply.

Jogging as slowly as he could manage among the lunch crowd, the teen wolf made it to the back door closest to the lacrosse field and had to restrain himself from sprinting into the inviting woodlands. He passed between the cheap stadium seating, tossing his still half-open backpack underneath. The run had invigorated him, changing his anxiety into adrenaline, all his senses peaking at once. The second his sneakers hit the tree line he was gone.
Stiles ran like he’d never run before. The sheer power in his limbs, his lungs and heart, was exhilarating. The world moved so much faster beneath his feet, the wind whipped through the layers of his shirts, fiercely cold against his too warm skin. He didn’t know where he was going; he didn’t give a damn. The cool, wild air in his sinuses and the thin game trails under his feet guided his path. Even while he was in motion, his mind was cataloguing the world for every nuance and shift. Squirrels and chipmunks, smaller game and startled birds fled before him. A thicker animal musk made his mouth water, and his hindbrain screamed *prey*.

Sharp hearing caught the tread of another being, running as fast as him, parallel and not far. A familiar heartbeat said *pack* and Derek’s fierce expression came to mind. The young wolf grinned, fangs lengthening, and he thought about wolves hunting together to separate and bring down a kill. Endorphins rushed through him hotly, and the only reason he didn’t shout in excitement was how breathless the sprint left him.

The sound of his hunting partner shifted, angling towards him. Still grinning, the bitten switched tracks from hunting to play-fighting in an instant. Just before the larger wolf lunged to tackle him, Stiles twisted to catch him, arms outstretched to clasp Derek’s shoulders and make him hit the ground first. His quick brown eyes caught the minute surprise across Hale’s face, but it didn’t last long.

While Derek hit the leaf litter first, he used their momentum to tumble the lighter teen once more and press Stiles into the dirt. The new wolf lost the last of his breath in a rush, but didn’t let go of his elder or stop grinning as a playful growl vibrated in his chest. He snapped his fangs toward the man’s nose in distraction, then pressed the advantage as Derek leaned back.

With a knobby knee and a hard pull, Stiles managed to be on top for a hot second before something changed. The other Beta’s scent went acrid, his stoic face snarling, and entire body tense with anger. Stilinski instinctively went limp, letting the irate wolf manhandle him back into the leaves and tilting his chin up to expose his neck helpfully. Hale panted, fierce and surprisingly human as he loomed over the teenager. The bitten wolf blinked up at him, uncertain what he did wrong though his more rational mind was still reeling at his odd impulses.

“What the Hell was that!” Derek demanded, still holding the teen down to restrain him from taking off again.

Stiles widened his arms, palms up in surrender, as his thoughts churned, “Uh… I felt like a run?”

The other man snarled, “You did that on *purpose*?” He stammered, lies on the tip of his tongue but held back by sheer will. Hale was a much better wolf than he was, he’d definitely be able to catch a falsehood, even with their blood up from the run. As if sensing his intentions, or maybe reading his
scent, Derek gave him a short shake, “Tell me what the Hell you were thinking!”

Stiles forced the truth from between his teeth like ripping duct tape from skin, which he actually had first hand experience with. “I almost pounced on Scott. So I bit myself. I just needed to get away, it’s lunch hour anyway,” he ended with a whine, completely aware of how pathetic he was being.

Derek studied him for a half minute, then crouched to the side instead of directly on top of the submissive wolf. The boy sat up sheepishly, busied his hands by picking leaves out of his clothes. With furrowed brows, the stronger wolf picked the first topic, “If you almost attacked him did he notice anything?”

“I didn’t attack him!” Stiles said indignantly. His limbs gave a guilty fidget, “I just--he kept moving. And I guess, I was teasing him just before, so I wanted to--you know. Tackle him, mess with him. Like I thought,” he gestured back and forth between them. “I thought if we weren’t hunting together, we’d… Play.” Oh God, that sounded awful. He could feel a blush forming, getting redder the hotter his cheeks and ears felt. Stuttering, he clawed a hand through his buzz cut while he wondered why the heck that had even come to mind.

Who even looked at Derek Hale and thought play in the same sentence? Unless, well… The other kind of-- stop that thought!

The born wolf helped out by interrupting, “You’re really in tune with the wolf.” Stilinski made a noise of confusion, but bit his lip in the hopes the reticent man continued. He was rewarded for once. Hale even looked mildly approving as he offered, “Control comes with time and practice. You used pain to keep yourself in check because you haven’t found an anchor yet.”

“An anchor?” Stiles echoed, curiosity stronger than his discomfort over the fact he was being told ‘Good Job!’ for hurting himself.

The dark haired wolf sighed through his nose, but offered a hand up to the boy as he stood. Surprised but pleased by the gesture, the teenager accepted and stood upright with barely a flail. Derek directed them back along the game trail, toward the school, and then explained, “An anchor is something meaningful to you. Something to bind you to your humanity.”

*Personal, in other words*, the new shapeshifter speculated before deciding to skip asking after Hale’s anchor. If it was personalized to the werewolf, it was probably private. Could it literally be anything? “So are we talking a noun: person, place or thing? Or, uh, a catch phrase?”
There was almost a stutter to the born wolf’s steps, and Stiles wondered what he’d said to throw him off guard. Derek watched him with a frown, but it seemed more thoughtful than annoyed, “It can be anything, but it has to be essential to you being human. My family used a talisman and a mantra. Alpha, Beta, Omega. It represents the idea that we could rise to one or fall to another. We’d say the three words, and with each one, we’d tell ourselves we were getting calmer, more in control.”

“Like focused meditation,” the teen commented. He considered the mantra for a minute, but ultimately had to disregard it. “I didn’t grow up with it though. Not like you. I think… I’ll have to focus on my dad. Hurting him was just--I can’t do it again.”

His companion’s frown deepened, “A person as an anchor is risky. I’ve seen it work perfectly for lovers, but if they break up or die, the anchor fails. Usually sending the wolf into a tailspin.” Stiles’ lips fell open, dismay written across his face, as he reconsidered his anchor. He softly cursed, letting his fingers twitch and tap where they would. Derek reluctantly added, “But using the Pack as an anchor is common too. And that is usually harder to destroy.”

Stilinski gulped involuntarily, the Hale fire a silent elephant between them, then caught himself staring and tried to distract himself with the local wildlife. Of which, there was none since his dash through the woods had sent all the critters into their holes. But he had a good idea what had been the last Hale’s anchor before he became just that. The Last Hale.

Like most of the difficult thoughts he’d had that day, Stiles sidestepped it. Fairly sure where the school was ahead of them, the young wolf darted over to jab Derek’s shoulder, garnering a reactive snarl before he skipped ahead. “Race you to the school! Bet I’m faster than you!”

He barely heard, “I caught you last time!” shouted after him as he took off into the wind. The lycan could still hear the other Beta though, beginning with a crash through undergrowth to catch up in a hurry and then going silent except for his lungs and heartbeat. Stiles knew he wasn’t being quiet by any means and wondered if one day he might be skilled enough to silently stalk the woods like Derek did.

Focusing on his steps, his breathing, the new wolf pushed himself harder than before. There was so much going on with his body, watching where he put his feet, keeping the right direction, it was easy enough not to get distracted for the five minutes he stayed far ahead of his mentor. When Derek started closing the distance, his adrenaline coursed harder and he could feel the change come over him smoothly. Fingers heavier with claws, fangs pressing against his lips and his ears warming with the extra hair covering them from the wind. His eyes glowed blue, bright and excited with renewed energy as he focused on keeping ahead of the other wolf.

For heart straining minutes, Stiles managed to keep the lead before the scent and sounds of the high school reached him. The woods ended a mere twenty yards ahead of him and he’d have to slow
down in order to walk out of the woods normally. Raising his arms in victory, the teen announced, “Calling it! I win!”

And yelped shrilly when he was suddenly tackled from behind, thankfully onto his side so he didn’t get a load of leaves down his shirts. When he caught his breath again, the teenager started to laugh. Endorphins buzzed through him as he rested on his back, plaid covered shoulder overlapping with leather. He breathlessly muttered, “You are such a sore loser.”

Derek huffed, giving up, “You are fast.” He staggered up, proving that Stilinski really had given him a run for his money. Sweat colored his grey henley black, and Stiles looked down to realize he’d sweated through his first T-shirt as well. Crap, he’d have to do something before returning to Scott. Not that he really thought the boy would notice considering the incident with his bite scars. But someone more clever, like Argent might. Derek at least helped him back up after throwing him around, and added, “Not as strong as me, but I work for that. And you shifted back when you started laughing.”

Amber eyes blinked. “Huh.” He shrugged off his jacket and plaid overshirt, explaining to raised, bushy Hale brows, “Can’t go back to school all sweaty.” Stripping the graphic T and balling it up to use as a rag real quick, he was surprised to find his chest different than he remembered yesterday. Long fingers followed his happy trail up past his belly button in wonder. “Is it just me or are my muscles getting airbrushed? And a little hairier?”

Derek snorted, the twitch of his mouth catching Stiles’ eye for the way it almost smiled. With a roll of his eyes, the Beta said, “Did you think you’d get stronger and look exactly the same?”

“No?” Stiles answered, tone still a question which went ignored. He wiped off his skin, goosebumps rising up as the sweat evaporated in the cool air. Dropping the cloth, the boy quickly dressed, buttoning up his white and blue plaid and half zipping his jacket to warm up. As he stuffed half of the dirty shirt into a back pocket, Stilinski looked back up at Derek and felt settled again. Like the moment they’d had before school. He was tempted to thank the born wolf, though the exact words why escaped him.

Hale warned, “Your lunch hour is almost up,” making the younger werewolf flail in sudden panic. Stiles cursed and started jogging back to collect his backpack in a hurry.

“Thanks, Derek. See you later!” he called softly, knowing the words would be caught by superior hearing. Stiles hustled into the school, through moderately crowded halls until he reached the cafeteria. His thoughts had still centered around his wofy mentor, wondering if he’d ever figure out why being with his Pack was better than the awesomeness that was Adderall for his ability to concentrate, until he noticed just where Scott had ended up.
Near the center of the table groupings McCall sat staring adoringly at Allison Argent, surrounded by the Golden Trio with their hangers on. Huffing through his nose, Stiles shook his head and went to the empty food line. The staff had already begun clean up, so he served himself some fries and fried chicken, snatching a half bottle of water as an afterthought. Shoring up his self-esteem, Stiles dropped his tray at the end of the table with a clatter. He ignored the stares from the popular kids as he dragged a spare chair over to sit with Scott on his left and some lacrosse jock’s girl on his right.

“Hey Scott,” he greeted, and then rolled his eyes at the lackluster response. McCall barely smiled at him before turning back to his hunter girlfriend with a concerned look. The rest of the table went back to ignoring him. Business as usual. At least they didn’t bother to bully him. He’s not sure that was better actually, but right now matching hostilities wouldn’t be a good idea for him anyway. The werewolf focused on stuffing his face, knowing he had very little time left to eat before the next class.

“How do you know we’re not actual competition?” Argent interjected, leaning forward to speak to Jackson around Lydia. She glanced back at Scott, “You can bowl, right?”

The curly-haired teen stammered, “S-sort of.”

Jackson sneered back, “Is it sort of, or yes?”

Scott’s temper was tapped; his best friend could tell even without the hint of acrid anger wafting off of him. The new first line athlete leaned forward, “Yes. In fact, I’m a great bowler.”

The teen wolf watched agape with fascination. What a trainwreck! No one had a chance to dispute it though, as the bell rang and prompted everyone to leave their seats. The table emptied even while Scott smiled nervously back at Allison and stayed with Stiles, who was gulping down the water.

Once the popular crowd was a sufficient distance, Stiles commented dryly, “You’re a terrible bowler.”

“I know!” cried the Hispanic teen, dropping his head into his hands in distress. “I’m such an idiot.”

“What the heck was that about anyway?” the officer’s son asked, curious since he hadn’t tried to listen in across the room with all the other students’ conversations going on. Maybe one day he’d be able to figure that out. Maybe Derek would teach him.
Scott sighed, “It was awful. First Lydia asked where Allison and I were going to hang out--”

“Hang out?” Stiles emphasized with sympathetic misery. His friend nodded sadly. “You don’t hang out with hot girls, Scotty. Next thing you know, you’ll be her gay best friend. You and Danny can start hanging out.”

Ignoring that last part, the lacrosse player continued in anguish, “I ask Allison out on a date and then we’re hanging out. I make first line, and the captain is out to get me. And now we’re going bowling.” He gave a pathetic human growl of frustration. In jerky movements, the kid snagged his bag and tray, letting his best friend trip to follow after him.

Stiles consoled him on the way to the math hall, patting him on the back as they split ways. Scott was stuck in Algebra II while Stilinski was rewarded for his genius by slogging through AP Calculus. Mrs. Martin noticed him as he came in, giving him a motherly concerned expression in silence. And though she was a parent and a teacher, at least she was sensitive to not embarrassing her daughter and so other students reaped the benefits.

The pretty blond lady started the lesson as usual, using the chalkboard for example problems with the latest equation. Stiles managed to keep up, shifting between the class work and the assigned homework written up on the far corner of the board. His long time crush sat near the front despite her relationship to the teacher, and eventually her chemically fashioned perfume permeated the room to him, making his nose itch. He absently tapped his pencil, distracted by the thought of whether his love for her cold, beautiful brilliance would survive his lycanthropy. She couldn’t wear that shit all the time, right? Not that she’d even bother to throw water at him if he was on fire. Based on her reaction to his attack and the cafeteria where she didn’t even stare at him in annoyance like Jackson had, she’d probably just walk right by. At least Jackson would probably stomp on him in a so-called attempt to smother the flames.

Mrs. Martin began explaining a new subset of rules that Stiles diligently wrote down in his math notes, mind turning away from her daughter. He wondered if Natalie Martin would change her last name when the divorce was finalized. She was still going by Missus despite the separation so he wasn’t sure. Though it probably said something about Mr. Martin that one of the first things she did with the dissolution of her marriage was go back to work. It wasn’t like she needed the money, having had her own family money before wedding her wealth to the Martin clan’s.

The hour went by quickly, much to Stiles’ dismay. Not that he particularly enjoyed Calculus, but his last class of the day was a real pain. Having finished his life science credits in his first two years and wanting to avoid further math in Physics, Stiles had signed up for Chemistry before hearing about the sheer awfulness that was Adrian Harris.
At least he had Scott as his lab partner most days. When the chemist wasn’t forcibly separating them because he thought Stilinski was particularly irritating. But just before he could skulk into the labs, his phone went off with his father’s ringtone. Confused and instantly worried, since his dad never called him during school hours, the teen wolf stepped aside to a fountain nook away from the crush of student bodies.

“Dad?” he greeted cautiously.

“Stiles. I caught you before your last class, right?”

The shapeshifter turned his back to the stone walls, scanning the crowd just in time to watch Scott and Allison flirt on their way into Harris’ class. “Yeah, and if you have an excuse to get me away from Harris I’ll even make you spaghetti with meatballs tonight.”

The Sheriff laughed softly and sarcastically asked, “Oh really? And would those meatballs be turkey instead of beef or pork?”

Stiles scoffed with offense, “Hey, you wouldn’t notice. They taste just the same in spaghetti sauce.”

“I’d notice,” his father deadpanned. With a sigh, he continued, “But have you seen or heard from Derek today?”

What essentially boiled down to a frolic in the woods raced through his mind and Stiles inexplicably blushed without quite knowing why. He didn’t think he had any shame left to care about being seen as foolish. “Uh, yeah. You could say that. Why?”

“He’s still not answering the phone. And this time we’ll need more than his statement.”

The wolf’s heart started to pound, “What?”

“The morgue is ready to release Laura Hale.”

Stiles felt his pulse in his ears, throbbing with his sudden influx of grief and sympathy. “Shit… Ah,” he glanced up at the ceiling, remembering that the late bell would ring shortly. “I’ll take him to the
“You think he’ll answer your call?” his dad asked skeptically.

The teen wolf crossed the empty hall to hover before the still open door, in Harris’ line of sight if he bothered to look up, for the chance he wouldn’t be called tardy if he was technically in the classroom. “He doesn’t need to. He’s at the school.” Stiles caught the teacher’s eye, and in answer to the sneer of anger, continued, “So we’ll see you at the station, Dad.” And was amused when adult turned away in seemingly impotent rage. The shrill bell sounded the beginning of class, something his father clearly heard over the phone.

“Right. Alright, try not to annoy Harris anymore than you already have. Kay, kid?”

A small smile quirked his lips even with their previous conversation. Stiles signed off, “No promises. Later, Dad.”

With his father’s goodbye, he quickly slipped his phone into a pocket and headed for the last remaining empty lab space. It was by a window which didn’t indicate good things for his ability to concentrate. At least it was only a row behind Scott, even if it was behind Allison as well. Partnered up with Isaac for the day, Stiles removed his Chemistry text and papers, glad that the lesson on the board didn’t seem to signify an experiment.

Isaac was probably worse in Chem than Scott was, and Stiles always needed to remain alert on lab days in order to keep up his grade. Still, book lessons were harder to stay focused on when he couldn’t do much with his hands. His feet tapped while he solved the equation on the board, half-listening to the lecture with the highlighted segments of the chapter already in front of him.

Yet he still found a moment’s thought for Derek again. And how he apparently couldn’t even take a call from the Sheriff while stalking his son from the woods. Stiles sighed, tapping his pencil rapidly until the tip broke on him. He growled softly, inadvertently catching Isaac’s attention, and bent down to retrieve a pen. Not that he blamed the other wolf. He certainly hadn’t been eager to give a statement about his sister.

Glancing between his best friend and the hunter, watching them steal moments of cuteness in class, made the teen wolf grind his teeth. How could an Argent seem so innocent? Was it just her youth making her seem so, or did she not know anything about the supernatural? He switched trains of thought back to Derek and as if by instinct lifted his head to window.
Across from him, right outside the treeline, stood Derek Hale like the looming predator he was. After a short startle and curious hum, the new lycan muttered, “Dude. You look like a creeper. Pedo-wolf much.”

Far away he saw the man’s mouth move and focused hard enough to catch, “Don’t call me dude,” just before Derek stepped back into the shadows. A glow of bright blue irises were Stiles’ only evidence that the man was still watching out for him. The teenager smiled and turned back to the front. He’d leave worrying about what they were doing after school, after school.

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