

Meanwhile Across the Big Pond

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Derek slowly blinks awake just a couple of minutes before his alarm is set to go off. He rolls over and checks the time on his phone, gently unplugging it from the charger. Sinking back into his fluffy pillow, he listens to the other four heartbeats in the house: Jackson (fast asleep), Isaac (light slumber), Cora (about to fall back asleep again) and the little wonder growing inside of her (wide awake) that has just woken its mother by kicking. Or so Derek presumes. He focuses on the tiny heartbeat, smiling to himself.

The phone vibrates in his hand. He cancels the alarm and swings his legs out of bed. Stretching, he shuffles over to the window and opens it all the way. The fresh, crisp morning air greets him, a breeze plays around his ears. Breathing deeply, Derek enjoys the beautiful landscape. The hills of the Scottish Highlands, the dark, thick forest bordering on one side of their property. A huge lake and a picturesque village lie beyond those woods and sometimes the werewolves perceive curious noises and scents, carried over the tree tops by the wind. Ever since September started, they swear there are sounds like a high school – excited chatter, carefree laughter, easy banter, cheering like a game is underway – and cafeteria smells, too. Even though the little village called Hogsmeade doesn't even have any schools.

But this early on a Saturday morning, there are only the sounds of the forest and their small farm. The roaster is already up and about and some of the sheep, too.

Derek watches the cat dash across the yard and thinks – not for the first time – that moving up here, into the middle of nowhere, Scotland, was the best idea any of them had in a very long time.

London, as exciting and grand as it may be, is not exactly suitable for werewolf purposes and each of them had their reasons for wanting to leave. Isaac felt claustrophobic in such a huge city, having only ever lived in Beacon Hills. Derek suffered from the constant reminders of his time in New York, every other corner triggered the memories of Laura and losing her. Cora despised the hustle and bustle of big city life, preferring the calm and quiet of the South-American small town she'd spent half of her childhood in. Jackson claimed the polluted air was bad for his skin, or perhaps it was the nosiness of his relatives that bothered him so much. And then Cora got pregnant and they agreed to move somewhere nice, quiet and close to nature. Isaac found the old farm house they now call their home online. A week later they stood dumbfounded in the yard, keys and deed to the property dangling from Derek's

fingers as the realtor hightailed it out of there. The ad hadn't exactly mentioned the existing livestock.

With a minute shake of his head, Derek comes back to the present and puts on his plaid dressing gown and matching slippers.

"Good morning, Sleepyhead," he whispers to the framed photograph on his bedside table and gently touches the relaxed face of a sleeping Stiles.

Peter took it that summer before the Alpha Pack disaster, secretly of course. Derek and Stiles had – unintentionally – fallen asleep on each other one night after too much research. Peter used the photo to tease Stiles mercilessly until the teen decided to take Peter's fun out of it by sleeping with Derek for the rest of the summer. Well, not exactly "with", more like "next to", "on top of" or even "half way under" and "curled up with" on occasion.

Derek can still recall the intoxicating mixture that made up Stiles' scent before trepidation and dread ruined everything.

He often wonders how Stiles is doing these days, but pain lurks down that road, so he never calls.

They use an actual landline, because their cell phones have no service out here. Cora calls it "living à la vintage". She loves everything about their new home.

Derek tiptoes down the upstairs hallway, passes Jackson's bedroom and the empty one they want to convert into a nursery. The door to Cora's and Isaac's room is ajar. A warm feeling settles around his heart as Derek peeks into the semi-darkness of the cozy room. Cora is sleeping on her side, as tightly curled up around herself as the baby bump allows it. Isaac is snoring very softly, his nose buried in her hair and his arms wrapped protectively around his little family. It is quite a sight and Derek's heart skips a beat in anticipation. He carefully closes the door and dares to breathe again.

On his way down the stairs, he muses about a joke Jackson made a few weeks ago. "Hey, since we have like a dozen sheep in that barn over there, we should totally learn how to knit. The little, old ladies in Hogsmeade won't let us hear the end of it, if Baby Hale wears no cute knitted socks or hats or gloves and stuff." Jackson will turn out to be a fabulous older cousin one day, Derek is quite sure of that. Also, he's kind of taken by the idea of a tiny knitted hat with a giant pompom on top and a triskelion on the front. The colors orange and blue come to his mind, making him chuckle.

Derek enters the kitchen and finds yesterday's mail still on the dinner table. The white envelope stands out against the dark wood. Chris Argent sent his monthly update on Peter's ... health.

When Derek decided to move to London, he didn't want to leave Peter behind in Beacon Hills. Lunatic megalomaniac or not, he was still family and Derek never liked Eichen House. When Chris offered to take Peter to France and keep an eye on him in some secret Argent family dungeon, Derek agreed. Not that Peter is up to much these

days. They are still searching for Kate, but Chris promised the cell across from Peter's to her.

Derek puts the old-fashioned kettle on and grabs the letter to file it away in the oaken secretary that sits in the far corner of the living room. He pushes the wooden drawer shut and looks around the living room. It reminds him so much of the one he grew up in, even though there are barely any similarities. Perhaps it's the fire place. His childhood home had one, too, the brick chimney a grim survivor of past tragedies.

Derek steps closer, a hand trailing along the patterns decorating the mantle. On top, some framed photos form a miniature gallery. Isaac named it "the Mantle of Fond Memories." It's basically nice pictures, old keep-sakes and hilarious candids put together. Nobody knows why exactly, but all four of them felt the need to build some sort of memorial. Derek's gaze flicks from frame to frame. Laura posing on the hood of her Camaro, Jackson's adoptive parents, Erica and Boyd snuggling in the moldy seats of the subway car, Lydia in a pretty dress, a faded Hale family picture that shows all of them alive, young and laughing – even Peter, the McCall pack sitting at a picnic table outside the school cafeteria, Camden Lahey in dress uniform, Derek and Stiles in a heated discussion, Cora's foster parents, Erica and Stiles in a pillow fight, Melissa hugging Isaac, Jackson and Danny in lacrosse gear, the very first ultrasound picture of Baby Hale...

The kettle whistles sharply and Derek rushes back into the kitchen. He fixes tea for Jackson and Cora, coffee for Isaac and himself. The sound of sleep-muddled movement comes from upstairs as Derek starts cooking breakfast.

Soon they'll be sitting around the dinner table, enjoying simple food and discussing plans for the weekend. Isaac will go to work (a part-time job at the most curious inn called The Three Broomsticks – Isaac bets, they throw killer Halloween parties) and do the grocery shopping. It's Cora's turn to do laundry. Jackson's probably going to accompany Derek out onto the sheep pasture and read books for his online courses while Derek bounds around the flock and tends sheep in his wolf form.

He sets the table and thinks of his mom and Laura. They could do the full wolf shift, too. Would they have looked a lot alike, if they were still alive? Derek likes to think so. He loves spending time in his thick, black pelt. The fur has a way of making him feel content with himself, confident and free like he never feels in his human skin.

His thoughts drift off without him really noticing and just like that he's daydreaming about the meadow behind the house, dotted with colorful wild flowers, sheep grazing leisurely while the pack is cuddling in a big puppy pile, Baby Hale in the very center of it and Derek observes happily, his tail wagging joyfully, ready to join the pile and drag the person whose long fingers scratch him lovingly behind his ears with him. Stiles would beat him to the pile, welcome him with open arms and bright laughter while the Betas tease them about dog kisses, but Derek would ignore them all in favor of trying to lick the moles right off Stiles' face as if they were made of chocolate.

"Oh my God, Derek!"

"Just call him already!"

"This is getting ridiculous."

Derek jumps and turns away from the window towards the table where Isaac, Cora and Jackson are sitting down and looking at him with understanding, worry and a bit of fond exasperation. Derek fights down a blush and takes his seat.

Perhaps, he'll call Stiles...

But that's later.

~ The End ~