We Don't Need Grace

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### We Don't Need Grace

by mia6363

**Summary**

The only reason Stiles and Finstock even met was because the Sheriff needed someone to wear his kid out. Countless clubs and sports turned Stiles away, and the alcoholic gym owner with a foul mouth and crazy hair was the Sheriff’s last hope. What started as an awkward arrangement would become an incredible journey full of gymnastics, blue ribbons, and gold medals.

Family isn’t always blood, sometimes it’s finding someone at the right time. Sometimes family is a hyperactive kid who hangs around the gym and his coach who takes his coffee with whiskey.

Otherwise known as The Olympics AU.

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**Notes**

See the end of the work for notes.
Thursdays were the fucking worst.

Thursdays meant that Finstock was out of bed at five, loading up his truck with gross, sweaty towels by five-thirty, and pulling into Beacon Hills Laundromat by six. Thursdays had Finstock sitting in an uncomfortable plastic chair that made his ass numb after fifteen minutes. Thursdays had him squinting against harsh fluorescent lights. Thursdays had him licking his thumb and turning the page of whatever paperback he’d left in his glove compartment.

After forty-five minutes his hands would shake too much for him to read.

Thursdays were the fucking worst because he had to wait until at least eight-thirty to get some whiskey in his coffee.

Finstock finally sat in his office and pulled out that week’s invoices and expense reports.

Office was a very generous term. It was barely bigger than the storage closet with a single bulb as a light source and two electrical outlets. The desk that Finstock had used for years he found at a garage sale. He had three bookshelves lining the walls, two shelves full of trashy horror and romance paperbacks, and one shelf full of coffee and miscellaneous bullshit that had accumulated over the years.

He waited for the timer to go off before he pushed down on his French Press, opening his bottom drawer to grab whiskey. The best part of Thursday mornings were when ambler liquid splashed at the bottom of his thermos seconds before he covered it with coffee.

Jordan Parrish knocked on his office door at nine-thirty, a good three hours before it was acceptable for him to do so.

“Fuck off, Jordan!” Finstock took a long sip of his whiskey-infused coffee and swished it between his teeth. “Thursdays are for bookkeeping and that doesn’t fucking finish until at least twelve-thirty.”
After a few sips of whiskey, finance came flooding back to Finstock’s wheelhouse. He had their accounts spread out in his binders, a mechanical pencil, and his reading glasses all ready to be holed away for the next few hours. This was his accounting sanctuary and Jordan knew that—

Jordan cracked open the door.

“I know, but—”

Finstock reeled back, nearly spilling his coffee. Jordan never opened his office door on a Thursday.

“What the hell, Jordan, is the fucking gym on fire?”

“Uh, sir,” Jordan cleared his throat. Finstock’s balls shriveled up at the sir. “Mr. Finstock, there’s a visitor for you.”

Sir meant I don’t know what to do and Mr. Finstock meant serious shit is afoot.

“Aw, fuck.” Finstock took a long slug from his thermos. “All right. Let’s get this over with.”

The last time Jordan dropped a Mr. Finstock, it was because the Petersons were having a meltdown in the parking lot, the product of passive-aggressive digs over a thirty-year marriage that culminated in a shouting-match so threatening that they had to call the police. The Sheriff cuffed them himself.

Surprising to no one, the Petersons divorced months later.

Finstock stepped out onto the gym floor, a smattering of equipment in front of smudged mirrors on one half, and the other half was where the floor softened into mats, the wall was equipped with a barre even though no one but Finstock knew ballet, weighted balls, ropes, and more mirrors. He had his thermos in one hand and a pencil in the other, which he quickly stuck behind his ear when he saw that it wasn’t a fighting couple or a mouthy client who wanted to haggle a new membership price.

The Sheriff of Beacon Hills stood at the front desk.

Well fuck my raggedy face, Finstock shot Jordan a quick glance, ‘Mr. Finstock’ indeed.

“Good morning, Sheriff.” Jordan grabbed a towel and began wiping down equipment despite no one having arrived yet. Finstock hopped up to sit on the front desk. “What can I do for you— oh shit,” the Sheriff flinched as Finstock caught sight of the little boy that ducked behind his father’s legs. “Hello to you too.”

The kid’s fingers were tiny, grabbing his father’s pants when the Sheriff turned around.

“Stiles,” the Sheriff sighed, “come on, you can’t hide,” the Sheriff bent down and picked the kid up, “Stiles, say hi to Mr. Finstock.”

“Hi.” The kid, Stiles, forced a grin. Finstock grinned back, though it was too early for him to make that shit to reach his eyes. Stiles leaned forward, so quickly that his father struggled to maintain his grip. “Whoa, are those your real teeth?”

The Sheriff cringed while Finstock laughed, loud guffaws that could rattle windows and scare birds. He vaguely heard the Sheriff’s soft, go play on the mats, before he caught his breath. Finstock wiped his eyes with the back of his wrist. The Sheriff winced.

“I’m so sorry about that.”
Finstock snorted.

“What are you talking about? That was awesome. Thursdays are the fucking— sorry, they’re just a bag of crap. But that was,” he felt giggles bubble in his chest again as he gestured to Stiles bouncing on one of the yoga balls, “just what the doctor ordered.” He leaned back on the desk, his fingers itching to uncap his thermos but he wasn’t about to guzzle down booze-laced coffee in front of the Sheriff. “So, what’s going on?”

The Sheriff didn’t return Finstock’s smile, hell, he barely did more than stretch his lips into a flat line. Bland soft-rock struggled to fill the awkward pause that only grew longer and more tense. The Sheriff shifted his weight from foot to foot. Finstock’s patience thinned and he relented, unscrewing his thermos and taking another pull of caffeine and whiskey.

If the Sheriff could smell it, fuck him. It was Thursday and Finstock wasn’t drunk enough to be able to smile and be spoon-fed bullshit.

God, did he really have to leave his office and bask in whatever non-emergency was plaguing the Sheriff’s mind? Finstock had things to do, books to manage, stocks to monitor, and a gym to run. If he was lucky, he could close up shop early if the day was going slow and he’d walk a quarter mile to his small house out back. Finstock smiled into his thermos, taking another small sip, thinking about how he’d kick up his feet, slip on his favorite robe, and watch garbage reality television until he passed out.

Another day in paradise.

He studied the Sheriff, scrutinizing the bags under his eyes and his neatly pressed and clean uniform. Finstock didn’t know him personally, but he wasn’t exactly a fan of authority figures. The one time Finstock did speak to the Sheriff, it was about the Petersons airing their dirty laundry in his parking lot, and that had been a quick, “Thanks, Sheriff,” before he went back into his gym. He didn’t even know the Sheriff had a son, only that he was married and that was because of the ring on his finger.

Finstock wasn’t really involved in the community. Town hall meetings, bake sales, ugh, it made him want to hurl—

“I’d like you to look after my son.”

Coffee, whiskey, and spit sprayed out of Finstock’s mouth. He sucked in air, which was a mistake because then he was hacking his brains out with the Sheriff’s hand on his shoulder. A small voice asked, “is he okay?” and a sterner voice answered. “He’s fine, go back and play.” Finstock wanted to say that his gym wasn’t a fucking playground, but his lungs rattled too hard for words.

He sat up, his eyes burned and his lips cracked, but he could speak.

“What the fuck, Sheriff?”

Finstock hated how his hands shook even though he could breathe fine, he hated that he couldn’t feel an ounce of the whiskey swimming in his veins. He hated how bright and prickly the world became when he was struck sober.

He pushed through the glass doors and even though he never smoked in his life, he really wanted a cigarette. For theatrics.

“— for a few hours on weekdays, more on weekends.” The Sheriff jogged after him, into the bright summer air. Finstock kicked at the gravel. “My wife is sick.” He glanced up at that, rubbing at his arms and squinting against the sun. “Her heart… it’s weak. Any kind of stress is dangerous and she
needs rest.”

Finstock nodded, his chest feeling less like it was going to seize at any moment.

“Kids aren’t exactly stress-free bundles of fun, I get it.” Finstock turned to look back at the doors. “Christ, how old is he?”

“Almost five.”

“Fuck.” Finstock rubbed his mouth, like if he scrubbed hard enough he could erase the booze that clung to his breath. “Noah,” it felt wrong to call him anything but The Sheriff. “I’m not… this isn’t some playground, you know? I’m an only child and I have no experience with kids.” He scoffed. “Aren’t there programs for stuff like this? Sports or clubs or—”

The Sheriff shook his head.

“He never lasts in them. Clubs don’t invite him back for asking too many questions and sports…” The Sheriff smiled, though there was nothing remotely happy about the expression. “He got kicked out of karate because he refused to hit anyone.”

Finstock scoffed.

“Karate is bullshit.”

Noah Stilinski looked at him like Finstock was a nocturnal animal out during daylight. His coffee was cold. He could barely taste the whiskey but he finished it off anyway with three bobs of his Adam’s apple and deep breath when it was done. Noah still had that look.

What the hell are you doing here?

Finstock crossed his arms. Your guess is as good as fuckin’ mine.

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Noah insisted he pay Finstock three hundred bucks a month. Finstock had no idea if that was cheap or expensive.

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God, it was weird trying to reshape his thinking into what a kid thought like. Finstock was used to minimum interaction with the citizens of Beacon Hills. His window to the world was Jordan Parrish, the teenager who needed some cash and a job to put on a resume. Jordan adapted to Finstock’s profanity, rantings, and overall demeanor quickly, but Jordan was sixteen.

Stiles was just over four and a half.

“Shit, you’re tiny. Half of these machines would crush you.” The kid’s shoulders jumped. Finstock winced. Finstock knew his gym like the back of his hand, every machine’s weird quirks were easy to understand. “I mean, they won’t crush-crush you.”

The kid was, thankfully, uninterested in the machines. He favored the soft mat flooring and yoga balls. His tiny fingers reached up to grab the barre, pulling a little, lifting up on the tips of his toes.

“What is this?”

That was the other thing Finstock had forgotten: Kids loved to ask questions. Finstock took a long
slug of coffee and leaned his hip against the wood.

“That’s a ballerina barre. It helps with stretches and dance practice.”

Stiles rolled his eyes.

“That’s stupid. There are no ballerinas here.”

“Oh yeah? Unroll those eyes, punk, ‘cause you’re lookin’ at one.” Stiles and Jordan whipped around at that. Finstock ran his tongue over his teeth. “What? You think I’m so sharp because I just sit around and complain all the time? No, I get here early and do my warm up routine.”

Stiles’s squealing “no way” was overshadowed by Jordan’s giggling “bullshit.” Finstock snorted.

“What do you guys bet me? I did five tours with a ballet troupe, switched to contemporary for a year before I stopped because I wanted to keep my knees past thirty.”

“Bathroom clean-up tonight,” Jordan spit back.

Finstock snapped his fingers.

“Deal.”

Stiles crossed his arms, moving to the edge of the mat so he was next to Jordan.

“What’s a bet?”

Finstock crouched down so he was eye-to-eye with the little punk.

“A bet means you’re willing to put down collateral because you believe your outcome will win.” Stiles wrinkled his nose. “It means if I win, you give me something. If you win, I give you something.”

Stiles scoffed.

“What are you gonna give me?”

Jordan put up cleaning up the bathroom. Stiles offered his juicebox. In return, Finstock offered Jordan going home early and still getting paid, and for Stiles to have some of the M&Ms that Finstock kept in his office.

Finstock kicked off his shoes, toed off his socks, and tossed his sweatshirt into the corner. Jordan turned up the music just as the song on the radio changed.

He gripped the barre and bobbed his head to the beat.

The first time Finstock saw ballet was on a television broadcast of The Nutcracker in 1967.

He remembered sitting in front of the television, tangling his fingers in the carpet fibers because he felt like he was floating. His eyes swept over the fuzzy images of dancers up on their toes, moving as if they weighed nothing, like petals on the wind. That was the moment his chance at being normal ended. That was the moment that Finstock thought, at five years old, *that is everything I want to be.*

When he danced everything made sense.

Life was stripped down to posture, rhythm, and movement. Dance never asked him to think about
how his father’s scowl would deepen every time Finstock caught a ride to ballet practice. Dance never made him face the arguments his parents would have when recitals rolled around. Dance never socked him in the jaw because he needed to feel what it’s like to be a man.

Dance got rid of all the bullshit definitions people built up around themselves until it was just pointed toes, arched backs, and sweeping orchestral music.

Even after all these years, it felt the same.

Finstock hadn’t danced for an audience for over two decades. In the morning, after one thermos worth of whiskey-coffee brew, he would dance to the rhythm of his heartbeat, to the ache in his legs, to the memory of strings, stage lights, and shared smiles with the troupe.

He leapt, twisting in the air, legs outstretched.

When he danced, Finstock forgot that he was a big guy with broad shoulders. He forgot that his smile made kids cry and that his loud laugh once got him kicked out of a restaurant. He forgot that he wasn’t beautiful.

He stopped as the DJ began to transition off the song into the commercials. He was more out of breath than he’d like and he needed to work more on his posture, but he quickly shoved aside self-criticism when Stiles shrieked, jumping up and down on the mat before he sprinted over.

“He’s a real ballerina!” Stiles jumped and Finstock ducked down to catch him, spinning with the kid’s momentum until he fell to his knees on the mat. Stiles gestured wildly at the slack-jawed Jordan. “Jordan, did you see that, he’s a real ballerina!”

Finstock gave Stiles the M&Ms anyway. He also cleaned the bathrooms because he was getting soft.

“I wanted to be a ballerina when I was your age.”

The afternoon had been spent showing Stiles basic moves, going around to customers and fixing their form on the machines while barking out new routines to Stiles. It was more fun than Finstock had anticipated. Stiles’s little head dipped forward and jerked back up.

“You are a Ballerina.”

Ballerina was more like ballurna, exhaustion slurring his words. His head dipped again. They sat side by side on the gym’s concrete steps, overlooking the empty parking lot. The Sheriff was supposed to pick Stiles up at closing time, but he always ran late. According to Stiles, his father was always late to everything. Finstock thought it was weird that a Sheriff wasn’t punctual.

“Listen, punk, I’m a fucking gym owner and my knees pop when it’s going to rain.”

Stiles leaned against Finstock’s arm.

“And a Ballerina.”

Beacon Hills wasn’t directly off a highway exit. It was tucked away deep in green hills and fog-laced trees. The roads were thin ribbons lost in the weeds. His gym was the only one in town. If someone wanted to go to a chain with better rates and more trainers, they’d have to drive forty-five minutes to a town that was off a highway exit. There were a few houses along the road, and traffic was nonexistent after eight.

Highbeams swept through trees down the road. Finstock nudged Stiles.
“Hey, wake up.” Stiles mumbled. Finstock rolled his eyes. “Aren’t you gonna tell me what you want to be when you grow up?”

Stiles responded most to questions. The kid could rattle them off all day, and he was happy to act like he was an expert on all subjects, as if he’d ascended from a mountain after meditating for decades on all the troubles in the world. He spoke with the confidence that only kids could have.

Stiles sucked in a breath, his eyes blinking open as his father’s cruiser rolled into the parking lot. Gravel crunched under the wheels and the engine was so loud that Finstock almost didn’t catch Stiles’s whisper.

“Spiderman.” Finstock held his hand up to block out the high beams before they fried his eyes. “I want to be Spiderman.”

Finstock brushed off his knees and stood up, helping Stiles to his feet.

“Up and at ‘em, superhero.”

The Sheriff got out of the car, looking like he always did. Tired. Exasperated. Bracing himself for a hyperactive child, and immediately smiling with relief when Stiles could barely keep his eyes open.

Stiles always woke up a little when his dad arrived. He’d get a tiny burst of energy as his dad buckled his seatbelt in the passenger’s seat. That night, his voice was a tiny bird’s chirp, high and excited. Dad, did you know Bobby is a ballerina? Like a real one. We lost a bet because he’s a real ballerina and Jordan had to clean the bathrooms but I think Finstock did it anyway and I got M&Ms. Have you seen a ballerina before?

His dad always responded the same way, never saying anything just humming. Dismissing the kid not even with words, just sounds. He’d get into the driver’s seat with the same sigh and close the door with the same jerk of his hand.

The Sheriff never thanked Finstock or asked how the day went. He would nod, his lips pressed into a thin smile, like if he made his lips as tight as possible than he could just take his kid and leave.

Finstock didn’t care for bullshit pleasantries anyway.

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August heat and was insufferable and Finstock’s wheezing little window-unit at the gym was not cutting it. Finstock drove out to Walmart to get more fans he could sprinkle throughout the gym. It was just blowing sweaty hot air back into the clients’ faces, but it was better than nothing.

“What are you doing?”

Stiles had his hands on his hips, watching Finstock and Jordan lug fans out of the truck like they were inconveniencing the almost-five-year-old’s strict schedule. Finstock wiped his forehead, grimacing at how dust mixed in with his sweat to create grey slime.

“You’ve noticed the disgusting heat I’m sure. Well, this is going to combat that in a very, very mediocre way. Hold the door open, will ya?”

For as indifferent as Stiles acted about the heat, he still stood in front of the fans with his arms spread out, whistling into the blades to make an alien-esque trill. He bopped and weaved to the radio and began to twirl just how Finstock had been teaching him. Stiles was not made to dance, not the way Finstock had been hypnotized. Stiles didn’t care about form or discipline, and it was fun teaching
someone with a free mindset.

“Oh shit,” Jordan slapped his palm on his forehead after he got the morning paper. “The Olympics are on!”

“Fuck, I forgot!” Finstock ran to the storage closet, Jordan and Stiles close behind him. He threw open the door and dragged out supplies to get the television shoved all the way in the back. It was a big square beast, massive and heavy. “Jordan, we got the,” Finstock frowned, snapping his fingers to try and remember the word, “uh, shit, the thing with the wheels—”

Jordan took off to Finstock’s office. Stiles crawled under Finstock’s arm to get on the other side of the television set.

“I got it,” Jordan wheeled out the desk that was meant to be used in classrooms, with the clunky projector still attached. “If we just unscrew this—”

Finstock and Stiles grabbed screwdrivers and unscrewed the projector. Jordan dragged the projector off and Finstock squeezed Stiles’s boney shoulder.

“You can help me with the tv, right?”

Stiles was in charge of managing the cables while Finstock lifted with his knees and hugged the monster television to his chest. Jordan’s “I got it,” was followed by Finstock’s “watch your hands, watch your hands.” Finstock adjusted the cables and ran them to the extension cord while Jordan stuck his fingers in his mouth to let loose a sharp whistle. The smattering of folks in the gym turned.

“We’re putting on the Olympics if anyone is interested in watching.”

Minutes later, every sweaty jock was sitting cross-legged on the gym floor, their eyes on the television. Finstock rolled his chair out of the office and saw that Stiles couldn’t see over the backs of the folks on the floor.

“You want the chair?”

Stiles immediately moved for it, but then he stopped. His eyes took in the lumbar support pads and the divets that came after years of use.

Kids were supposed to be selfish, in a way that was normal when everything in the world was heightened because it was all so bubbly, bright, and new.

Stiles had moments where he forgot to be a kid. His hand lingered on the seat as the gears turned in his head. Whenever he hesitated, his left hand would shake.

“It’s your chair.” Stiles poked at the squishy lumbar pads. “That’s for your back.”

The NBC logo finally cut into the commercials. Finstock sat in his chair, sighing at how it eased his back.

“Okay. Want to sit on my lap?”

Finstock ended up with his arms hugging Stiles loosely to his chest, feeling his little lungs expand and deflate with each series of breaths. He explained why the Olympics were so much fun, because for two weeks everyone could lose themselves in the love of a sport they rarely practiced or followed. There was a level of patriotism to it, supporting America because it’s easy to root for the home team…
But for Finstock, he loved it for the thrill of the game. People mastering a craft and then going toe-to-toe with other masters all around the world. The rules of the sport and technique acted as a universal language. *It's wonderful what people can do,* Finstock thought with only the lightest traces of bitterness, *when they decide to work together.*

He held out his hand and Stiles put Finstock’s thermos in it without hesitation. Finstock took a sip as the news anchor announced the change from fencing to men’s gymnastics. The screen changed to show the large mats where the floor routines were performed.

Finstock swished the coffee around in his mouth as the first competitor, a man from South Korea, began. He held out his thermos for Stiles to hold, but the kid’s hands were limp on Finstock’s legs. Finstock snorted and shook the thermos, *Earth to Stiles* on the tip of his tongue when Stiles’s fingers clamped down. His grip was hard enough to make Finstock flinch.

He leaned over Stiles as much as he could, putting his thermos down on the floor and not caring when it toppled over.

Big brown eyes were transfixed on the television screen.

“Stiles, you okay?” The kid’s cheeks were flushed and his chest was moving, but the silence was unnerving. “Punk?”

Stiles’s head bumped Finstock’s chin when he twisted around to look up at Finstock.

“He looks like Spiderman.” Finstock steadied Stiles, his hands covering the boy’s small shoulders. He was *trembling.* “I want to do that,” Stiles’s pointed to the screen, his other hand still gripping Finstock’s leg. *Like he’s trying not to float away,* Finstock thought as Stiles grinned. “I want to be Spiderman!”

Finstock couldn’t help but smile back, giving Stiles a little shake to his shoulders.

“Let’s see what I can dig up, all right?”

Finstock was pretty sure the library had some videos on basic gymnastics. It wouldn’t be difficult to at least check, but the *look* on Stiles’s face… the undiluted, euphoric shock that cracked across his smile… was as heartbreaking as it was endearing. Stiles threw his arms around Finstock’s stomach and *squeezed.*

Crackling cheers came from the television’s shitty speakers as the scores were announced. Jordan clapped, and the other customers whistled, eyes on the screen as the next competitor got ready.

Stiles buried his face into Finstock’s chest.

Despite years of alcohol and cynicism building the calluses around Finstock’s hands, he could still feel Stiles’s giddy heartbeat against his palm.
At first, Stiles was told that his mother was sick.

Sick was an easy word to use, simple for a child to say and understand when his father would pull him aside, his grip tight on his wrists. Your mother is sick, Stiles, you need to let her rest. Sick meant that his mother needed to stay calm, there could be no extra stress from his desire to play, to ask questions, to laugh… it would only make her more sick.

When Stiles got older and he could handle more than single-syllable words, his father told him the truth.

After he was born, his mother got very sick, and it took her a long time to get better. Stiles couldn’t spell rheumatic heart disease, but he could still say the words and see how they made other adults wither and wilt.

Remember, Stiles, peace and quiet, his father would whisper instead of good morning.

“I hope this will be enough shade,” his mother glanced up at the side of their house, and at Stiles’s favorite frog umbrella they’d attached to a pole just in case the shade was chased away by sunlight. “What do you think, sweetheart?”

Stiles woke up every day at six in the morning. His dad would hurry him down the stairs because his mom was an early-riser and if Stiles was barely awake he wouldn’t be too loud. He rubbed his eyes and squinted at the pamphlets that came with the mint and basil seeds.

“The mint is the one that’s important to keep out of the sun, so we should plant them here.” Stiles poked at the soil under the umbrella. “Basil needs more sun, so we can put them all the way on the end. Maybe the tomatoes should go in the middle?”

He frowned, trying to imagine the garden, when his mother hugged him with one arm.

“You’re so smart.” She pressed a kiss to the top of his head. “My little genius.” Even though she was sick, she never seemed weak to Stiles. Her grip was always firm. When she squeezed him all the worried pieces inside of him settled. She pulled him onto her lap and it was moments like this, when
her smile pressed against his temple… that made waking up early worth it. “I can’t believe you’re in second grade.”

“What, you thought I was gonna flunk first?”

She laughed, hard enough that she leaned back, pulling Stiles with her. When she laughed, she never seemed weak. Her eyes sparkled, her cheeks flushed, and she held him tighter than his dad would. She caught her breath. Her lips pressed against Stiles’s cheek like a promise.

“You’re getting so big.”

“Stop making me eat gross broccoli and I’ll stay small.”

She snorted and tickled him. He squealed and wriggled in her arms, pressing back so he could feel her laughter. His toes skimmed the dirt, sending a spray of debris hurtling toward the porch. Pebbles clacked against the glass door. Stiles winced when it opened seconds later, his father already dressed in his uniform.

“Stiles, time to get ready for school.”

His mother’s fingers tightened around his pajama shirt.

“Noah, it’s fine, we still need to get to the tomatoes.”

Maybe Stiles could have stayed… if his mother hadn’t immediately started coughing. He was up on his feet and helped her back to the house. His dad steered him towards the stairs. He hurried to his room, always hoping he’d be fast enough to not hear his mother insist please, Noah, it’s fine, just a cough. Every time he heard that, and heard his father remind her that her health was more important… it made Stiles grind his teeth and yank on the clothes his father laid out on the bed.

He held his backpack tight to his chest at the bust stop, not looking at his father. It was the first day of school and his dad kept shifting his weight from foot to foot, clearing his throat every few seconds. Stiles kept his eyes ahead.

“Try and,” his father sighed, “make some friends this year, Stiles.”

Kindergarten was a rough start. Stiles had cried so hard on the first day, that his mother had to go to the doctor because she was so upset. When she was upset, her sickness got worse. Stiles cried, his father kept hissing at him to stop, to think of his mother. Stiles thought of his mother, and cried harder.

During first grade Stiles realized he really loved learning, reading, and asking questions. He always seemed to ask too many… until the teacher would deflate or someone behind him would whisper, "shut up." He read every book in the “First Grade” section at the library, and got into an argument with their librarian when he wanted access to the other books.

"It’s easy,” his father promised as the bus’s brakes wailed, “just be friendly. Someone is sure to like you.”

The smell of exhaust burned his nostrils. He got on the bus and pretended he couldn’t feel his dad’s disappointment pushing against his shoulders. Pressure to bring home a friend, pressure to have a birthday party that wasn’t him and his mother blowing out candles on a cake. Stiles read that extreme pressures could create gems.

He sat with a weary thump.
Maybe one day he’d wake up and find that his skin had hardened into glittering diamonds.

Beacon Hills Elementary was a long brick building. The windows had white shutters and the roof was black. There were two playgrounds, the front playground for grades kindergarten to third. Stiles wasn’t sure, but he had the feeling the big-kid playground was way cooler. Bigger slides, bigger swings, a real jungle gym where Stiles could actually get high off the ground.

He wasn’t allowed to bring books out during recess. He wondered if big kids were allowed to bring books.

The baseball diamond was reserved for the boys who played kickball. The balance beam and swings were for girls. All the was left was hopscotch, which was for little-little kids, the sandbox, which was for losers, and the rest of the open field that was cut off by a chain link fence.

A boy sat in the sandbox, hunched over with red sneakers and shaggy hair.

Stiles kept walking until he reached the softest part of the grass. He did his stretches before he copied Bobby’s stance, straightening his back before he spun. It was weird without music, but if Stiles couldn’t bring a book out to recess than he definitely couldn’t bring his Discman.

As long as you got workin’ noggin, Bobby would rub his head hard with a grin that made Stiles want to learn how to do a backhandspring, you can remember your favorite songs and keep beat here, he’d tap Stiles’s temple before letting go. Heaven, Stiles imagined, would be a lot like Bobby’s gym, where him, Jordan, and Bobby would lean forward to squint at the old VHS tapes they’d get from the library. Instructional videos for gymnastics.

The cher-chuck of Finstock pressing the rewind button, to really study the movement, was a sound that always made Stiles feel at peace. Stiles nearly vibrated out of his skin because he just wanted to get started. Whenever it was a new jump, tuck, or flip, Finstock’s hands were always on his ankles, on his knees, making Stiles move like he was in slow motion. Everyone takes it slow, Finstock would grunt, sweat on his brow as he steadied Stiles, before we go fast.

Floor routines were the most fun. The transitions between big movements felt like dancing, and they were the easiest to practice. Instead of lifting up onto his toes and twirling in the air, he’d drop to his knees, lock his legs, and spin so his body would swivel to where more space would be if Stiles were on a mat. All he had was more grass and—

The kid from the sandbox was right in front of him. Stiles bailed on the movement and ended up rolling on the ground.

“Geez,” Stiles pushed himself up on his elbows, spitting out a wad of grass, “you scared the shit out of me.”

Sandbox Kid froze.

“That’s a bad word.” Stiles got up and dusted off his knees. Joyous shrieks floated over from the baseball diamond. Someone slid into home. Girls jumped off the swings… and the Sandbox Kid wrung his hands. “Were you falling?”

Stiles rolled his eyes.

“No, I was practicing.”

The Sandbox Kid squinted against the sun, waving a gnat away from his face. Stiles opened his mouth to explain about transitions during gymnastics and floor routines, when an ugly laugh bubbled
and burst behind him. Stiles turned to see Jeremy Gribble cast a shadow that reached Stiles’s busted sneakers. Sometimes when kids got bigger, they were bullied. When Jeremy Gribble got big, he became the bully.

“Dancing is for girls.” Jeremy sneered. “Are you a girl, Stiles?”

“No.” His dad always said to ignore bullies. Stiles had a hard time ignoring anyone. “What are boys supposed to do?”

Jeremy stepped closer.

“Something cool. Like karate.”

The smart thing to do would be to run. To grab the Sandbox Kid’s arm and get running because Jeremy was big, but he was heavy and Stiles was confident in his speed. But instead he giggled, shrill and sharp the way he would at the gym.

“Oh man,” Stiles howled with laughter, “karate is bullshit.”

:::

Bobby’s gym was the last stop on a different bus than the one Stiles would get on in the morning. He’d watch kid’s get off the bus, one by one, until it was just Stiles for miles of green trees and dirt roads. His face still stung and the bus driver kept his eyes ahead, not once checking the rearview mirror. After the first glance back, he’d stopped. Stiles didn’t blame him. He caught smudges of his reflection against the glass.

It wasn’t pretty.

The doors hissed open and Stiles stepped onto the gym’s parking lot, his backpack slung over his shoulders. The bell above the door jingled and there was a rush of air conditioning that whoosed over Stiles’s skin and clothes.

Jordan looked up from behind the front desk and his mouth fell open moments before Bobby shrieked.

“What the fuck happened to your face?”

Bobby was loud and he had big teeth that chomped around his words like scissors. Stiles remembered how he’d been frightened of him when his dad first dropped him off, but now… nothing was more comforting than the hands on Stiles’s hips that lifted him up onto the desk, the wild green eyes that dragged over his face, and the burst of angry coffee breath over his head. I know you’re not my uncle, Stiles thought as Bobby snapped open a first aid kit, but is there some other word that exists? One that I don’t know yet?

Jordan pressed a cold towel to Stiles’s lip while Bobby smoothed his thumb over Stiles’s bruised brow.

“I got into a fight.”

Bobby rolled his eyes.

“No shit, Sherlock. Why did you get into a fight?” He jammed a bottle of rubbing alcohol into his mouth and bit down on the cap, unscrewing it with his teeth as his free hand fumbled for cotton balls. “This is going to sting.”
Wet cotton brought a bite of pain before it was over.

“A boy said that dancing was for girls.”

Bobby snorted and smoothed bandaids over the cuts.

“That’s a bunch of bullshit.”

Bobby’s hands were softer than his father’s, but they were a little bigger. His palms were warm against Stiles’s cheeks, his thumbs resting on the bones in Stiles’s face. He turned Stiles’s head from side to side. When Bobby looked at him, with narrowed eyes and a twisted frown, it didn’t feel cold at all. If anything, it made Stiles smile.

“Yeah, I know.” Stiles sniffed and jumped off the desk. “I think I made a friend though.”

Bobby’s eyebrows shot up.

“The kid who hit you?”

“Psh,” Stiles rolled his eyes. “No. Another kid. He got beat up with me.” Stiles shrugged. “We talked in the nurse’s office. He was nice.”

“Good.” Bobby clapped his hand on Stiles’s shoulder. “Next time you two hang out, do it with less bloodshed, all right?”

The moment his toes touched the mat, it was like he was at the beach, the sand pulling every ache and worry down, out, and away. Stretches melted into dancing. Dancing leapt into… into…

Twisting and twirling through the air. There was nothing like it, nothing that Stiles had ever felt or found anywhere else. His mind would clear until all he cared about was his body and how he could make it move. Fight gravity. Increase distance between him and floor. His feet slapped on the mat for a moment before he was in the air again.

When he couldn’t sleep, he’d think about the videos from the library, replaying each movement in his head.

His feet hit the mat. He ran into a leap, his hands outstretched as he dove forward. His palms hit the mat, and he felt the force transfer from the floor, up his arms, spine, and then he was twisting his wrists as he pushed—

Dancing was fun. He liked how Bobby would crack a smile, shaking his head as they’d go from song to song, getting sillier and sillier until they were shaking on the floor, laughing like they’d never get in trouble for being too loud. Dancing, Stiles knew, was Finstock’s it. The same way gymnastics was it for Stiles.

When Bobby danced alone… Stiles saw it.

Glimmers of something bright, bubbling, and liquid. Something that, at seven years old, he didn’t have the words for. He just knew how he felt when he watched Bobby stray from silly and approach… grace. It was like watching a bird take flight, a butterfly sailing through a sunbeam, and his mother’s breath catching right before she laughed.

His feet hit the mats and he tucked in, rolling until he straightened out his body, spreading his legs and pointing his toes, pushing his palms against the mat until he was back on his feet.
Sweat dripped down his neck as air burned in his lungs. He held his arms out to keep from stumbling.

Hushed silence shattered into whoops and cheers. Bobby ran to him, arms spread wide.

Every hug from Finstock felt like a crash of waves against rock, the *thud-hiss* of contact before Stiles was lifted and spun. Bobby laughed louder than his mother, his whole body hitched with every breath, and he smelled sharp, like coffee, sweat, and something else that burned Stiles’s nose.

Bobby spun Stiles a few times before he set him down. Jordan high-fived him, and the *clap* of their palms coming together always stung, but Stiles didn’t mind. The lingering tingle on his skin was a reminder that… no matter what his dad thought, Stiles *did* have friends. They just weren’t friends he made in school.

“Holy shit,” Bobby shook Stiles’s shoulders, “you gave me a fucking heart attack with that handspring and… I don’t know, that half-flip and twist, what the hell was that?” His fingers were warm in Stiles’s short hair, and he rubbed, back and forth, for a few moments as he laughed. “Punk. Come on, let’s run it again. Try and get more air on your jumps.”

By the time they were done, Stiles’s body felt like it was made of jelly. He didn’t have the energy to flinch when Finstock cleaned his face with alcohol before putting on fresh bandaids. Their breath fogged out as they sat on the steps, breathing in deep.

Stiles rested his head on Bobby’s shoulder.

Gravel crunched under tires. Stiles lifted his head, his heart beating faster which always gave him a burst of energy. He stood in time with Bobby, a sharp breeze cutting across their cheeks as his father opened the door. His dad’s eyes narrowed on Stiles’s face, and Stiles realized that he’d been so happy that he forgot about his injuries.

“*Stiles,*” Stiles flinched as his dad stepped closer, his boots thudding against the pavement. “What happened to your face? What do you think your *mother* will do when she sees that?”

The best part about being in the air, about never staying on the ground for more than a split-second before he pushed back *up*… was that he never had to worry about his mother or father. When he was twisting, flipping, and leaping… he didn’t *have* to think about his mother’s heart problem, about his father’s endless sighs and disappointments.

That was the worst part about coming down.

“M’sorry.”

Half the time, Stiles wasn’t sure what he was apologizing for anymore.

“*Stiles,*” his dad sighed, like even that display of disappointment took too much energy. “She can’t see you like that.”

Gravel ground under Finstock’s shoe. Stiles jerked his head up, but Bobby turned away, his chin tilted up, his hair wild and bits of light from the high beams shining through it. Stiles hadn’t thought that maybe… maybe Bobby would be disappointed in him too, that the sighs were contagious. That it was a different kind of sickness that only adults could catch. Between breaths, Stiles was suddenly struck with the nightmare that Bobby would start sighing, would start telling Stiles to calm down, be quiet, please.

*Think of your mother.*
Please, Stiles never went to church but he’d seen enough about it on television to get a vague grasp on the concept of God. Please, Stiles prayed, don’t take Bobby.

“He can stay with me.” Bobby crossed his arms. “If it’s that big of an issue, Stiles can stay with me tonight.”

His eyes burned, and it was hard to breathe through the confusing mixture of shame and relief. He gripped Bobby’s shirt, tugging it. He had to say thank you, before his dad reminded him in that tone that soured the air. Say thank you, Stiles. Inside voice, Stiles. Have some self-control, Stiles. He pulled, hard enough that he saw the blurry outline of Bobby looking down at him.

Stiles opened his mouth. A tiny, shaking sound was the only warning he could give before tears rolled down his cheeks. He was being too loud, he was drawing too much attention to himself, but he couldn’t stop, he couldn’t get control of his breathing, of his inability to… to swallow what he was feeling.

Two strong hands lifted him up. His legs dangled in the air, and by the time he’d stopped crying, he realized that Bobby was carrying him, walking him down the dirt road that stretched back into the woods behind the gym.

“You live back here?”

Bobby shifted his arms so Stiles was more on his hip.

“Yee-up.” The trees parted and sure enough, there was a house, tucked away in the back. “Mi casa es su casa.”

Stiles sniffed and slid down from Bobby’s arms.

“What does that mean?”

“My house,” Finstock held the door open, “is your house.”

It was a small yellow house with a tiny porch and a pink lawn chair propped out front. The paint was peeling in some places, but the bright yellow peeked out behind dirt and moss. His kitchen was smaller than Stiles’s, his drawers were half open and duct tape held a few cabinets together.

Whenever Stiles cried at home, his dad’s first question was why are you crying? Whenever Stiles cried it was a firm hand on his arm steering him into an empty room and telling him to get his breathing under control like they practiced.

Bobby pulled out a chair, got a cold pitcher of water out of the refrigerator, and sat down next to Stiles.

“So,” Bobby nudged Stiles’s shoulder, “want to get a pizza?”

The tightness in his chest vanished, so quickly that he shuddered. Stiles ducked his head, wiping at his eyes with the back of his hands.

“Do you,” his breath caught, only once, before he got it back, “do you like pepperoni?”

Bobby snorted.

“Fuck yeah, I love pepperoni.”

:::
Deep breaths like Bobby said, Stiles breathed in and counted down from ten. The other kids had their coaches in their ear, their parents rubbing down their legs before the big event. Stiles leaned on Bobby, trying not to notice how other kids stared at him. He nudged Bobby’s shoulder.

“You figured out the zoom?”

“I swear I have the manual memorized.” Bobby flashed him a grin. “How are you feelin’?”

Out of place was the first thing that came to Stiles’s mind. He’d never been to any kind of competition before, the closest being field day on the last day of school. He’d never been in a car for more than forty minutes, and he’d never been in a car that wasn’t driven by his father. Stiles had never been to a gymnastics competition before, and it showed.

He only brought one gym bag and a water bottle that his mother had decorated with holographic star and rainbow stickers. Part of the long drive had been to buy a proper singlet and shorts. He still pulled at it, even now, while none of the other kids fidgeted the same way. They stared at him, at how his parents weren’t with him, at how his coach was messing with a camera and not going over his routine.

“Nervous.” Stiles swallowed, taking a final sip of water before he screwed the cap back on. “But I’ll be okay.”

Bobby had suggested a competition to see if Stiles would like it. They had to send in videos of Stiles’s daily routine in the gym in order for him to be placed, and then... and then it was driving over two hours away on a Saturday morning to sit in a giant gymnasium for three hours. It was kids looking at sneakers, at the gym bag he borrowed from Bobby, and at the different last names on his and Bobby’s name tags.

“That’s good.” Finstock rubbed his palm over Stiles’s head, patting his back twice as Stiles’s name was called. “Just remember what I told you.”

Stiles nodded and walked to the mat like all the other kids before him.

“This can be a one-time thing if you’re not feeling it. You’ve got autonomy, Stiles. That means if you say, ‘hey, Bobby, this sucked shit,’ then I’m gonna believe you.”

The mat was bigger than Bobby’s. The bleachers were high and longer than Stiles had ever seen before. There was a long table with older men and women sitting with notebooks out and pens ready. Stiles saw that other kids waved to the judges table, and then to the bleachers, but Stiles kept his hands at his sides. There might be a chance he’d never come back, and Bobby was on the sidelines.

He smiled at him. Bobby grinned and had the camcorder ready.

The first few plucks of soulful piano began. Stiles grinned and kicked off before the first “Caroline,” airborne the moment the rhythm was established.

When Bobby said they had to pick a song, that was the only one he wanted. When he asked why, Stiles shrugged, his ears warm when he mumbled, “It’s the first song you danced to,” back when Stiles had first started going to the gym. One random song on the radio that Bobby had to prove that he’d done ballet. Whenever Stiles heard it he always reached for the volume to turn it up.

It made Stiles feel light on his feet, and that day was no different.

His hands hit the mat and Stiles pushed, spinning and grinning because it was his favorite song. His
feet hit the mat on “mighty fine,” the smack sending tingles up Stiles’ spine as he rolled his shoulders, bobbing his head to the beat before he turned, running into a cartwheel that melted into a front handspring.

He slid into a split before bouncing back onto his feet, focusing on gathering his breath as he struck ballet poses.

He took off running, hands on the ground, then pushing, his legs stretching, hitting the ground, pushing and floating until—

*It just felt like… right, you know?*

Bobby never avoided Stiles’s questions like his dad did. He never spoke in that oddly high-pitched lilt where the words clung to his dad’s teeth. When Stiles asked Bobby why he did ballet, he thought that might be when Bobby finally spoke like his dad. He was wrong.

Stiles twisted in the air, arms crossed over his chest.

*I saw it on television and it just… I knew that I wanted to at least try it. And once I did… once I moved like they did, that was it for me.*

The move was the hardest one Stiles had tackled so far, but when he nailed it, he really *stuck it*, relishing in how it made Bobby scream obscenities and the rest of the people at the gym clap. Stiles brought his legs back down in time to hit the mat, a few inches away from the edge. He sucked in air and straightened his back, fighting momentum as he turned on the balls of his feet to face the table.

A sharp whistle cut through the air and Stiles relaxed, smiling at Bobby’s loud claps. He bowed his head once and stepped off the mat, barely taking three steps before he was hugged.

“You fucking *nailed* it, punk!”

Stiles pulled as much air into his lungs as he could.

“I wasn’t sure if I was going to get my legs down in time and then I did and I just kept thinking of what you said about ballet and—” Stiles heaved in more air, “it looked good?”

“You kiddin’ me?” Bobby’s grin was all teeth. The wrinkles at the corners of his eyes deepend. “It looked fucking great.”

He clapped Stiles on his shoulders twice, squeezing on the last one before letting go. It was the kind of contact that Stiles saw in movies about football, where it was bigger kids and adults being rough. They both turned to the judges table. Stiles chewed on the sleeve of his sweatshirt, pulling at frayed threads with his teeth and tongue as his stomach twisted. The judges turned to each other, whispering before holding up cards one by one.

9.7 from the owlish woman with big glasses and grey hair.

7.2 from a young man with a thin nose and blonde hair.

8.9 from the chubby man with a bad comb-over.

8.4 from a woman with red hair and bright lipstick.

Final score: 8.55.

Bobby squeezed Stiles in a tight hug and he pointed to the leaderboard.
“You’re up _high_, punk.”

A third-place medal hung around Stiles’s neck by the time they left. It was bronze with feathery engravings. Stiles ran his fingers over the ridges as Finstock pushed his water bottle in his hands.

“Stay hydrated. We passed a diner on the way home, want to stop and get something to eat?”

Stiles nodded, feeling floaty and numb. He kept bumping his shoulder against Bobby, not able to stop from swaying into his orbit. Bobby opened the door for him, reaching over to buckle his seatbelt when a voice made him withdraw.

“Wait,” they both peered back to see the owlish woman with big glasses running toward them, “please wait!” She had long grey hair that fell out of its loose bun. She had to put her hands on her knees and Stiles held out his water bottle. She waved her hand, dismissing him as she pushed her hair out of her face. “Sorry, I need a moment, you left so quickly.” Bobby had his hand out, ready to catch her if she needed it. “I haven’t seen you guys before. Would it be presumptuous to assume that you’re new to the competitive circuit?”

Stiles blinked at the words he’d never heard while Bobby’s lips flattened into a thin line. He crossed his arms and leaned against the car.

“I guess it’s not presumptuous if you’re right.”

“Forgive me. I just,” she held out her hand, “I’m Evelyn Goodwin, I’m on the judges panel and…” she smiled at Stiles in that strained adult way. Like he was a dog begging for food at the table. “You were very good, young man, but if you had any interest in continuing, some slight changes would increase your score.” Stiles hugged his arm around his stomach, the numbness vanishing as Bobby squared his shoulders. Evelyn continued, her cheeks flushed. “Just formal details, I have some booklets. If you’re interested in competing again.”

She held them out to Bobby. He took them, not gently or politely.

“Thanks.”

Evelyn glanced at Stiles again and he turned away, crossing his arms and staring at the driver’s seat.

“Your son has incredible talent. If you’re serious about this, read those books,” Evelyn took a step back. “And if you have access to rings and pommel horse I’d get him started on those right away.”

If there was one thing Stiles hated, it was adults talking about him like he wasn’t there, like just because he was a kid he was an idiot. He curled in on himself as Bobby huffed.

“I’ll take it under consideration. Thanks Ms. Goodwin. Have a good night.” Fingers gently shook Stiles’s shoulder. “You all buckled in, bud?” He nodded. “All right.”

They were on the road in three minutes. Stiles was asleep in five. Car rides always put him to sleep, the deep kind of sleep that always left him disoriented. Bobby shook him awake and Stiles jerked, his eyes blinking open, sluggish and offbeat.

“We’re here. Still hungry?”

Stiles yawned.

“Yeah.”
The diner was busy, but the waitress found them a booth tucked away in the back. The seats were bright red with sparkles underneath a thick lamination. The menu was long and the waitress had a raspy voice. Stiles asked for a root beer. Bobby asked for coffee.

“Hey.” Bobby kicked Stiles’s sneaker. “Remember what I said. You don’t have to do shit if you don’t want to, got it?”

Stiles twisted his straw wrapper between his fingers, thinking of how he sailed through the air, and how the Evelyn looked at him in the parking lot. Like he was playing with something expensive.

“I know.”

Bobby ordered tapioca pudding with extra whipped cream and another coffee. Stiles asked for grilled cheese and fries.

The waitress gave Stiles crayons so he could draw on the back of his paper placemat. He lazily made swirls of purple and pink, thinking of ballerinas and pop music. Bobby rewound the camcorder, his tongue bitten between his teeth.

“Bobby?” Stiles put down his crayon, grateful that when Bobby looked up, his frown vanished. “Why did you stop dancing? In the ballet, I mean.”

Whenever they danced together, Stiles couldn’t imagine why Bobby would stop. The way he laughed… it lacked the usual rough edges. Dancing made Bobby forget the quick barbs that spit from his mouth on a moment’s notice.

“Ballet is physically intensive.” Bobby cupped his hands around his coffee, blowing on it. “That means it eats away at your body. It’s a rush, it’s my favorite thing… but it came to a point where I had to choose if I wanted to have terrible arthritis and need a cane by forty… or to stop and save my body while I still could.” Bobby shrugged with a smile, even though Stiles could tell he was sad. “I chose my body.”

Stiles’s throat tightened.

“Is gymnastics physically intensive like that?” Bobby nodded with the same sad smile. Stiles picked at the corner of his placemat, chewing on his lower lip. The more he thought about it, the clearer the answer became. “I want to do what you did.” Bobby straightened. Stiles held his chin up. “I want to keep going and stop before it does permanent damage.”

The waitress brought their plates and left with a, “holler if you need anything.”

“All right,” Bobby held out the bright cherry to Stiles. “We can definitely do that.”

The cheese was gooey when Stiles bit into it, feeling much better the moment toasted bread hit his tongue. He relaxed against the squeaky fake leather and watched Bobby dip his spoon into the tapioca pudding.

“That lady thought you were my dad, huh?”

Bobby coughed on a spoonful of whipped cream. Stiles laughed and threw a fry at him, not moving fast enough to duck from the flick of rolled up napkin that Finstock sent his way. The waitress returned with a raised eyebrow.

“You two need anything else?”
“More coffee,” Bobby wheezed, “would be great.”

Stiles tapped his fingers along the table and kicked Bobby’s knee.

“I’ll take another root beer on the rocks.”

“On the rocks, where did you learn that?”

Bobby squawked. The waitress rolled her eyes.

“He probably learned it from his old man.”

She shot Bobby a pointed look before she walked away. Stiles tried to cover his mouth, to squash the high-pitched giggles that bubbled in his throat. He was too late, they were out in the air. He slammed his eyes shut, waiting for a harsh **quiet down**, a squeeze to his arm and a reminder that he **really needs to calm down**.

It wasn’t his father’s hand that reached over the table. It wasn’t his father’s palm that closed over Stiles’s head and rubbed, warmth coming through the friction before he pushed back.


Stiles toyed with the medal around his neck. Bobby thumbed through the booklets Evelyn gave him. Silence scared Stiles. When he was at home it was meticulously maintained and obeyed. At school, it meant something bad was coming.

Clinks and dings from the other people’s forks and knives, murmured conversations from other tables, and soft music that fizzled through speakers filled the hush. Silence made Stiles feel like he was disappearing, swallowed by emptiness.

He listened to the velcro-scrub **scritch-scritch** that came from Bobby scratching at his face. He listened to the **hiss** from the kitchen griddles. Stiles marveled at the feeling of peace, at how his body felt light despite not being in the air.

Bobby glanced up from the booklets and smiled.
FINALLY the Olympics AU has arrived. This is my little baby that I’ve been working on for so long, and it’s finally getting started. I’m going to try to make these chapters as long as I can, because I do want them to not be rushed, so when updates do happen, I hope it doesn’t feel cheap. I just want to give this story the attention and care it deserves.

Get ready for the feels, kids. It’s going to be a run ride.

Bonus game: What was the song that Finstock danced to and later, Stiles performed to? It’s … probably pretty easy to figure out… hahah.

The art is by the fantastic Liz, check out her page and her Instagram, she’s amazing, and the year headers were made by me :)

I’ll still be active on tumblr for the time being, but there are other ways to find me. Here you can see a little breakdown of other places to find me and the other things I do in relation to these fics (journals/behind the scenes, playlists, head canons). So click on over to get the full rundown!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!