Nothing More than Convenience

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Summary

Once upon a time, in a land far, far, away- okay no. Stiles refused to start this story off like a fairy tale because in truth, his life couldn't be further from one. In fairy tales, the characters weren't forced to marry someone they absolutely abhorred. His life was more like a horror story.

... When Derek is told that he'll have to marry a human for the good of his kingdom, he isn't exactly thrilled with the idea. But, he'll do anything that his mother, Queen Talia, wants. What he's not expecting is to accidentally fall for his future husband who may or may not completely hate him.

Notes

I'll add tags as the story progresses. This is my first fic on ao3, so I hope you enjoy it. Not really sure what to call this kind of universe. I guess you'll see what I mean.

See the end of the work for more notes.
Stiles is big on reading. Not learning, per se. But reading is something he loves to do. There was a time, soon after his mother’s death, that all he would do is sit in the castle library and go through all the books she had adored. It made grieving easier, knowing that there was a part of her that he could always carry with him.

Her death was the hardest thing he had had to go through. His father had become more distant during that time. Colder. He was swifter to reprimand and stricter when it came to obeying rules. But his father had been a king who had just lost his queen, so Stiles cut him some slack. He stayed out of the way as much as possible and tried to keep out of trouble. King John had his own issues to deal with without being bothered with his son’s.

Soon after Queen Claudia’s death, a war between the Stilinski Kingdom, and another kingdom ruled by the Hale family, began. The Hales were werewolves.

At that age, the most Stiles knew about weres came from books his mother had read to him. In those books, the history between weres and humans were described. They shared a tumultuous relationship. There had been a time when humans hadn’t even known that werewolves existed. When their existence became known, humans hunted them down like animals. Stiles, like his mother, had never believed weres were truly animalistic. At least not until… but he’s getting ahead of himself.

After years of persecution, the weres fought back, eventually building their own communities as the species separated themselves from humans. The two groups lived in a separated peace—pun sort of intended. Every state in America is now ruled by two monarchies: one run by humans and one run by weres. The rest of the world works much the same.

But there were a group of rogue humans that despised werewolves and refused to leave them be. They were called the Argents. The Argents ran rampant across the country, creating mayhem in the states. California is just one example of the problems they have, and still continue to, cause.

Years ago, the Argents stole into the Hale land one night and slaughtered almost fifty werewolves, including their ruler, King Michael Hale.

The weres, in turn, placed the blame on all humans instead of just the Argents and they retaliated accordingly. No one had been expecting the attack.

That’s when Stiles’ belief that weres weren’t complete animals came to an abrupt end.

He remembers the night. His mother had had a headache and had gone out for a walk in the garden. It was her second favorite place to be, the library being the first.

She was dead before any of the guards could come to her aid. Oh, they captured and put the murderers to death, but was there really a point to the punishment? His mother was never coming back. She was gone. Forever. No amount of punishment towards the culprits would change that.

Since then, the two kingdoms have been warring with each other. Over a million deaths have resulted from the feuding. With every battle, Stiles saw another wrinkle added to his father’s face. Another gray hair. Watching his father suffer began to hurt him too. Maybe that’s why he agreed to this ridiculous plan. There could be no other, logical reason.

“This is insanity! Honestly, Deaton. This is one of your worst crackpot ideas ever.”
They’re all in the conference room, circled around a table. Deaton and his father on one side and Stiles seated on the other. It makes him feel alone, as if the whole world is against him. It just might be.

“With all due respect, Prince Stiles, this is the only way that I think the war can end,” Deaton says, bringing his hands up to clasp them together.

“I agree with him, Stiles. Though I literally would rather not throw my son to the wolves, there’s nothing better that I can think of. We’re talking about saving lives here,” King Stilinski adds, voice just slightly on the verge of pleading. Stiles knows that someone in power isn’t used to begging for things, his father being no exception. It must take a huge effort of his part. In this moment though, Stiles couldn’t care less.

“I’m your son! You can’t just hand me over like a sacrifice to fix all your problems. I will not be used!”

“Stiles!” his father snaps, making him flinch back. “I have made your life easier than it should have been for a prince. I have been lenient with your training after the Queen’s death—” he starts, voice hard.

“The Queen. Listen to you talk about her as if she wasn’t my mother. As if she wasn’t your wife.”

“Stiles!”

Stiles’ breath hitches as he feels tears of frustration and anger coming on. But, he refuses to crack. Not now. He’ll cry later on in his room where there are no witnesses. His father is now staring at him coldly, all hints of his pleading expression gone. Now there’s just hard resolve.

“As a prince and future king, you should know by now that rulers have to make sacrifices sometimes for their people. This is a sacrifice you will make.”

“I can’t marry a werewolf, dad. Not after what they did to Mom.”

His father sighs, bringing his hands to his face. Deaton takes over the conversation again.

“The Hales have a son around your age named Derek. You kind of lucked out that he also happens to have the same… gender preferences as you. Stiles, this is really the best solution for everyone.”

“Stop trying to convince him, Deaton.” And Stiles’ heart soars for a minute with hope. “He going to do it whether he like it or not because that’s his duty. He is a Stilinski and he will behave like one.

Stiles stands up from his chair.

“I’ll do it, but not for you or the humans on our land. I’m doing it for mom, because it’s what she would’ve wanted. She hated even the thought of war and… I’m going to do this for her,” he says before storming out. Instead of going to his room like he had planned, he runs to the library to cry out his problems. Maybe the faded presence of his mother will be able to comfort him.

“Mom, seriously? You want me to marry a human?” Derek Hale asks his mother. He had come into his room with the pretense of ‘bonding time.’ Her offer had been milk and a fresh batch of chocolate cookies. Talia Hale had let him get full and content before moving onto the actual topic she was concerned with. Now, Derek is stuffed full of deliciousness and pissed the fuck off. Really,
the two don’t go together. He can already feel his stomach protesting.

“Of course I don’t want you to marry Prince Stiles. But, that has nothing to do with him being human. Your father and I always wanted you marry someone for love, not politics. But this war has gone too far and I just don’t think I- our kingdom- can handle it anymore,” Queen Talia says to her son, sitting on the foot of his bed.

“What do you mean, ‘you don’t care that he’s human?’ Are you crazy? Humans killed my father, along with many other werewolves that had been under the protection of our kingdom,” Derek says, sitting up. Talia shakes her head.

“That was one group of humans. I refuse to see them all as murderers like everyone else in this kingdom would like to. You know, there was a time before they knew about us that we used to get along.”

“Yeah, mom. And now they know about us and they despise us. We’re winning the war. Why are we trying to compromise?” Derek continues, reaching for another cookie and knowing it will only make him feel sicker.

“We’re compromising because even though we’re winning, its only by a slim margin. We have power but they have numbers and were losing too many of our kind. It’s the best solution. We can end the war while tying our two kingdoms together. By uniting the Hales with the Stilinski, we can ensure that there’s never a war in California again. Besides, your father never wanted war.”

“Like a human prince wants to marry me,” Derek mumbles, knowing its true. The Stilinski prince was probably being forced into this in much the same way as he was.

“Who wouldn’t want to marry you, honey?” Talia Hale says, reaching up to run a hand through his black hair. “You’re handsome, intelligent, and loyal. Anyone would be lucky to have you.”

Derek grumbles around a mouthful of cookie.

His mother continues. “I’m not going to force you into anything, but I want you to meet the boy before you make your decision. He’s only a couple of years younger than you. They’ve invited us to dinner and I’ve accepted. Tomorrow night.”

“Mom!”

“Just meet him!” she says, standing up and making her getaway after dropping that bomb.

After she leaves, Derek thinks about it and already knows that he’ll go through with the dinner and the marriage too. Even if it’s the last thing he wants. Because after his father’s death, his mother just hasn’t been the same. Not empty, but definitely emptier. Losing her mate had destroyed a little bit of herself. The war had only made it worse. If Derek could help her with her burden, he would, by whatever means necessary.

Sacrificing his future happiness seemed like such a small price to pay in comparison to all of her sacrifices.

Stiles’ dad finds him the next day in the library, nose in a book while trying to forget all about him problems. Unfortunately, no matter how much he tries to hide from them, those problems literally come to find him.
“Stiles, get dressed. We’re having company for dinner tonight,” his father says, efficiently erasing any calm Stiles had. The tone of the King’s voice sets his nerves on edge with its ominous tone. He closes the novel.

“What company?” he asks innocently, tracing a pattern on the cover of the book, avoiding eye contact. Since yesterday’s conversation, things have been tense between them. They’re both terrible at confronting issues, so they haven’t spoken since. Yesterday’s dinner and today’s breakfast and lunch had been exceedingly awkward.

“The Hales,” his father says, voice devoid of any emotion. “I invited them to dine with us so that you and Prince Derek can meet each other.”

Stiles stands up, putting the book aside. “You invited werewolves into the castle? Into this kingdom? Oh my God, Dad. Werewolves have never stepped foot in this place! Are you insane?” Stiles might add a lot of flailing to make his point.

“How do you expect to get married to the man if we don’t let him into our home?”

“Here’s a brilliant idea! Why don’t we just not get married?” Stiles says, hands spread in exasperation. His dad crosses his arms.

“You told me you were going through with the marriage yesterday. You’re not going to back out now. I need to you go upstairs and get dressed because they’ll be here in an hour.”

Stiles crosses his arms in the manner as his father. “Just how long have you known about this dinner?” he asks.

“Since yesterday.”

“And you’re telling me about this an hour beforehand, why?”

“Because now, you have no time to back out. Go get dressed, Stiles.”

When he gets back to his room, there’s an outfit laid out on his bed. It’s pretty simple. Black paints and a burgundy, button-down shirt. People always say that burgundy is his color, so he has the sneaking suspicion that his outfit hadn’t been chosen randomly.

He has the sudden urge to just throw on pajamas or a bathrobe and be done with it. Hopefully, his future suitor would be so thrown off that the wedding would be canceled. But, then his father would be livid. And he has to remind himself just why he’s doing this. Mom, Mom, Mom, Mom. Like a mantra. It helps.

There is uproar within the kingdom when they hear about the werewolves’ arrival. Like Stiles had told his father, this would be the first time that anyone other than humans had stepped foot into the Stilinski Castle since monarchies were established in America. He has no idea how it works in other states, but in California, things like this just don’t happen. So maybe his people have a right to be upset. Stiles is upset too.

The Stilinski Castle is closed to the public for dinner. The only people invited to dine are his father, his father’s advisor, Deaton, Queen Talia Hale, Prince Derek Hale, and himself. Stiles already has an inkling about how awkward this is going to be. He refuses to speak to his father, and he is so not speaking to Derek or Queen Talia. So his only other source of conversation is Deaton who is a terrible conversationalist. He doesn’t laugh at Stiles’ hilarious jokes. His face always remains deadpan. Stiles is going to be miserable. But really, he had already known that.
Stiles, his father, and Deaton wait to greet the Hales by the front doors of the castle. There are guards lining the entrance, probably to make sure that one daring human doesn’t decide to attempt an attack on the arriving werewolves. It’s not too farfetched. Stiles wouldn’t be surprised if the Hales decide to bring their own entourage for protection.

It’s only a few minutes of tense waiting before the Hales arrive. All the guards stand to attention, and like Stiles had predicted, before the Hales enter, five of their own sentries walk in before they do. So that means that there are a total of seven werewolves in the Stilinski Castle. Stiles feels faint. He doesn’t know how his father is maintaining a calm mask. The only sign that Stiles sees of his dad’s anxiety is his clenched fists.

Talia Hale, who Stiles sees first, would be beautiful if he didn’t know she was a werewolf. She has long, dark hair that reaches almost to her waste. Her skin is smooth and almost luminescent under the lighting. She also has this faint smile on her face and lines around her eyes as if she laughs a lot. Queen Talia grins at Stiles, but he knows it’s feigned. Weres don’t share the same emotions as humans. They’re pure beasts at heart. Still, he can’t help the small smile that pulls at his lips against his will. She just has that effect.

Stiles thinks that if Derek Hale is anything like his mother, this situation maybe won’t be completely terrible. But then he sees the prince and those small hopes are washed away. Price Derek is like a sculpture carved from marble, expression equally as cold and lifeless. Perfectly shaped nose, face, lips, everything. A smattering of stubble that covers the lower half of his face. Eyes a mixture of silver, blue, green, and brown. Daunting eyebrows hovering over those rainbows of color. Tell that its sculptor well those passions read.

The only thing marring the perfect visage was the frown on his face and the seemingly perpetual look of disdain. And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command. As if, unlike Stiles, Derek has spent a lot of time learning the ways of a prince. It’s slightly intimidating, if he’s being honest with himself.

And maybe comparing him to the king in “Ozymandias” was a little harsh. But if the shoe fits… Plus he loved poetry. His mother used to read him it to get him to sleep, and “Ozymandias” had been one of her favorites. She always used to say that just because the Stilinskis have power, it doesn’t mean that we have to be drunk on it. God, he missed her.

He’s doing this for her. He just has to keep reminding himself.

Thankfully, they soon sit down after some pleasantries that involve handshaking and small talk. Really it’s just his father and Queen Talia talking. Derek and Stiles are doing the best job in the world of avoiding eye contact with anyone and eachother.

When Stiles shakes Derek’s hand, again, not looking at his face, he’s surprised by how normal it is. His hand is warm, and slightly calloused. His grip is maybe a little bit too strong. For some reason, he imagined Derek's hand to be as cold as his expression. Stiles must wince or show some emotion because Derek quickly pulls his hand back.

Stiles is sure the dinner tastes great. There’s a lot more meat than usual, for the weres presumably. It might be a prejudice that weres like meat more than humans, but they don’t seem to mind. Derek is stoically cutting into a steak while Queen Talia happily indulging in the lamb.

His father has loosened up some, giving the Queen small smiles every now and then. They and Deaton talk mainly about politics, about how the marriage will be planned.
Whenever Stiles makes the mistake of looking across from him, where Derek unfortunately is, the man is staring at him—glaring really. Derek quickly looks away each time. Stiles wonders what he’s done wrong, but thinks that maybe that’s the way Derek is.

When dessert comes, Stiles decides that he needs air. He excuses himself before quickly walking out of the dining room and finding the nearest exit that leads outside. The fresh air hits him and he immediately feels so much better. Stiles walks to the garden, one of his mother’s favorite places and the site of her murder. All the blood has long since been washed away, but this place still depresses him. Even as it revitalizes him.

Stiles is walking by the castle wall, fingers trailing along the rough stone, when he sees a dark shape rear up in front of him. He’s prepared to scream for help, sure that his life will end in much the same way as his mother’s did, before the shape’s features materialize enough that he realizes its Derek. Stiles calms down, but a hint of fear still stays with him.

“Hey, um,” and damn it! Why does his voice have to crack like that? “I’m just getting some air. And honestly, I’d rather be alone. Not to say that you have to go back in there, but I’d rather—”

He cuts himself off as Derek takes another step towards him, his face imperturbable. Stiles walks backwards until he’s pressed against stone, and Derek just keeps coming, getting closer and closer until he’s crowding Stiles against the wall. Stiles is now regretting his decision to not scream a minute ago.

“Please don’t kill me,” Stiles says, not proud of his moment of weakness, but he’s willing to do anything if it means getting away. Derek snorts before taking one step back, just enough to put about two feet of space between them. Stiles draws in a shaky breath.

“I just think we should talk,” Derek says finally. Stiles realizes that it’s the first time he’s heard Derek’s voice. It’s deep and smooth and has Stiles wishing that Derek wasn’t a werewolf. Then, he wouldn’t feel so conflicted about finding the man, and his voice, attractive.

“Okay. Then talk,” Stiles replies, trying to stand up taller. Trying to regain some composure. They’re almost the same height, Derek having only about an inch on him. But Derek's brooding nature makes him seem even more imposing.

“I don’t want to marry you,” Derek begins.

“Same,” Stiles interjects, willing himself not flinch as Derek’s eyes flash gold for a brief moment. He had heard about the weird eye-status thing, but had never seen it in real life.

“But,” Derek continues, tone sharper. “My mother has already been through enough without the war adding more stress. I’m doing this for her.”

“I’m doing this for my mother too,” Stiles says, wondering if he might actually share something in common with a werewolf. Derek stares at him warily.

“I thought the Stilinski Queen was dead,” he says. Stiles feels his earlier tangled emotions surfacing yet again.

“Yeah, she is. Actually, she was killed in this very garden. By werewolves,” Stiles says, eyes narrowing as he punches out the last sentence. Derek goes still, but doesn’t look the least bit guilty, and Stiles really didn’t expect him to. Animals don’t have manners. It seems that they aren’t capable of common courtesy either.

“Human’s killed my father. I guess were even.”
Stiles feels like acid is bubbling in his stomach, clawing up his throat. “This isn’t a game,” he spits. “There are no winners or losers or ties. People die. are dying. My mother is dead. Your father is dead. Millions of people are dead.”

“Don’t act so righteous. I’m doing this for my people too,” Derek says, stepping in closer, his calm voice becoming angry.

“You aren’t people. You’re animals.”

At that, Derek’s façade cracks as he slams a palm into the wall behind Stiles. Right next to where Stiles’ head is. The human cringes just barely.

“If I was really an animal, I would kill you right now,” Derek growls out. “Do you want me to be an animal? It would be so easy to just give in. I can smell your fear, you know. And I can hear your heartbeat. It’s going so fast. You sound and smell like prey.” He hisses out the last part before taking the hand that had smacked into the wall and holding it up to Stiles’ face, claws extended. Derek runs a finger down Stiles’ cheek, grinning as the human’s pulse undoubtedly jumps.

Stiles has never seen a weres claws up close. They’re sharp and terrifying. But Stiles forces himself to steel his resolve. He takes a deep breath before reaching up and pushing the hand away from him.

“No, don’t threaten me. Just because you’re some freakish human-beast hybrid doesn’t make you any better than me. In my eyes, it actually makes you worse.” Stile wrenches away from the wall, resisting the urge to run from the garden. Speed walking being the next best solution.

When Stiles returned back to the dining room, dessert is being served. It looks delicious, but the thought of eating anything makes him feel extremely nauseous.

His father and Talia are talking about having another castle built for him and Derek after the wedding. Okay, now he really feels like he’s about to puke. Derek enters a minute or two later. Unlike before, there’s no glaring on Derek’s part. Actually, he barely spares him a passing glance. Stiles wants to think that that’s better, but in reality, it’s worse, and he has no idea why.

The Hales return back to their kingdom late at night and all Derek wants to do is retire to his room and sleep. Unfortunately, his mother wants to talk. She follows Derek to his room, but he ignores her, choosing to flop onto his bed with a book.

It’s only when he’s a few sentences in that his mother begins to speak.

“You know that Stiles likes to read too,” she starts, voice hopeful. She sits at the foot of his bed like before, one hand straying to rub one of his legs.

“I don’t care.” The hand on his leg pauses.

“I take that to mean that you two didn’t get along? You don’t want to go through with this marriage?” Her voice is full of nothing but concern, though Derek can smell the anxiety rolling off her in waves. He takes a deep breath, reminding himself why he’s doing this. How much his mother needs him to do this.

“Of course I don’t want to marry him, but I will. It’s the best way to help my people. It’s just… he hates me, Mom. I think he might hate all werewolves, really, but he despises me.” If Derek was being honest with himself, he hadn’t given Stiles much reason to like him. But, it was like the
prince wouldn’t have wanted to like him anyway. He had these prejudices about weres that just set Derek’s teeth on edge.

He hadn’t snapped like he had in the garden for some time. Only after his father’s death had his control with his wolf been that bad. He had even let his eyes glow, his claws come out. But he had good reason, damn it. Stiles was infuriating. Even so, Derek knows that he would never actually hurt the human, despite what he had fronted. That’s what it had really been. A front. He doesn’t really hate Stiles the way that Stiles hates him, and he doesn’t know why. He should hate Stiles after everything Stiles had said to Derek.

Talia hums as if reading his mind. “What happened out there when you two left the table? What did you do, honey?”

“Nothing,” Derek replies a little too quickly. His mother raises an eyebrow until Derek lets out a deep breath and relents. He tells her everything: what he said, what Stiles said, what both of them did. He’s even more ashamed of his actions when he finishes.

Talia doesn’t look angry, only sad, which is so much worse. But after a moment, a smile comes over her face. She reaches over and gives him a kiss on the cheek.

“He’ll come around. Just be patient.”
It’s a few days later when another meeting is called by Deaton. The past week has been stressful for his father. Small riots had begun to sprout up in the Stilinski land, and the King has been forced to send out his guards in order to control the crowds. Stiles assumes this meeting has something to do with that, and he has no idea why he’s supposed to attend it.

Usually, his father handles the more serious problems concerning their people. His confusion is only doubled, tripled even, when he sees that it’s not just Deaton and his dad in the conference room. A scowl soon appears on his face as he takes in the scene, his puzzled expression becoming angry.

“Sit down, son,” his father says from his usual seat at the head of the table. Sitting opposite him, on the other side, is Queen Talia Hale. But that’s not what concerns him, because it’s not just Talia there. Seated next to her is Derek, arms crossed and face empty. There are only four chairs.

Deaton remains standing and gestures for Stiles to take the seat across from Derek. It’s among the very last things that he wants to do, right along with stabbing himself in the eye with a fork and jumping into a bubbling pot of lava.

“Uh. No thanks. You can take the seat,” Stiles says to Deaton, avoiding eye contact with Derek. His father sighs loudly.

“Stiles, for God’s sake! Sit down.”

After a moment of internal debate, Stiles decides that storming out of the room would make his father look bad in front of the werewolves. His dad would never forgive him for that. So, he clenches his fist and sits tensely in his chair, head held high as, but still avoiding the pair of eyes that he can feel staring blankly at him.

His father clears his throat before speaking in a milder voice. “Deaton, can you recap on why we’re here, please?”

“Of course, sir,” Deaton replies before coming up to stand by the King. “As I’m sure you are all aware, both weres and humans have certain… feelings towards each other.”

Stiles tries to hold back an eye-roll and fails miserably. His dad shoots him a scolding look. Deaton continues, unfazed. “At the news of a marriage between the two princes, there has been upheaval in both kingdoms. Riots mostly. They haven’t gotten violent yet, but I fear that soon enough, humans and weres will begin to fight each other, regardless of the peace treaty.”

Deaton waits for nods of understanding before beginning to speak again.
“The problem is that, in the Stilinski Kingdom, the humans are fiercely protective of Stiles. They’ve made him into something of an idol after Claudia’s death. He’s seen as the son of not just King John, but everyone else too. The last thing they want him to do is marry a werewolf. They have already begun to guess that the marriage is a means to end the war, and I believe they would rather actually go to war then use Stiles as a sacrifice.”

Stiles can’t help the grin that spreads across his face. He really does love his subjects. They’re smart and loyal. If only his father felt the same way as the other humans.

“The situation is mostly the same in the Hale Kingdom. The werewolves don’t want their future King marrying a human for the sole purpose of ending a feud,” Deaton says, voice grave.

“So that’s it?” Stiles pipes up, voice hopeful. “Is the wedding called off?”

“I’m afraid that stopping the wedding arrangements would just make things worse. Then your people would know for sure that the wedding was all politics. A union between the two kingdoms is the only way that we can all make sure that another war doesn’t take place. We have to force weres and humans to come together.”

“So, Deaton. How do we convince everyone that the wedding isn’t just to end the fighting? How do we make the riots stop?” Talia asks, looking genuinely curious and concerned.

“Yeah. How?” Stiles adds, having a sudden intuition that he won’t like what’s going to be said next.

“We have to make it so that both the weres and the humans believe this isn’t political. If everyone thinks the two of you are in love, they’ll be more inclined to go along with the wedding,” Deaton says.

Stiles feels as if he’s slowly being strangled. He brings his hand up to tug at his collar, his breathing becomes irregular. “You want me to pretend that… I like Derek,” he says, voice expressionless.

Deaton shakes his head. “No. I need you to pretend to be in love with him. You two need to be convincing in order fool everyone.”

“Convincing,” Stiles repeats in a choked voice. “I don’t have to like, kiss him, do I?” he asks, glancing at Derek for the first time since the conversation began. Derek isn’t looking at him anymore, instead choosing to stare at his hands. Stiles looks at the tips of the were’s fingers, remembering the claws that had been there. Remembering how it had felt when they had been trailing down his cheek. He can’t help but shiver, just a little bit.

Deaton doesn’t reply, instead turning to the king, as if asking him to take over. The King nods and focuses his attention towards his son.

“You are to do whatever necessary to play your part. You’re a good liar, Stiles. You lie to me all the time.” His father says the last part drily before turning serious. “I expect you to behave as a prince should, for once.”

That last part is like a blow to his chest, but he ignores it. Anger becomes a blanket for him to hide under.

“I refuse to be intimate with him,” Stiles says, deadpan. His father clenches his jaw, but remains calm.
“Stiles, I understand your feelings, but it’s very important that-” Deaton starts before Stiles interrupts him.

“No! How are we supposed to prove to two entire kingdoms that we are… infatuated with each other when he won’t even look at me?” Stiles says in outrage before pointing to the Derek.

The werewolf finally lifts his head, glowering at Stiles across the table.

“I can do my part in this,” Derek says. Stiles sneers.

“Oh, sure you can.”

“I can. I have no issues with putting on a false mask. You’re the one who has problems with keeping your emotions in check. Take now as an example.”

Stiles splutters. “Excuse me?”

“You act like a child, like you have no sense of duty. Everything is always about you, isn’t it?” Derek says, slamming his palms down on the table with a loud smack. His eyes flash gold for a millisecond. It’s so fast that if Stiles would have blinked, he’d probably have missed it. But he hadn’t blinked, and he had seen it.

Stiles can’t help the way he flinches back, fear overtaking his body.

“Derek. Hale.” Talia says, breaking the silence. Her tone is stern and commanding. When Stiles looks up at her, he sees that her eyes are a blood-red, all hints of her easy smile gone.

Stiles breath hitches in his throat. He had almost forgotten that he was in a room with two weres. Weres that are completely capable of ripping his throat out if they feel inclined to. The realization washes over him like ice cold water. He sits ramrod straight in his seat as Derek and Talia have a silent staring battle.

Finally, Derek seems backs down. He glares again at Stiles, but there’s less heat behind it.

“I think that we’ve covered all the bases,” Talia says as she begins to stand up. “We’ll stay in touch.” She gives one last parting smile to everyone before walking out of the room. Derek stands up too.

“Sir, I’m sorry for my behavior today,” he says to Stiles’ father, tilting his head slightly.

“It’s all right, Derek. You weren’t far off from the truth.”

Derek nods uncertainly, giving one fleeting look to the human prince before he exits the room, leaving Stiles, his father, and Deaton alone.

Stiles turns to his father, trying to hide how hurt he is.

“So you think I’m spoiled? That I only care about myself?”

“Well, you sure are acting like it, son.”

“Do you have any idea how hard this is for me? I don’t want to marry a werewolf. Just the thought of… of letting him touch me. Dad, I can’t,” Stiles says, hearing his words get thicker as he feels tears coming on. He will not cry. He will not.

“I don’t care about what you want. This isn’t about what you want, Stiles.”
There’s a moment of silence as Stiles’ welled up tears begin to overflow. Damn it! He did not want to cry in front of his dad. His dad that had changed so much after his mother’s death. Who had gone from easy going to strict and hard. His dad who just didn’t understand him anymore.

“Sometimes I really hate you,” Stiles says before he stands up and storms out.

“Derek, what is wrong with you? Why are you behaving like this?” Talia asks her son once they’re back at the Hale Castle. The entire ride had been tense and silent, and she had barely let him get to his room before the verbal onslaught began.

“Stiles started it, Mom,” Derek says, knowing he sounds like a petulant child. He can’t help it, though. The human just brings it out of him.

“You told me that you were going to try to make this work! Picking a fight with him is doing just about the opposite. I know this isn’t what you want, but why would you try to sabotage-”

“I wasn’t trying to sabotage anything, Mom. I already told you that I wanted this marriage if it meant making everyone’s lives easier.”

“Then why, Derek?” his mother asks, looking defeated. “Why would you let your eyes show like that? I heard the spike in his heart beat. I smelled his fear. He’s absolutely terrified of werewolves and you know that. So why would you try to scare him?”

“I wasn’t!” Derek shouted, turning to stare at his mother. “I just let anger get the best of me for a moment. It won’t happen again, I swear.” Derek knows that deep down, a part of him was just frustrated about Stiles’ outright refusal to so much as touch him. He might be forced to admit to himself that maybe he wouldn’t mind the marriage if his soon-to-be husband was more willing. But Stiles would never be, so Derek had to let that thought go.

“It better not, Derek. We all need this wedding to happen.” Talia takes a deep breath. “I want you to go back the Stilinski Kingdom tomorrow and apologize.”

Derek groans, flopping onto his bed. “I already apologized to the King,” he says.

“Did you apologize to Stiles?” his mother asks. Derek stiffens. That thought had never occurred to him, mostly because he didn’t think that the fight had really been his fault.

“No. But-”

“Derek.” Her tone is dangerous again, like it had been during the meeting. Derek feels his wolf wanting to submit to her, resisting the urge to whine.

“Fine. I’ll go and apologize to Stiles,” he says finally through clenched teeth.

“Thank you, honey,” his mother replies, voice full of sweetness. He was once again reminded of how his two sisters got their fiery nature. They could go from angry to charming in two seconds flat. It was terrifying.

“Good night, Mom,” he says into his pillow, closing his eyes as he hears her shut the door.

As Stiles rolls over in his bed the next morning, he releases a loud groan upon remembering what
had taken place the day before. That stupid meeting that had basically sealed his miserable fate. He is going to be forced to pretend to be in love with a werewolf. With *Prince Derek Hale*.

Stiles’ heartbeat begins to race as he remembers those glowing eyes. He can’t help but shudder. And then he remembers what he had said to his father after the meeting and burrows further in the covers, trying to hide from the world.

He should go and apologize to his dad right now, because he didn’t mean what he had come out of his mouth. Except, he kind of did. Some part of him did hate his father deep down. Or at least hated what he had become after his mother’s death. But, it was both of their faults that things had gotten this bad.

Stiles hears his door open and sits up to see his dad standing in the doorway. He opens his mouth, prepared to- he doesn’t really know. Defend himself against a lecture? Begin to say that he’s sorry?

But the King barely looks at him.

“You have a visitor. Get dressed and go to the library.” That’s all he says before closing the door, leaving Stiles feeling empty and alone.

Stiles shakes those emotions away, perplexity taking its place. He doesn’t get visitors. He doesn’t have anyone that he would really call a friend because, well, being a prince was kind of lonely. The only person he would consider an acquaintance would be Scott who works in the kitchens as a cook. And they only speak every now and then when they pass each other in the hallways.

Maybe he should invite Scott to hang out sometime. If he was going to be married to Derek, he would need at least one friend to get through it with. Someone he could talk to. Someone to spew his feelings out to.

Stiles sighs before climbing out of his bed to get dressed.

When he trudges downstairs and walks down the hallways, coincidentally, he runs into Scott who’s hurrying to the kitchens. The boy nods at him and looks as if he’s going to keep walking until Stiles blocks his path.

Scott eyes him warily. “Is there a problem, Prince Stiles?” he asks, fidgeting nervously. Stiles fights an eye-roll. Really, he’s not that special or intimidating. He doesn’t expect anyone to bow at his feet or anything.

“Just Stiles, please,” he says, giving an encouraging smile that he hopes will ease Scott’s mind. His hopefully future friend still looks anxious.

“Of, course… Stiles,” he says uncertainly. The prince smiles happily.

“So, I was wondering if you wanted to hang out sometime. We could go to the village bakery. Or horseback riding. I’ve been stuck in the castle for a while and it would be nice to get out…” Stiles trails off as Scott’s expression becomes even more dubious. “I mean, it’s okay if you don’t want to. I’m sorry. I’ll just…”

Stiles tries to weave around Scott and continue on his way to the library, but Scott suddenly speaks up.

“No. I… yeah. Hanging out would be nice. Just come and find me whenever.” Scott grins for the first time during the conversation and something in Stiles’ chest soars. He just made a friend. Maybe he’s jumping ahead of himself. After all, they barely know each other. But he has a feeling
that he and Scott will be great friends.

Stiles nods and give a mock salute before turning and walking to the library. The smile on his face is like a permanent thing, refusing to fade away. And really, Stiles doesn’t want it to, even if his cheeks start to hurt after a minute. He guesses that he should be thankful to Derek for the pain relief, because as soon as he reaches his destination, the grin wanes away.

“What are you doing here?” he asks Derek who’s sitting by the window in *his* usual seat. He balls his hands in outrage. The library is his haven, and now it’s been tainted like everything else in his life. He doesn’t sit down in the spot next to Derek because that’s just too close for comfort. No, he’d rather remain standing, thank you very much.

“Trust me. I wouldn’t be speaking to you if my mother hadn’t forced me to,” Derek says, crossing his arms. Stiles mimics him so that both of their postures are defensive.

“Okay. Why *are* you speaking to me? We have to put on fake personas in front of our people, but we don’t need to really talk or anything in real life.”

Derek sighs after a moment before dropping his arms. For once, his expression looks almost vulnerable. Stiles isn’t able to tell whether it’s an act or not.

“This is a nice library,” the werewolf says, looking around. Stiles is thrown for a minute.

“You read?” he asks, not realizing how his words could be taken until Derek turns to glare at him.

“You’re surprised that I’m capable of it? Werewolves aren’t stupid, no matter what you think.” Derek seems to take a deep breath, calming himself before continuing. His eyes are closed, for which Stiles is grateful. Stiles isn’t sure what he would see if they were open, Derek’s normal blue hazel eyes or the luminescent golden werewolf ones.

“It would be easier to pretend that we like each other if we could at least get along. Just a little bit. I… I’m here to apologize for yesterday. I lost control when I shouldn’t have. I know that you’re afraid of werewolves and I’m trying to make it so that you’re not completely terrified of me,” Derek says.

Stiles snorts. “I’m not afraid of you. Just… wary.”

Now it’s Derek’s turn to start snorting.

“I can tell when you’re lying, Stiles,” he says, voice wry. The human raises an eyebrow.


“No,” he sighs in exasperation. “Your heart beat just gets kind of irregular when you tell a lie. It skips or jumps. I’m not really sure how to explain it.”

“That’s actually kind of cool,” Stiles says, smiling despite himself as he tilts his head to the side.

“What else can you do?”

“Um,” Derek rubs his hands together as if he doesn’t know what to do with them. “Well, besides the hearing, I’m also kind of strong. Stronger than most humans, at least. Faster too. If we were in a race, I could beat you without a problem. It wouldn’t be a fair fight,” he says, a faint smile on his face too. Even though it’s small, Stiles is shocked at seeing that little bit of emotion. He’s once again reminded that Derek is *hot*. Beautiful, even. Derek would probably be considered as great
marriage material if it weren’t for that thing about him being a werewolf. Stiles needs to think of something else.

So he tries to imagine it, he and Derek running together. Stiles would probably cheat and give himself a head start. If Derek was being nice - not likely - then he would probably stay behind Stiles for a while and give him the illusion that the human had a chance of winning. Then, Derek would begin to close in.

In his mind, Stiles’ face slowly begins to morph into that of his mother’s. Derek’s features change into that of the faceless werewolf that Stiles pictures every time he thinks of his mother’s killer.

Suddenly, knowing that weres have the advantage when it comes to speed and strength isn’t all that exciting. It’s horrifying really.

Stiles clears his throat.

“Well, you came to apologize. I accept your apology, so... I guess you can go now.”

Derek frowns for a moment as if not understanding Stiles’ sudden change of mood, but he nods and stands up. “Yeah, okay. But, I meant it about things being easier if we got along. We don’t have to love each other, or anything. But we can be cordial, right?”

“Right,” Stiles says, voice small. Derek raises an eyebrow, his grimace deepening.

“I can tell when you’re lying, remember?” the werewolf says before walking out of the library and leaving Stiles alone.

Stiles decides to go find Scott because, after that conversation, he really needs someone to talk to. He hurries towards the dining area and past it, to the kitchen in the back. He almost gets smashed in the face by a frying pan, but manages to duck just in time.

“I’m so sorry, Prince Stiles,” an old lady - Stiles thinks her name is Agatha - says. She looks fearful for her life. Honestly, Stiles hasn’t interacted much with the help, so he doesn’t know what they all think of him, but he isn’t tyrannical or anything. Why do they all seem so terrified?

“It’s fine,” he says, giving her a smile. “Can you tell me where Scott is?”

Her expression turns questioning, but she just nods and gestures for Stiles to follow her all the way to the back of the kitchen. He had never realized how many people it took to prepare one of his meals. There has to be maybe twenty cooks in one claustrophobic working place. Stiles is already sweating.

They finally reach Scott who is sitting in a chair and peeling potatoes. There’s already a barrel of peeled potatoes in front of him. Stiles is kind of in awe because, well, he hadn’t been in the library that long. It would’ve taken Stiles about two hours to do what Scott had done in 15 minutes.

“Thanks,” Stiles says to the lady as he makes his way to Scott. “Hey,” he greets. Scott looks surprised to see him so soon after their brief discussion, but he also seems happy.

“Hi. Uh, I can hang out with you right after I finish peeling these. It’ll only take like ten more minutes,” Scott says nervously, like he isn’t sure that Stiles will take kindly to having to wait.

Stiles can’t help an eye roll. He looks around until he spots another chair and pulls it over to where
Scott is sitting. Scott looks at Stiles as if he’s never seen him before as the prince grabs an extra peeler with one hand and a potato with the other.

“What?” Stiles says, shrugging his shoulders. “If I help you, we can leave sooner,” he states matter-of-factly.

“Yeah, but. You really don’t have to,” Scott splutters.

“I want to. I just need a tutorial or something because I’ve never really done this before.” Stiles feels kind of ashamed to admit to something like that, but Scott just grins before jumping into an explanation.

Truthfully, Scott probably would’ve finished sooner if he hadn’t spent so much time talking Stiles through the motions, but he doesn’t seem to mind. When the last potato is finally peeled, Stiles fingers are cramping up. He shakes his hands out as he stands.

“I don’t know how you do it, man,” Stiles says, staring at Scott in awe. “After five minutes my hands are killing me.”

“You get used to it,” Scott says, ducking his head bashfully.

They make their way out of the kitchen, both of them having to dodge arms and duck under cooking utensils. It’s like walking through a field of landmines. Stiles is out of breath when they finally make it out.

“So, what do you want to do?” Scott asks.

“Well, like I said. I kind of want to get out of the castle. And I haven’t been to the village in a while. We can browse the shops? Maybe get some food?”

Scott nods, but he has this sad look on his face that immediately raises alarms in Stiles' head.

“What’s wrong?” he asks. “We don’t have to go out if you don’t want to.”

“No, it’s just. I don’t really have a lot of money. Usually I just eat the leftovers in the kitchen. My mom is a healer, and she makes enough to support us, but not a lot.”

The possibility had never occurred to Stiles that not everyone had money to spend. He stands there for a moment in surprised shock before nodding.

“Okay. I’ll pay for you.”

Scott’s head snaps up. “No, really. It’s fine.”

“You’re my friend now, Scott. I can do nice things for you. Friends do nice things for each other, right?” Stiles asks. Scott nods after a moment. “Okay, then. Let’s go!”

Stiles grabs Scott’s arm and they walk towards the front doors of the castle. Deaton intercepts them halfway.

“Going somewhere?” he questions.

“Yeah, to the village. Can you tell Dad for me? Just so he knows where I am.”

*Not like he’ll care much*, Stiles thinks to himself.
“I can do that. I’ll also send a guard down to go there with you.”

Stiles freezes. He’s been in the castle for so long that he had forgotten the proper protocol. He really hates having a guard hovering over him every time that he goes outside. But, it’s a nonnegotiable thing. Stiles has argued multiple times against it and gotten nowhere.

“Okay,” Stiles sighs, resigned.

“He’ll be waiting for you at the doors,” Deaton says before hurrying to go do whatever needed to be done.

“I hope you don’t mind the guard. I know it’s probably going to be weird for you. Hell, it’s weird for me and I’ve had to deal with it my whole life.”

Scott shrugs. “It’s fine.”

“Okay,” Stiles says with relief. He doesn’t want to scare off his only friend before they’ve even really become friends yet.

True to Deaton’s words, there’s a guard there to meet the two of them by the doors. He inclines his head to them after saying that his name is Isaac. He seems okay. Around Stiles’ and Scott’s age.

The walk to the village is about half a mile, so it only takes around ten minutes to trek there. Stiles finds himself laughing with Scott more than he’s ever laughed in his life. Scotts hilarious once he comes out of his shell. They even start to joke around with Isaac who manages to crack a smile.

The only thing that brings Stiles’ mood down slightly is the whispers he hears around him. Marriage. Werewolf. Hale.

But no one comes up to talk to him directly. They all give Stiles a wide berth.

At that moment, Scott cracks a joke that makes Stiles forget about anything werewolf related. His eyes tear up and he laughs until his stomach hurts.

He wants to do this more often.

They make it to the village bakery and stuff themselves with pastries. Stiles winds up buying Isaac something too. They’re all grinning ear to ear as they return to the castle. A part of Stiles almost doesn’t even want to go back.

Chapter End Notes

If you liked the chapter, kudos are appreciated. If you see any mistakes, plz tell me in the comments
The next few days thankfully pass uneventfully. Stiles doesn’t go on anymore outings during this time, mostly because either Scott is too busy in the kitchen or Stiles is too busy with his job as a prince.

It’s such a drastic change to his life, suddenly having so much work to do. Now, there are meetings every other day. Sometimes Derek and Talia are present; sometimes it’s just one or the other. Derek and Stiles don’t talk to each other, instead beginning to develop this pattern where they ignore the other’s existence unless absolutely necessary. It works for both of them.

Until one day when it doesn’t.

Stiles is called down for another meeting about a week after his discussion with Derek in the library. Everyone is there, which has Stiles worried. Deaton only attends if there’s an actual problem. It forces Stiles to think of the worst possible scenario. Like, the marriage being moved to tomorrow or something.

But Deaton’s expression isn’t grim like it normally is when he has bad news to give. He’s his normal, tranquil self. It eases Stiles nerves a little. That is, before the man opens his mouth.

“A ball? But, we haven’t had one in years. Why now?” Stiles asks, mind muddled. What he means to say is that their kingdom hadn’t had a ball since Queen Claudia’s death. She had enjoyed them. Had loved mingling and talking to her people, and after she died, it had just felt too strange to have one without her, so they hadn’t.

“This ball is a way to publically announce that there will, in fact, be a wedding. The people will bring gifts to acknowledge their support of your decision, and it’s a perfect time for you two to test your acting skills,” Deaton explains.

“I think it would be better if we don’t test them, actually,” Stiles says in a clipped tone.

Deaton frowns. “I’m not asking you to kiss Derek, though it certainly wouldn’t hurt. But, we’re not going to force you to do anything that you’re uncomfortable with.”

Stiles just huffs, choosing not to mention that the entire marriage is making him uncomfortable. He knows that he would get nowhere, anyway. And he and his dad have been doing so good lately. They’ve even had a few conversations that hadn’t turned into fights. He doesn’t want to push their luck.

“When is it?” Stiles chooses to ask instead. Better to get all the details now. He could be difficult later.

“Three days from now,” the King responds. Stiles breathes a sigh of relief. At least he has some time to brace himself before he has to be attached to Derek’s side.

Or not.

“I think it would be a good idea for my son and yours to spend some time together,” Talia starts, making Stiles freeze mid-gesticulation and Derek turn to glare at her. “They barely know each
other, and maybe if they did, it would be easier for them to interact with one another. The way things are going now, I think that your people will suspect that there’s next to no chemistry between the two.”

“That’s because there isn’t,” Derek and Stiles both say at the same time. Glowering ensues on both their parts. An epic standoff.

“Could’ve fooled us,” the King says, one hand coming up to hide his smile. Stiles turns his glare to his father.

“I’m not going to have bonding time with him,” Stiles says, gesturing towards Derek with a scowl. Of course, everyone ignores him.

“Honestly, it’s not a bad idea,” Deaton says to Talia. She and the King nod in agreement.

Stiles starts to feel panic rising. “No. No! Not happening. I swear, I can pretend to… to be in love with him without getting to know him. Really, I can! We don’t need to do this,” he says frantically, adding a few flails to make his point.

Deaton stares at him intensely. “Okay then. Let’s see it. Smile at Derek. Maybe try to even give him a compliment.”

There’s dead silence as Stile gulps. He stares straight ahead at the man in front of him.

“You go first,” Stiles splutters, feeling his face heat up. Derek looks up at Deaton questioningly who nods the go ahead.

Derek then focuses his attention on Stiles and raises an eyebrow as if in challenge before breaking out into a smile that has the human’s stomach clenching. And not from fear. But from what exactly, Stiles has no idea. It’s just…

Stiles has never seen Derek with a full blown grin before. It almost has him swooning before he remembers that Derek is a *werewolf*. What is wrong with him that he keeps forgetting that?

Still, he can’t bear to look away, and if he’s being truthful with himself, he doesn’t want to.

“Your eyes are breathtaking,” Derek says, never once breaking eye contact. His voice seems sincere, as does his expression. Of course it’s all feigned, but really, Derek is the best actor in the world as far as Stiles is concerned.

It’s actually hard for him to catch his breath for a moment as he bites his lip. They continue to look at each other- it’s not an angry stare down like before, more a searching gaze- until someone finally clears their throat.

Stiles reluctantly looks up at Deaton who says, “Your turn, now.”

The human feels a blush creeping up again which he furiously tries to stop. It had been nothing. Derek was just a good liar, that’s all. And Stiles is a sucker for compliments.

He can’t be blamed for that. He just doesn’t get them that often, so when he *does*...

Stiles glances back at Derek and gives a small, pained, half smile before stammering out, “Ditto.”

The entire table erupts in groans.

“That’s it, Stiles. You’re not getting out of this. Tomorrow, I want you and Derek to actually spend
time together. I don’t care how or where, but it’s going to happen.”

Stiles begins to whine. “Daaaaaaadd…”

“No, son. I’m not budging on this.”

Stiles knows that his father is close to getting angry again, and they had been doing so well lately that the prince can’t bring himself to argue.

“Okay,” he finally says, voice small.

“I can’t believe you did that, Mom,” Derek whispers as they leave the meeting room. “We don’t need to spend time with each other. More importantly, we don’t want to.”

Talia turns and steps in front of her son, blocking his path. “First of all, yes you do. And secondly, don’t lie to me.”

Derek is floored for a moment before saying with conviction, “I’m not lying.”

His mother’s eyes soften as she grips his arm. “Then repeat that last sentence again.”

Brows furrowed, Derek says, “Stiles and I don’t want to spend time together.”

“That was a lie, honey.”

“No it wasn’t! Stiles sure as hell doesn’t want anything to do with me,” Derek replies in confusion and annoyance. Talia stares at him until he finally gets it. “Are you implying that I want to spend time with Stiles?” he asks quietly, struck dumb.

“Your heart did jump. Maybe what you think you want isn’t the same as what you feel inside.”

He shakes his head frantically and steps around his mother. “You’re wrong. Your hearing must be off or something.”

Talia quickly matches his pace and they make their way out of the castle before she begins to speak again. “You and I both know that my ears are perfectly fine, Derek.”

He grumbles in irritation before she continues.

“But, you know what’s strange? I didn’t hear your pulse jump back in that room during the meeting.”

“What are you talking about, Mom?” Derek sighs as they reach their horses in the castle stables. He pats Harley on the nose before saddling him up.

“I’m talking about back there when you told Stiles that his eyes were breathtaking.”

“Like I told you, you have hearing problems,” Derek says, clenching his teeth. His mom frowns, but finally drops the subject.

None of what she had said was true. He knows that. Even if her heartbeat hadn’t jumped once throughout that whole conversation. Derek refuses to believe anything that his mother says.
Because denial is a thing that he’s incredibly good at, apparently.

The next day, Stiles is sitting in the library, book in his lap when Derek walks into the room. The werewolf looks different. Tired, pale, and as if he’d rather be anywhere else.

Well, you and me both, buddy.

“You look like death,” Stiles says unthinkingly. He cringes slightly, expecting Derek to get angry and attack him or something. The werewolf just looks at him and twists his lips in an exhausted frown.

“Didn’t get much sleep,” Derek replies, walking to where Stiles is seated by the window. He takes a seat too, hands splaying across the table that separates them.

“Why?” Stiles asks, decidedly looking back down at his book instead of the at the Hale Prince staring at him.

“Too many thoughts,” is all Derek says.

Stiles hums in understanding and continues looking down at the pages, not really reading anything. Derek’s gaze feels like a burning itch. It makes him restless until finally, he has to look up.

“So, what do you want to do today?” he finally says, closing the novel as he gives up all pretenses of trying to ignore the man. Derek shrugs, crossing his fingers and leaning back. Stiles can’t help but notice the way the sunlight filters through the windows and catches his eyes, bringing out the gold and green in them.

Really, why would Derek say that Stiles’ eyes are breathtaking? They’re just a plain, boring brown. Derek’s eyes are… like every color and no color at all. Blue, green, a pale gray and more. He could get lost in them if he allows himself to. Which he won’t.

“We can stay here if it’s alright with you,” Derek answers, efficiently cutting through Stiles’ reverie. “Do you mind if I look around for a while?”

Stiles mouth opens in surprise. Part of him wants to say no. The thought of a werewolf in one of his mom’s favorite places is somewhat disturbing for him. But, Derek isn’t just any werewolf.

Stiles isn’t sure when he started to make the mental distinction.

“Actually, never mind. I guess- I guess it was stupid of me to ask,” Derek says, reading Stiles’ silence wrong.

“No. Um, it’s fine. Go ahead.”

“Thank you,” Derek breaths out. He gives a drained smile before standing up and getting lost in the shelves, leaving Stiles surprised but content to a degree. This development actually works to his advantage. Books means reading which, in turn, means little to no talking.

It’s about fifteen minutes later when Derek returns, four books in hand. Stiles looks up and raises an eyebrow.

“Your library is… impressive,” Derek explains, ducking his head almost… sheepishly? Stiles has
to admit that when he loses the scowl and glaring eyes, Derek is kind of stunning. Especially when he blushes.

Derek? Blushing? What has the world come to?

Is the werewolf sick? Yeah, that’s definitely it. Because Derek is so not acting normal, right now. But, weres can’t get sick, so what does his strange behavior mean?

Derek seems oblivious to Stiles’ inner turmoil, instead cracking open a book and leaving the world behind. After a moment of staring, Stiles picks up his own book and chooses to do the same.

They remain like that for a couple hours, both lost in fictional worlds, until Derek startles Stiles back into reality… by laughing.

The human looks at Derek as if he’s an alien for a good three seconds. “Are you okay?” he finally asks.

Derek looks up, faint traces of a smile still on his face. “Yeah, sorry. I just got to a funny part in the story.”

Stiles reaches over before pausing, his arm midway across the table. “Can I?” he asks, gesturing towards the book. Derek nods, picking it up and handing it to him. Their fingers end up brushing accidently, and Stiles knows that his pulse jumps. He just hopes that the werewolf doesn’t hear it.

Oddly enough, it’s Derek who ends up jerking away. All traces of his easy grin are gone.

Stiles is kind of sad about that. Befuddlement also creeps in too. Seriously, what is with this man acting so weird all of a sudden?

He looks down at the book in his hand, taking one look at the cover before also bursting into laughter. Stiles hands the book back, careful to keep Derek’s page and avoid touching him. Obviously Derek hadn’t liked that.

“That was one of my mom’s favorites. She used to read it to me when I was little,” Stiles explains.

“It seems like she was a great person,” Derek replies, eyeing him carefully. Stiles glances down, unwilling to look into Derek’s eyes at the moment.

“Yeah. She was.”

Cue the awkward silence.

“So, um. Was your dad… a great person?” Stiles stutters, biting his bottom lip nervously. If he’s not mistaken, Derek glances down at his mouth for just a millisecond before answering.

Definitely imagining things.

“I thought werewolves weren’t people?” Derek asks, throwing Stiles’ words back at him. He doesn’t seem angry though. Just curious.

Stiles looks down at his hands, face red. He really has been a jackass, hasn’t he?
“He was the best father that anyone could’ve asked for. He loved all of us,” Derek answers after a moment, voice quiet.

“You have two sisters, right?” He realizes just how little he really knows about Derek. He’s a prince, has two siblings, his father is dead. That’s about it. Oh, and he’s a werewolf which Stiles keeps forgetting. Or maybe it just doesn’t bother him as much as it did a couple of weeks ago.

“Laura and Cora. Yeah, they’re nuisances, but I love them,” Derek says fondly.

“It must be nice…” Stiles has always wanted siblings. Might have even got one or two if his mother hadn’t been killed.

“Yes. Sometimes.”

Stiles looks up to find Derek staring at him. The human laughs nervously, breaking the eye contact.

It’s at that moment that Scott walks into the library, smile growing on his face as he sees Stiles.

“Hey! I bumped into Deaton and he said that I could probably find you in here. I wanted to see if you had time to…” the boy trails off as he notices the person in the room. His eyes widen to epic proportions as he realizes just who that person is. “Oh! I’m sorry. I’ll just- just um… go,” Scott splutters, already turning on his heels.

That forces Stiles into action. He stands, making his way over to his friend.

“No! It’s fine. Uh, Scott, this is Derek. Derek, Scott.”

“Hi,” Scott squeaks. He looks absolutely terrified. Stiles thinks that he probably looked similar to that the first night he met Derek. Prolonged exposure to the werewolf has inured him evidently.

“Hello,” Derek replies. When Stiles takes a glance at him, he finds that Derek’s expression is completely closed off again. He doesn’t look angry, just… resigned.

Stiles furrows his brows before turning back to his friend. “Sorry, Scott, but I can’t hang out right now. Maybe later?”

Scott is in the middle of nodding when Derek stands up suddenly, causing both of them to jump as his chair clatters backwards loudly.

“It’s fine, actually. I was about to leave anyway.”

Even Stiles can detect that lie..

“Are you sure? Really, it’s no problem.”

“Positive.”

“O-kay?” Stiles says, having whiplash from the sudden mood change. It had felt like they’d finally made some progress. Obviously, that had just been his imagination.

Derek is already walking away when Stiles calls out, “You can keep the books, you know. I mean, it’s okay if you want to borrow them. You can bring them back the next time you’re here.”

“It’s fine. Bye, Stiles,” Derek answers. And with that, only Scott and Stiles are left in the library.
“I am so sorry, man. Did I ruin something?” Scott asks worriedly. Stiles waves him off.

“It’s just Derek being weird. So, I guess I have some free time on my hands after all. What do you want to do?” he asks as the two boys walk out of the library.

“Do you think it’s possible for Stiles to already have a… consort?” Derek asks his sister, Cora, as he walks through the front doors of the Hale Castle. The question’s been eating away at him since he’d left the Stilinski Kingdom, and Cora had been the first unlucky soul he’d seen.

She stares at him questioningly, paused in midstride.

“Stiles as in your human fiancé?” she asks, arching an eyebrow.

“No. The other Stiles,” Derek deadpans. Cora rolls her eyes.

“Ha ha.” Cora says, equally as deadpan. “Why do you think he’s with someone else?” she asks, following Derek as he heads to his room. She keeps up with his fast pace, as he launches into an explanation.

“Maybe I’m just being an idiot, but—”

“Like that’s unusual,” Cora snorts. Derek turns to send a searing glare her way, but she isn’t the least bit fazed. Maybe family members are immune to his glare. It doesn’t seem to work on Laura or his mother either. It certainly works on Stiles though.

He rolls his eyes and continues, trying to get to the point.

“But,” he starts again. “When we first met, he was so opposed to the marriage. And most of it was probably his dislike of werewolves, but what if another part of it is just that he already has someone? There was this man… Stiles seems pretty close to him so what if…? And Scott is human. How can I compete with that? It’s not my fault that I was born a werewolf, and I wouldn’t have it any other way, but I- I can never be that for Stiles. Human, I mean.”

They reach his room, both of them falling onto his bed. Cora wraps her arms around him, snuggling closely.

“You’re completely gone on him, aren’t you?” she asks, voice just the least bit teasing but mostly concerned. Derek stiffens, pulling away an inch or two.

“No, I’m not. We hate each other.”

“Lie.”

“I hate him.”

“Also a lie, Der.”

“I could never have real feelings for a human. That’s ridiculous.”

“You’re a professional fibber. You should actually be paid for it. Just, make sure that it’s humans you tell your fibs to. Werewolves can hear your pulse, remember?” Cora says, laying a hand on his chest.
Derek groans in frustration.

“He could never like me,” he finally mumbles.

“See, now that’s only true if you believe it is.” Cora rubs soothing circles up and down his arms as he grumbles.

“I do believe it, though. And now I know it’s true, because Stiles already has someone. He might even love him.”

“Derek, how are you sure about any of this? He could just be a friend.”

Deep down, Derek knows that Cora has a point, but he can’t acknowledge it. Not in his unusually emotional state. God, what was it about Stiles that brought out the worst in him? And the best, if he was being honest with himself. Which he wasn’t prepared to do at the moment.

“You should seriously just talk to him.”

Derek huffs. Like that will ever happen.

*Hey. Just a question. Are you secretly in a relationship with Scott?*

That actually doesn’t sound so ridiculous in his head, but it doesn’t mean he’s going to say it to the human prince.

“So, you don’t have a problem with me marrying a human?” Derek asks. Cora rolls her eyes again.

“Not for the reasons you’re thinking. Werewolf. Human. It’s all the same to me. I don’t get the prejudices we have against each other. Dad always told us that it was all nonsense. Mom too. What I did have a problem with was you marrying someone you didn’t like.”

“Did?” Derek quotes, eyebrows furrowed. Cora runs a hand through his hair, smiling.

“Well, it’s obvious that you like this Stiles guy now. So, I’m happy for you.”

He sighs, leaning into her touch. “I don’t like him.”

“Lie.”

Derek grabs a pillow and hits her in the face with it, grinning when she makes an affronted noise before tackling him.

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Chapter End Notes

Sorry this took so long. Hope you enjoyed it. Sorry again for this chapter being slightly shorter than the others. Comments and kudos are appreciated :(
The Stilinski Kingdom throws a ball to celebrate the union between humans and werewolves. There's also a heap of misunderstandings that make Derek a very sad sourwolf.

Stiles and Scott don’t leave the castle after Derek walks out of the library, mostly because Isaac isn’t there that day and if Stiles has to have a guard hovering around, he’d rather it be Isaac.

Instead, they go up to the prince’s room and flop down on the couch that’s situated in the corner. The two boys make small talk for a while, neither of them really invested in it. There’s a lull in the conversation where Stiles fiddles with a loose thread in his sleeve when Scott finally says what’s on his mind.

“So. Prince Hale?”

Stiles sighs, crossing his arms as he turns to Scott. “Yup. That’s my fiancé.”

“He seems kind of… intense,” Scott says, sounding uncertain, like he doesn’t feel like it’s his place to observe the obvious.

“That’s one way to put it,” Stiles takes a breath as he pauses. “He’s really not that terrifying once you get to know him. And he doesn’t always act so strangely. I wonder what was wrong with him…” he says, trailing off.

“He seemed kind of… put out,” Scott answers.

“Put out?”

“Yeah. Like, annoyed or something. Maybe jealous? But, that doesn’t make any sense,” Scott says.

“You’re right, it doesn’t. But, whatever. I really don’t feel like talking about him anymore.”

“Oh okay.”

“Okay.”

There’s a tense silence.

“So, what do you want to do?”

“Um, I’m kind of tired actually. How about sleep?” Stiles suggests, standing up and stretching.

“Sure. Uh, I guess I’ll see you later,” Scott says, following suit before heading towards the door. Stiles stops him midway by grabbing his arm.

“That’s not what I meant, idiot,” the prince says, smiling so that Scott knows he’s joking. “You can stay.”
“And sleep… with you.” Scott states, eyebrows raised. Stiles finally realizes where Scott’s head is. In the gutter, obviously.

“No!” he exclaims, laughing. “Not like that. No offense, Scott, but you’re not really my type. I meant sleeping. Just sleeping. The bed is big enough for two. For five, even.”

Stiles belatedly understands how weird the request sounds. He knows that this is a thing siblings do. Had already thought he and Scott were working up to being something like brothers, and Stiles had never had anything like a sleepover as a child. But, maybe this is too soon for Scott. Maybe he’s just expecting too much.

Stiles is ready to take it back, to shake his head and just tell Scott that he can go if he wants, when the boy begins to smile.

“Sure,” Scott finally says, taking off his shoes before flopping down on the bed. Stiles is left standing, dumbfounded for a moment before he begins to grin. After a moment, he sheds his shoes too and climbs into his bed.

When they’re both comfortable under the thick, plush blanket, he feels Scott burrowing deeper into the pillows.

“This is great,” Scott hums before yawning. Stiles rolls over to face him.

“What do you mean?”

“Well, my bed isn’t nearly as nice as this. Yours is so soft,” Scott explains, staving off another yawn.

“So, this isn’t weird for you then?” Stiles asks, needing conformation. He wouldn’t want Scott doing this just because he thinks he has to. Just because Stiles is the prince of the kingdom.

“Nope. Totally cool with it. I mean, I like working in the kitchen, but sleep. Sleep is good.”

Content with his friend’s answer, Stiles drifts off.

Derek doesn’t come to any of the meetings after he leaves the library that day. Talia doesn’t bring him up, so Stiles assumes that everything is fine. Maybe Derek is busy. It doesn’t matter, he’ll see the werewolf at the ball soon enough. In the meantime, the impromptu naps definitely continue.

When Derek arrives at the Stilinski Kingdom, it’s with his mother and sisters in tow. The castle is more crowded than he’s ever seen it. There must be hundreds, maybe even a thousand, of people in one spacious room.

It’s somewhat overwhelming. Derek isn’t used to being around so many people. The Hale Kingdom never throws gatherings like this. At least, not in a while.

The sounds and smells only make things harder. Mostly the sounds though. He can hear the whispers in the room, can feel the tension. A lot of these people have never come in contact with
weres. And those who have probably aren’t aware of it.

He has an inkling of what humans think werewolves are like. Bloodthirsty, beastlike, animalistic. It must be perplexing for them to actually see four weres in the flesh. Weres who look and behave… in much the same way as humans do.

But still, they keep their distance. Mutter in the background. Because prejudices blind people even when they realize what they think isn’t the complete truth.

So the four Hales stand there after the Herald announces their arrival until finally, Cora rolls her eyes in exasperation.

“I’m going to mingle with the humans while you guys stand around like social pariahs,” his little sister scoffs before advancing on a group of men. They eye her warily for a moment before she turns on the charm. She flips her long, dark hair over one shoulder and gives a blinding smile.

Apparently, Cora has some magic werewolf mojo going on because within a moment they’re all laughing and eyeing her adoringly.

Derek grimaces as Laura gives him a wink before catching up with Cora.

“Don’t get too friendly,” he says under his breath. “I will tell Boyd.”

He hears her laugh over the chatter of the humans as she melts into the crowd.

“Oh, there’s Deaton,” his mother exclaims. “Do you want to come with me? I need to ask him something.”

Derek shakes his head, immediately regretting it when he’s left alone and getting side-eyed by those who are closest to him. He’s just about ready to leave the ballroom and go hide in the library or something when a hand grasps his shoulder.

He does not jump, but he does turn around, smiling though slightly confused when he sees that it’s King Stilinski.

“Hello, Your Majesty.”

“Just John is fine, Derek. Can you help me with something?”

“Does it involve getting out of here?” Derek asks, pulling at his collar. All of the attention on him is making him feel stifled, as if the walls are closing in and he can’t get enough air.

“Yeah, for a while,” John replies.

The werewolf looks around, not seeing Laura, Cora, or his mother anymore. Derek can hear faint traces of their voices, but that’s about it.

“Sure,” he says, with relief. Anything is better than being forced to socialize. John gestures for him to follow, and the crowd parts for them as they walk. He isn’t sure if it’s out of respect for their king, or out of fear because of what Derek is. Either way, he’s grateful that he doesn’t have to push through the teeming mass of bodies.

Finally, when they leave the room and walk into a secluded hallway, the King begins to explain.

“Stiles is still in his room, and I have no idea what he’s doing up there, but I don’t have the time or the patience to get him out. You two are supposed to dance to start the ceremony. After that, dinner
is served and the gifts are given. Everyone here is waiting for the dance so the ball can officially begin.”

Derek raises an eyebrow. “So you want me too…”?

“Would you mind getting him down here for me? I need to keep up appearances, so I can’t disappear for however long it takes me to drag Stiles out of his room. And, I don’t know. He doesn’t really listen to me anymore.”

The Hale Prince decides to leave that last sentence untouched.

“Okay. That’s… okay. Where’s his room?”

After giving him some directions, John pats Derek’s back and sends him on his way. The werewolf is once again sorely regretting his life decisions. He almost thinks being back at the ball would be better. Almost.

But, walking to Stiles’ room is also pretty terrifying. Mostly because he can’t get what his mother and Cora had said to him out of his mind. He doesn’t like Stiles. And even if he did, there’s a very slim chance in Hell that the feelings are reciprocated.

Even though Derek’s convinced himself that he was being ridiculous about the Scott thing, he still knows that Stiles would rather be with a human. Derek isn’t human. He can never be human.

So that’s that.

And even though he knows that Stiles could never like him, his stomach still drops when he hears not one, but two heartbeats coming from the human prince’s bedroom. Derek contemplates turning back around and returning to the ball, because yeah. The ball is now definitely the lesser of two evils at the moment.

But then, what’s he supposed to tell the King? That his son is blowing off the ball to spend some quality time with another person? A person that he isn’t being forced to marry?

Derek is still standing at the threshold of the door when it suddenly opens. He probably would’ve been able to hear someone approaching if he weren’t so lost in his own thoughts. As it is, when the wood in front of his face swings away, he startles.

Though it’s nothing compared to how Scott jumps about four feet in the air and gives a very unmanly shriek.

Stiles is by Scott’s side in a second. The prince’s eyes widen slightly, but that’s about all the reaction Derek’s presence emits from him.

Both of them look like they’ve just woken up, hair mused and wild, expressions still drawn with sleep. The only difference between them is that Scott’s clothes are rumpled whereas Stiles looks like he’s just gotten hastily dressed.

“Hey, Derek. What are you doing here?” Stiles asks, seemingly completely unfazed by the fact that his future husband has just caught him with another man. And Derek feels like his heart’s just been ripped out of his chest.

Which means… well, it means that obviously he hasn’t be very truthful with himself these last few weeks. Obviously Cora and his mom were right. Obviously, he harbors some… amorous feelings for Stiles. And it’s also pretty obvious, if it hadn’t been before, that the human couldn’t care less
“Hey, are you okay?” Stiles asks, taking a step out of his room and raising a hand as if he wants to touch Derek’s shoulder. His arm waivers there in the air, like he isn’t sure whether this is something the werewolf would be open to.

Derek makes the decision for Stiles, stepping back so he isn’t in arms reach. Stiles drops his hand after a moment, features arranged in what has to be a mock imitation of concern. Because from what Derek sees in front of him, Stiles apparently cares very little about his feelings.

“I’m fine. Your father wants you downstairs,” Derek replies, crossing his arms and keeping his expression blank.

“Okay, yeah. I just finished getting ready. Sorry, we kind of overslept,” Stiles says, still eyeing Derek warily before turning to Scott. “See you after this fiasco is over?” he asks.

“Maybe. I might need to stay in the kitchen and help out. We’re pretty busy tonight,” Scott says, carefully stepping around Derek as he walks out of the bedroom.

Derek can feel his wolf rising, wanting to challenge Scott for Stiles. He has to physically keep himself from letting his claws out, from letting the gold bleed into his irises. But, it’s so hard. It’s a wolf’s natural instinct to compete for things. But, Stiles isn’t a thing. And it wouldn’t be a fair fight for Scott anyway.

The werewolf doesn’t realize that his fists are clenched and that he’s nearly vibrating with tension until Stiles cautiously nudges him with an elbow. Scott is gone.

“Are you sure that you’re alright? I mean, I know how you feel. I don’t really want to go to this ball either, but it won’t be so bad. There’s food, which is a plus.”

If Stiles is going to pretend that nothing is wrong here, then Derek’s going to do the same. It’s easy for him to brush his emotions under the rug. Facing them is what’s harder.

“It’s fine. I’ve never been one for socializing, but I can get through it,” Derek answers, not even attempting to feign a smile because it would probably just transform into a grimace. But, he does hold out his arm for Stiles to take, and after the briefest of hesitations, Stiles does.

Derek tenses as his sensitive nose picks up Scott’s scent on the human prince’s skin. He forces himself to relax. Of course Stiles would smell like Scott, since the two are together and have presumably just shared the same bed doing God knows what.

The werewolf stifles a pained noise at the thought and his hold on Stiles tighten subconsciously. Stiles doesn’t comment on it though, which is something that Derek is grateful for. The walk back is silent.

When Derek and Stiles enter the ballroom, the crowd goes quiet as they take the couple in. The people of the Stilinski Kingdom are judging them, Derek knows. Scrutinizing how authentic their relationship really is.

Derek also knows that he needs to push whatever thoughts he has about Scott to the back of his mind if he wants to succeed in being convincing.

So, he does just that as he steps further into the room, pulling Stiles with him. Soon enough, the silence turns into low murmurs which, in turn, morph back into the loud chatter that was present before the two princes entered.
In a moment, King Stilinski is by their sides. He pats Derek on the back.

“Thanks for fetching my irresponsible son,” John says wryly, a small frown on his face.

“I was on my way down,” Stiles pipes up, expression indignant.

“And what’s wrong with your hair, son?” John adds, eyeing Stiles’ bedraggled mane.

The young human runs a hand through it, trying to shape it into something presentable and failing miserably.

“Here,” Derek says, reaching up and helping him smooth the dark, surprisingly soft hair. It’s only when Stiles makes a low, startled sound that the werewolf realizes what he’s doing. “Sorry,” he mutters, drawing back. What an incredibly stupid thing to do. Stiles doesn’t want Derek touching him. That much is clear.

“No, it’s-”

“Okay, enough talk,” John says, cutting Stiles off. “You two need to dance so we can get this ball started.”

Stiles still stares at Derek for a moment with an expression that the werewolf isn’t able to place, before he finally shakes his head and gives a small smile, turning back to his dad.

“Dancing means I get food, right?”

The King sighs before nodding. “Yes, there will be food.”

“Then let’s get this over with!” Stiles exclaims, interlocking his arm with Derek’s again.

“You know, maybe if you would’ve come down from your room earlier-” John starts before pausing and giving an exhale full of exasperation. “Never mind. I’ll go tell them to start the music.”

With that, the King leaves them alone again.

“Ready for this?” Stiles asks, squeezing Derek’s arm lightly. The werewolf tries not to read too much into it.

“Yeah, it’s just a simple waltz,” he replies, shrugging nonchalantly even though he’s not too keen on being so close to Stiles for a prolonged period of time. Worse than that is the fact that he has to keep a pleasant expression on his face throughout the entire dance. Even when he can still smell Scott on Stiles.

So yeah, he’s definitely feigning the nonchalant attitude.

By chance, he catches his mother’s gaze in the midst of crowd, and she must understand that he’s suffering from some emotional turmoil because she gives a small encouraging nod.

Derek breathes in and out slowly. It’s okay. He can do this.

He jumps a little when the music starts, the musicians beginning to play in the corner of the room.

He cannot do this.

But, Derek also can’t back out now. So, when Stiles leads him to the center of the room, he
follows, feeling numb all over. It’s a wonder he doesn’t trip and fall on his face with how completely out of it he is.

When it’s just them and a circle of people surrounding them, Stiles turns to Derek and takes the lead, positioning the werewolf’s hands in the proper places.

“You okay?” Stiles whispers as they begin to move, Derek operating on autopilot. His body remembers the steps even if his mind doesn’t.

“Fine,” he answers, voice sounding slightly strangled.

“Derek?”

“I’m fine.”

After a moment, Stiles takes a step closer so that they’re now chest to chest. There’s a small hesitation before Stiles slowly begins to lean into Derek, so that his head is propped up against the werewolf’s shoulder.

Derek breaths in through his mouth, trying to just enjoy this as much as possible. Memorize how this proximity to Stiles feels, without Scott’s scent marring this perfect picture. He knows that this is probably all he’ll get, stolen touches every once in a while that only occur solely to convince everyone that this pretend relationship is the real deal.

Though unfortunately, it seems like they aren’t being convincing enough.

“What?” Stiles mumbles into Derek’s shoulder when the werewolf goes rigid and tilts his head to the side.

“The humans- your people- are saying that we’re not behaving like a couple should. Distant is the word some of them are using.”

Stiles lifts his head off of Derek’s shoulder, crease forming between his eyebrows. “That’s probably because you look like you’re faintly constipated. Seriously, what happened to your amazing acting skills? Where’s that charming smile?”

Derek opens his mouth to reply, but nothing comes out. Charming smile? What?

“Okay, that bewildered look is slightly better than your broody one, but it still isn’t all that pleasant,” Stiles says, pulling away to really get a good look at Derek. “I know that you’re probably annoyed with this question by now, but are you sure that you’re okay? You’ve been acting weird, well, weirder than usual. And I think the people here are right about one thing. You are kind of distant, as if your mind is somewhere else.”

“I’m-”

“You are not fine. Stop saying that,” Stiles cuts him off vehemently. Derek shifts away from the human, so that they’re barely touching, as they continue to dance.

“What exactly do you want to from me, Stiles? I’m doing the best I can here considering everything,” he says, refusing to look Stiles in the eyes.

“In case you’ve forgotten, I’m not exactly crazy about this whole thing either,” the human replies, brows coming together to make an indentation in the skin above his eyes.
“I think that that’s pretty much apparent, actually,” Derek says. He tries to keep the annoyance and hurt out of his voice, but is sure he fails.

The music fades away, leaving the two princes standing motionless in the middle of the room holding mutual glares.

Derek knows that this ball isn’t going well. Their faux relationship is slowly deteriorating in front of the entire Stilinski Kingdom. The werewolf withdraws from Stiles, removing his hand from Stiles’ waist before stiffly holding out an arm for the human to take. Derek doesn’t look at him as he does it.

After a moment, Stiles laces his arm through Derek’s just as stiffly and they walk towards the dining tables as the musicians begin to play a faster song. The other people start to dance, still staring curiously at the couple.

When they reach the table where the King, his mother, and two sisters are seated, he knows that they are in serious trouble.

Derek’s suspicions are definitely conformed when John stands up and furiously hisses, “What the hell were you two doing out there? Are you insane?”

“Dad-” Stiles starts before the King stops him with a gesture.

“I really don’t want to hear any excuses from either of you right now,” he says before walking into the dancing crowd.

Derek turns to his mother who doesn’t look angry, per se. Just overwhelmingly disappointed which is somehow so much worse. Talia doesn’t say a word to him, just shakes her head before following John.

Stiles sighs and takes a seat across from Cora. A moment later, Derek follows, sitting across from Laura and willing off the headache he feels coming on.

“Well, you sure messed that up,” Cora says to Derek with a judging eyebrow raise before turning to Stiles. “You smell wrong.”

The human makes an insulted noise. “Excuse me?”

“Not bad. Just wrong,” Cora answers, as if that’s an explanation. Well, Derek understands what his sister means, but obviously Stiles doesn’t. Derek would like to keep it that way.

“So, when is the food served again?” he cuts in, giving Cora a meaningful look. He should’ve been paying more attention to Laura, evidently.

“Why do you smell like that?” his older sister questions accusingly, leaning across the table.

“Okay, what are you two talking about?” Stiles asks, looking at the princesses dubiously before turning to Derek. “What are they talking about?”

“You know what, Der? I’m sorry I didn’t believe you before. It seems like you were right about the human,” she says, eyeing Stiles derisively.

Stiles turns to Derek, looking hurt. “What did you tell them about me?”

“I-”
“You told Cora about this and not me?” Laura interrupts indignantly, folding her arms and huffing.

“She was the one I ran into first,” Derek replies.

Stiles slams his hands on the wooden table with a loud smack. “What the hell is going on?!”

Cora turns to the human. “For the record, you’re an idiot. Anyone would be lucky to marry my brother, and you should be more appreciative.”

“Cora, stop,” Derek orders, though it’s not like she listens to him.

“Look,” his little sister continues, glaring daggers at Stiles. “You seem like an okay person, but I’d rather you just tell my brother whether you’re truly invested in this union between the kingdoms or not. You know, instead of going behind his back and seeing someone else as if we can’t smell them on you.”

“What.” It’s not even a question, more a word used just because Stiles can’t think of anything else to say. He then turns to Derek, eyebrows raised and repeats, “What.”

“Just forget about it, Stiles,” Derek says, standing up and walking away from the table. His sisters call after him, but he ignores them. They’ve made enough of a mess as it is.

He stalks across the room, paying no attention to the people who jump out of his way. Derek really has no clue where he’s headed until he’s already there, stepping into the dimly lit library. He inhales the scent of old paper and polished wood, weaving in between the shelves until he finds a dark, secluded spot to properly brood.

Derek only has just enough time to think that he’s going to kill Cora and Laura when he hears the sounds of footsteps paired with a rapid heartbeat and harsh breathing.

The werewolf freezes as he hears the footfalls slow and come to a stop just outside the library.

“Derek?” Stiles says softly. “They… your sisters told me that you all think I’m with Scott which is just- Derek, are you insane? I mean, first of all, Scott is not my type. Like, not at all. And secondly, I may not have wanted this marriage, but that doesn’t mean that I would just go and… Derek, how could you think that I would do something like that?

Derek begins to take a step in the direction of Stiles’ voice without conscious thought. He had felt so betrayed when he had believed that Stiles was seeing someone else. And now... now he doesn’t know what to think.

What he feels is this overwhelming swell of irrational hope bubbling inside him. Stiles still doesn’t want to be with him, that much is for sure. But, at least he hadn’t- Derek doesn’t know what to call it. Cheating? But, that would imply that they’re actually together which they’re not.

“Derek? Please let me know that you’re actually here and that I’m not having a monologue with the air.”

The werewolf decides that letting his presence be known would help with this conversation. Quickly, so that he can’t rethink it, he steps out from behind a bookshelf so that he’s within Stiles’ line of vision.

The human is in front of him in a second, walking so fast that Derek wonders for a moment if Stiles really is human.
“How did you know that I’d be here?” Derek asks, mostly because he isn’t ready for the talk that he’s sure is coming. Stiles looks down sheepishly.

“I didn’t. But, this is where I come when I’m upset. I figured, since we both shared a love of literature, maybe we shared this too.”

“Well, you were right,” Derek says quietly.

“And you were wrong. About so many things, Derek,” Stiles says looking up into the werewolf’s eyes as if he’s searching for something.

“I’m sorry. But what would you have thought? If you could smell someone else on me? If you had just seen me step out of my bedroom with another person?” Derek asks, voice beseeching.

“I’m pretty sure that I would’ve at least given you the benefit of the doubt. I would’ve asked you if something was going on. But, I think that’s more me being incapable of keeping my thoughts to myself. You though... you keep everything so bottled up all the time.”

“Stiles, I-”

“Please just let me get this out first, okay?” the human says, cutting Derek off who nods after a moment. Stiles bites his bottom lip before beginning again. “Scott and I are just friends. Yes, we were sleeping before the ball, but that’s all it was. Only sleep. Scott was pretty wiped out after preparing the food for the ball- he’s part of the kitchen staff. And I definitely needed a nap before this debacle started. So, just to make sure things are perfectly clear, Scott and I are not together.”

Stiles doesn’t breathe throughout the whole speech, and when it finally ends, he takes a deep gasp of air.

“I wouldn’t blame you,” Derek finally says into the silence.

“What?”

“If you and Scott were together, I wouldn’t blame you. This thing between us isn’t real. It’s just politics. And I would never deny you happiness if you met someone who you really wanted to be with,” Derek replies, even though the words are hard to get out.

“Derek-”

“We should get back. Everyone’s probably wondering where we are by now,” the werewolf says, holding out his arm without looking at Stiles. There’s a tense moment where Derek isn’t sure that Stiles is going to take it, but he finally does after staring at Derek for a long second.

They walk back to the ballroom in silence.

Stiles wants to tell Derek that the reason he’ll never be with Scott, or anyone else for that matter, is because he’s holding out. Hoping that maybe one day, something does happen between them.

The truth is, perhaps he might want more than this act they’ve got going on.

Maybe he’s starting to care less and less about what Derek is and more about who he is.
And it’s those precise thoughts that scare him into foolish inaction.
The Moon and The Sun

Chapter Notes

It's been awhile since I started this fic. Almost 6 years now. I was inspired by this quarantine to work on it again, so enjoy!

As if the opening dance isn't painful enough, of course the two princes are forced to dance again. Well, maybe *forced* is a little too harsh of a word. Extremely encouraged. Yeah, that works. After the eating- which is really Stiles’ favorite part of the entire night- and the gifts and blessings given by the people of the Stilinski Kingdom, the dancing starts up again and Deaton comes to them and tells them that they needed to get back on the dance floor.

Stiles protests profusely, because who would want to relive that nightmare again? But Deaton says that this is their chance to redeem themselves from their first disaster. And Stiles will do anything to wipe that judgmental, angry look off of his father’s face.

So, there they are, once more, in the center of the room. There’s a little less pressure because there are others dancing around them too. At least these stares are more like furtive glances, instead of the previous gawking.

Another difference is that this time, people try to come up to Stiles and ask him for a dance. *Try* being the appropriate word. The first person who walks up to Stiles’ side barely gets a syllable out before Derek is growling and snapping at him, eyes glowing their golden hue.

The man quickly backs away, face pale and eyes wide with fear.

“Derek? What the hell?” Stiles asks, pulling away slightly to look the werewolf up and down cautiously.

Derek shakes his head and spins Stiles into an intricate turn. Stiles lets the subject drop, like he knows Derek wants him to, but he can’t help but mull over it in his mind.

When almost the same thing happens, not even five minutes later, Stiles stops mid-step and pulls his arms away to fold them over his chest.

“What’s going on, Derek?” he questions, raising an eyebrow.

“So nothing,” Derek replies stoically, voice and expression devoid of any emotion.

“Didn’t we just have this whole conversation about sharing your…” Stiles wants to say the word *feelings* but thinks better of it. He doesn’t think they’re on that level yet. “…thoughts with me? Keeping everything bottled up isn’t going to help.”

Stiles keeps his voice patient and kind, because he knows that that’s the best way to get through to Derek. Brute force will get him nowhere. It’s like taking a wall down brick by brick verses using a bulldozer. It may take more time, but it’s less messy.

And finally, Derek lets out a sigh and Stiles knows that the wall is coming down.
“It’s not my fault,” Derek says, face pulled into a pained expression as if that’s the hardest sentence he’s ever uttered. Stiles is still left in the dark.

“Maybe you should um… explain that statement,” he says after ten seconds pass in brooding silence.

“Can I?” Derek asks holding his hands out for Stiles to take. When the human rolls his eyes, complying as they begin to dance again, Derek finally answers his question.

“For werewolves, it’s different because, well…” he pauses as if trying to collect his thoughts. It makes it all the harder to when another unlucky person tries to ask Stiles for a dance. Derek manages to hold back a growl this time, but his eyes still flash in warning. The human scuttles back quickly, almost tripping over himself in his haste to flee. Derek turns back to focus his attention on Stiles, eyes cooling to their normal color. “That night we first met, you called me an animal,” Derek starts again.

Stiles opens his mouth to say… something. Maybe apologize? Because he hadn’t even really known Derek enough in those five minutes to judge the werewolf fairly. But, before Stiles can begin to form words, Derek is talking again.

“It’s okay. I know-” he looks away for a moment, “-well, I hope that your perspective of me has changed, but you were half-right. Werewolves do have some animalistic instincts, and we can usually control them. But emotions like rage or… or jealousy are harder to control. I logically that you’re not mine, but my wolf doesn’t and- it’s just a territory thing.”

Derek ends the explanation with a shrug, like everything he’s just said is no big deal, but Stiles can sense there’s more depth there that Derek is unwilling to share. Stiles won’t push anymore for the rest of the night. This ball has been stressful enough as it is.

So, he just tightens his hold on Derek’s shoulder and lets the subject drop for the time being. When Derek’s expression clears with relief at not being forced to explain further, Stiles knows that he’s made the right choice for the time being.

“Well, that didn’t turn out so bad,” Stiles says as the ball finally begins to come to a close. Guests have begun to approach them and say their goodbyes, giving Derek wary glances, but smiling as they do so. The werewolf eyes them just as cautiously, like he’s uncomfortable with everything, but he’s trying which is really all that matters.

Stiles sees a familiar face in the crowd and steps around the next person waiting in line with an apologetic smile. He grasps Derek’s hand and pulls him along behind him.

“Hey, Scott!” Stiles exclaims as he gets closer to the human. Scott isn’t in his kitchen uniform, instead wearing regular civilian clothes. He had probably been at the ball for a while, but the room is so crowded that they could’ve been within ten feet of each other and easily still not have seen one another. “You’re not working in the kitchen tonight?”

Scott looks up, seemingly flustered, before ducking his head and letting out a noise slightly indicative of an affirmation.

“Are you okay?” Stiles begins cautiously.

Head still down, Scott nods. “I just wanted to tell you that I hope your union is a happy one.” He risks a glance at Derek, looking nervous. “I got an earful from the Hale sisters, and…” He looks at
Derek now. “I wanted to let you know that Stiles and I are just friends. I wouldn’t disrespect you or the kingdom by jeopardizing your marriage. I will stay away from Stiles if you think that’s best.”

Stiles opens his mouth to protest, but Derek interrupts him. “That won’t be necessary, Scott. Stiles has already informed me of the situation.”

Stiles furrows his eyebrows. “So, you’re fine with us still hanging out? What happened to the raging jealousy?”

Derek huffs and glares at Stiles, but there’s no real heat behind it. “I’ll keep my raging jealousy in check. Besides, it’s not my place to tell you what you can or can’t do. We’re equals in this… relationship.”

Stiles tries to ignore the flutter in his heart at Derek’s last words. He smiles up at Derek and then looks down at their hands that are still clasped. The flutter in his heart spreads down to his stomach and he knows that he’s in trouble because… he might be developing feelings for Prince Derek Hale.

It’s been a week now since Stiles has last seen Derek, and he finds himself missing the werewolf. Over breakfast that morning, he asks his dad when Derek will be coming over again. Of course, he has a flakey croissant stuffed in his mouth, so the king doesn’t understand him the first time.

“What?” his father asks. Stiles swallows before attempting to speak again.

“Have you communicated with Queen Talia recently? Do you know if Derek will be visiting again any time soon?” Stiles attempts to keep the eagerness out of his voice, but the king raises his eyebrows in surprise anyway.

“Actually, Talia sent a letter just yesterday. I didn’t know how receptive you would be to her request, so I was deciding when to talk to you about it,” his dad says contemplatively, hands clasped in front of him on the table. There’s a moment of silence.

“Why wouldn’t I be receptive?” Stiles asks. If possible, his dad’s eyebrows raise up even higher. “Well, you haven’t exactly been enthusiastic about this arrangement, or anything pertaining to it.”

Stiles sighs and stares at his dad expectantly, waiting to hear the news. His dad caves in.

“Talia asked if we would be willing to visit their kingdom for a change. Apparently, their citizens would like to get a look at their future king. And of course, they want confirmation that there is a real connection between you too. Queen Talia wants to host a ball. Stiles remembers how badly the Stilinski ball had gone and gulps. “You mean we’re going to have to do it all again?” His voice is raised and a tad too shrill.

“Think of it more like an opportunity to do it again, but better. A second chance. I’m not completely sure we convinced our subjects, but perhaps we can convince theirs.” His father picks up his fork and continues to eat his breakfast.

“A trip to a werewolf kingdom, though? Is that safe?” Stiles asks. Stiles would like to think he has
gotten over most of his prejudices, but still… werewolves are dangerous. And what if they hate humans in the same way that some humans hate werewolves? What if some of them don’t want humans in their kingdom?

His father heaves a deep sigh, stabbing at the egg on his plate. “I’m sure that the Hales will take all the necessary precautions to keep Derek’s betrothed safe,” he says with a shrug. “We will also have our own guards on hand.”

Stiles sits in contemplative silence for a moment before dropping his utensils on the table with a clatter.

“Stiles,” his dad begins, voice raised in warning as if he’s expecting an argument.

“Okay,” Stiles interrupts, cutting him off. “When do we leave?”

The king drops his own fork in surprise. “You’re serious? You want to go?”

Stiles opens his mouth, closes it, and then tries to reformulate his thoughts again before answering. “I want… to see Derek. So we can get all of this over with as quickly as possible.” For some reason, Stiles doesn’t want to admit to his father that he misses Derek. They no longer have the kind of relationship in which Stiles would feel comfortable expressing feelings like that.

“Okay,” the king says. “Talia has planned the ball for this upcoming Saturday, but she says that we are welcome to arrive on Friday and spend the night.”

Stiles checks his mental calendar and notes that today is Tuesday. Four days until he can see Derek. It’ll have to do. “I do have one request. Actually, it may be two requests,” Stiles says, choosing to ignore his dad’s huff of exasperation.

“Yes, son?”

“I’d like it if we can take my friend, Scott. And one of our castle guards, Isaac. It would be nice to have some familiar acquaintances while at the Hale Kingdom.”

The king nods with a small smile, seemingly happy that Stiles is requesting very little and not putting up much of a fight at all. “Done. We’ll leave Friday afternoon.”

Arriving at the Hale Kingdom isn’t quite as scary as Stiles pictured. He had ridden in the same carriage as Scott and Isaac, so they had talked to each other most of the trip. He’s actually so distracted by their conversation that he doesn’t notice their arrival until the carriage halts.

Isaac gets out first, since he’s supposed to be the one guarding them. Scott exits next, and Stiles is the last to get out.

When Stiles finally gets a glimpse at the castle, he takes a sharp inhale. It’s beautiful in a different way than the Stilinski castle is. His castle at home is made out of brown stone, with wide turrets, and flags of red and gold.

The Hale castle is hewn from gray stone, it’s turrets much sharper, but it a graceful way. The sky is dark when they arrive, so the gray stone takes on an eerie shine in the moonlight. Their flag’s colors are silver and light blue. Stiles is reminded of Derek’s eyes when he looks at them.
In total, there are about 15 people who have made the travel from the Stilinski Kingdom to the Hale Kingdom. There is Stiles, the king, Deaton, Scott, and Isaac. There are also about 10 guards - excluding Isaac - who have been tasked with keeping, Stiles and the king safe.

Together, they walk up the castle steps where Queen Talia, Princess Laura, Princess Cora, and Prince Derek stand, waiting to greet them.

Stiles knows that there’s a deep flush on his face, based solely on the heat he feels rising in his cheeks, when he makes eye contact with Derek. He really had missed the werewolf.

“Welcome,” Queen Talia says with a warm smile. “We were just about to sit down for dinner. Are you hungry?” she asks.

Stiles is starving. He’s really always starving, so he accepts the invitation readily. His father and Deaton also accept. Scott and Isaac stand awkwardly, unsure of whether they should decline or accept the offer, but Stiles insists that they stay and eat dinner.

So, about twenty minutes into their arrival, they’re seated at a grand table laden with any food Stiles could’ve ever dreamed of having. Being a prince, he was used to eating to his heart’s content. But the Hale castle had foods that Stiles had never even heard of before, let alone tasted. He sampled all of them, eating until his full stomach was protesting

Leaning back with a content sigh, he stretched and yawned.

Derek had been watching Stiles from the moment they sat down for dinner. He didn’t know that Stiles could eat so much. A part of Derek is content, that Stiles is enjoying the food so much. Most likely, it’s his wolf side that’s so happy. Werewolves enjoy providing for their family.

Technically, Stiles isn’t family yet. But his wolf side doesn’t understand technicalities. It has already begun to see Stiles as someone welcome and familiar.

“Derek,” his mother says. “Why don’t you show Stiles around the castle. You can also show him the guest’s quarters, so he knows where he’ll be staying.”

Derek nods, and stands up. He holds an arm out for Stiles to take and is pleased when Stiles accepts it without hesitation. They walk slowly, the voices of their families eventually fading into nonexistence.

Derek and Stiles amble throughout the castle, with Derek pointing out specific rooms and corridors along the way. Stiles halts when Derek points out the doors leading to their castle’s library.

“You have a library?” Stiles asks in wonder. He eyes the doors like he wishes to go through them this very moment. Derek smiles at the eagerness.

“I can show you around it, tomorrow if you would like?”

Stiles faces him with a grin. “That would be great.”

Derek tilts his head in agreement, glad that he has already made plans to spend more time with Stiles.
Eventually, they stop outside of a polished, wooden door. Derek releases Stiles’ arm to push it open. Inside, there’s a huge bed with plush, white covers and about ten pillows. The room is almost as spacious as Stiles’ own. The one thing it has that Stiles’ room doesn’t is-

“Wow, a balcony!” Stiles exclaims, skipping into the room and swinging open the glass doors leading to the outside air. There are a few comfortable looking chairs, but Stiles settles one that is big enough for two, dragging Derek behind him.

Derek settles himself next to Stiles, enjoying how comfortable it now feels to be close to him whereas before, the proximity felt strained. He inhales Stiles’ smell and feels his wolf hum in content. Derek looks up at the full moon. It’s bright enough to illuminate the night, so they aren’t completely shrouded in darkness. There’s a misconception about werewolves that they have to turn on the full moon. In reality, werewolves can turn whenever they want, but the moon rejuvenates them. That luminous, white sphere in the sky is Derek’s main source of strength, so he draws on it, turning towards Stiles.

“How do you feel about finally visiting my kingdom?” Derek asks, trying to fill the silence. “I know that being around so many werewolves must be hard for you, but I promise that our family will keep you safe.”

“I’d be lying if I said I wasn’t nervous,” Stiles says, wringing his hands together. Derek reaches out and covers Stiles’ hands with his own.

“You think I wasn’t nervous? Coming to your kingdom the first time?” Derek asks, thinking back to that first night. The dinner and then that disastrous conversation in the garden. Derek flushes just thinking about how bad his first impression had been with Stiles. “I never actually said this to you, but I owe you an apology about that first night. I threatened you without even knowing you, and you didn’t deserve it.”

“I think I did actually,” Stiles responds, chewing at his bottom lip. The things I said to you… well I want you to know that I’m sorry too. And I don’t think any of those things about you anymore. You’re a werewolf… and that’s not an issue for me.”

“Really?” Derek asks, a hint of optimism in his voice that he hopes Stiles doesn’t pay too much attention to. He’s trying to stay calm and collected, but everything about Stiles unravels him now: his scent, his messy hair, the way he’s still biting his lower lip. Derek thinks he may be falling just a little bit in love.

“Well,” Stiles looks away and laughs. “As long as me being human isn’t an issue to you,” he finishes, shrugging like his statement is a joke. But Derek can see the underlying tension in Stiles’ shoulders, like he actually thinks that Derek might not like him because of his human status.

Derek reaches out and places a hand on Stiles’ chin, gently nudging it so that Stiles is facing him and can’t look away. When their gazes meets, Derek’s breath just might stop for a moment. He remembers that day in the castle; in the Stilinski advising room when he was asked to say one nice thing about Stiles. It hadn’t been hard for him.

Even when Derek hadn’t liked Stiles that first night, he had had to admit to himself that Stiles was attractive. And his eyes… God. They were like pools of warm mahogany. They reminded Derek of a forest in the summer time, when everything is brown, golden, and perfect.

Derek forces himself to come back to the present, noting that Stiles is almost vibrating with nervous energy now.
“You being human has never been an issue for me,” Derek finally replies. The relief on Stiles’ face is almost too much for Derek to handle. If Derek belongs to the moon, then Stiles belongs to the sun. It’s as if rays of joyful light are just radiating off of him, and Derek finds himself gravitating toward it. He inches closer and closer, noting how Stiles’ breath hitches when Derek’s hand moves down to his throat. Derek can feel Stiles’ racing pulse just under his fingertips.

Derek inhales deeply, smelling Stiles’ nervousness and arousal. The latter scent ignites a fire in Derek’s, drawing him even closer to Stiles until their lips are only about an inch apart. But Derek picks up another scent that’s tainting the wonderful way Stiles smells. Derek has to search for it for a moment, having not actually smelled it in a while, since that first night in the garden. He finally understands what it is.

Fear.

Derek jerks away from Stiles as if he’s been stung, standing up to put some distance between them.

“Derek?” Stiles asks, making the motions to stand up too.

“No!” Derek says, taking another step back. “Stay there.”

“What’s wrong?” Stiles questions. “Did I do something?” His voice is so shocked and pained that Derek has to stop himself from whining. All he wants to do is gather Stiles up in his arms and console him, but he can’t. Because Stiles is still afraid of him.

“You didn’t do anything. I should go.” Derek avoids looking at Stiles, knowing that if he does, he won’t gather the necessary strength to leave. He strides towards the glass doors that lead back into Stiles’ guest room, throwing them open and continuing to walk until he reaches the wooden door that leads out into the hallway. He pauses with his door on the handle, waiting for something… Maybe for Stiles to run after him, to tell him not to go. But he hears no footsteps, so after a moment he turns the knob, pulls the door open, and walks out.

Stiles is left alone on the balcony, under the bright moonlight. He wonders where things went wrong. He had been so eager to finally kiss Derek, when suddenly Derek had drawn away from him. He’s left feeling cold and weak, whereas just moments ago he had never felt so warm and alive.

He hadn’t chase after Derek. Maybe he should have.

Stiles replays in those moments in his head after he’s tucked himself into the warm covers of his bed, long after Derek is gone.

They had almost kissed, and Stiles had been ready. He really had been. He had felt excited and anxious. And just a little bit afraid. But he couldn’t be blamed for that little sliver of fear, right? It would have been his first, real kiss. Anyone would be a bit apprehensive. Especially around someone as striking as Prince Derek Hale.

Stiles sighs into his pillow, wondering once again what he did wrong.

He also wonders if maybe, Derek had fled because he hadn’t wanted the kiss to happen.

Maybe, Derek didn’t want him.
End Notes

comments much appreciated. really, feedback is awesome.
oh, and if you see any mistakes, please tell me.

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