When the Universe Comes Knocking (It’s Polite to Open the Door)

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Summary

It was like a door he’d nailed shut in his brain suddenly exploded open, all of his past confusion and anger and hurt and adoration flooding out at once. Stiles? Was it actually Stiles?! 

Stiles, the guy he’d had a crush on for fucking years growing up. The guy who’d been an absolute dick to him their whole last year of high school.

The guy who’d told him he loved him in a dirty men’s bathroom on prom night while drunk and upset because he thought Kira was Derek’s girlfriend.

That Stiles? But it couldn’t be!
Thank you so much to both of you for the request and the support! <3<3 I really hope you enjoy it :) <3<3<3<3 Sorry I went nuts on the word count ahaha lD

Things to note, if you please: I am not a business owner >.> Please excuse any inaccuracies, I am but a humble fanfic author and Google only gets you so far.

Also, I say this constantly, but please, pretty please, look at the time lD Look at the word count lD Please sleep. This will still be here tomorrow, I promise!

See the end of the work for more notes.
Chapter 1

No matter what anyone said, it wasn’t weird. Nothing about this was weird. They were in the cafeteria, and he had food, and he was allowed to sit there chewing absently on his Twizzler while staring across the large room and pretending to listen to what was going on at the table around him.

Nothing strange about that. Just a dude chilling in his chair, straddling it because that was the expected thing to do for someone ‘cool,’ and trying to make like he wasn’t only there because he wanted to spend some quality time watching the way a small smile teased the corners of the other teen’s lips while he read his book.

Light eyes narrowed slightly, trying to determine from across the loud room if the other teen had just let out a slow, relieved breath, or a shaky exhale at whatever had transpired on the pages of his book. His teeth dug harder into the chewy plasticity of his overly sweet treat, fingers drumming absently on the table in front of him and upper arms a little tender from leaning all his weight against the back of the chair like he was.

Really, he’d much rather be sitting in the chair properly, but that wouldn’t do for someone like him. No, he had a reputation to uphold, and one Stiles Stilinski did not sit in chairs unless they were backwards. Except in class, because fuck that, he could hardly concentrate as it was, let alone if he had to sit straddling a chair the whole time.

He’d rather be straddling something else, anyway.

Or someone else, at any rate.

“What do you think, Stiles? Stiles?”

Said individual started horribly when the Twizzler he’d been chewing on absently was suddenly wrenched from between his teeth. It kind of hurt, if he was honest, since his head had jerked forward at the action before he automatically loosened his grip on the sugary treat between his teeth.

“Stop eating sugar, you’re hyper enough as it is.”

Stiles let out a distressed noise when his snack was tossed onto the table, because while the five second rule was a thing, it wasn’t so much a thing in a high school cafeteria and no way was he putting that back in his mouth.

“That was supposed to last me until practice,” Stiles whined, punching hard at the traitor sitting beside him.

“You ate the rest of the bag, you’ll be fine,” Jackson Whittemore insisted, punching him back much harder than necessary. To be fair, Jackson had very little understanding of what constituted ‘hard’ anymore, what with the whole lycanthropy condition thing he had going on.

Still, Stiles didn’t have it in him to forgive such a heinous crime as robbing him of his afternoon snack, so he just punched him again and ignored the fact that he was probably only injuring himself rather than causing Jackson any immediate discomfort.

Shaking out his hand while Jackson popped another fry into his mouth, Stiles’ eyes strayed back across the cafeteria towards the object of his affection, who was sitting alone in the back corner
with his mostly uneaten lunch in front of him and a book in his hands.

It wasn’t that he didn’t have any friends to sit with, it was more that he liked to spend lunchtime reading. Stiles had learned that long ago, considering he’d been crushing on the guy since the first day of high school. He knew his entire routine by heart, and while Jackson always called him a stalker, it wasn’t like that.

Stiles just knew him. It was hard not to want to keep an eye on someone like him. He was the perfect guy, the literal whole package. He’d grow into his ears and bunny teeth eventually, Stiles was sure. After all, he already looked ten times more attractive now than he did their first day of freshman year.

It was going to be weird when they graduated and went their separate ways. Not that he thought he was going to be missed, but really, Stiles blamed his behaviour towards him entirely on him.

Because Derek Hale was fucking infuriating! Ever since day one, Stiles had tried so hard to get him to pay attention to him. He was funny, okay! He was extremely entertaining! People liked him. He was charismatic and outgoing, and he was the captain of the track team and had been since sophomore year. Nobody could outrun him on the track, not without some help from various Supernatural enhancements, and those were forbidden in official meets.

He was also particularly good at lacrosse, missing out on captain by literally one vote, though he wasn’t too sore about it since Jackson ended up being captain. And he was basically in charge of the team anyway because Jackson sucked at peopling. He was just a really good player.

And Stiles got good grades. Like, he was smart, okay. Maybe not Lydia Martin—Goddess of knowledge and beauty—smart, but he was a solid A student, which was saying a lot since he had the worst trouble focussing. His attention span was the length of a goldfish’s memory.

Except if Derek Hale was what he was focussing on. Because Derek could hold his attention for literal hours.

Feeling wasn’t mutual, apparently. Because, again, no matter what Stiles did, he couldn’t get the guy to notice him. Stiles was popular. A jock, by some standards, sure, but he was still smart enough to get teased for not failing every class he took. He tended to be head-to-head with Derek grade-wise in almost all their classes, so he’d have thought the other guy would’ve noticed him.

But no. Derek Hale was very in his own little world. Always busy, always distracted. He read, and played chess, and did math for fun—seriously, Stiles didn’t know what was wrong with him, he liked a fucking nerd!—and was in debate and just... He did a lot. So much.

Too much.

He never had time to notice Stiles, and that was frustrating, because there was only so much Stiles could take.

Which was why he’d stopped playing nice by the time the year started. They were running out of time, and he needed Derek to fucking—at least just acknowledge him or something! So while he was sure his mother would be horrendously disappointed in him, he couldn’t help it. He acted like a dick to Derek, because it was the only way to get his fucking attention.

“Would you stop looking at Hale for two seconds and pay attention?” Jackson snapped his fingers in Stiles’ face, making him jump and turn to the table at large. A few of his friends were smirking knowingly at him while others seemed wholly uninterested in his desire to tap that before
graduation.

“I heard you, I can multi-task,” Stiles insisted, eyes skirting back over to Derek. He still hadn’t touched much of his lunch, just like every other day. Too wrapped up in his book. He was going to end up eating in class again, sneaking bites of his sandwich behind Mr. Harris’ back whenever the man turned to write on the board.

Stiles wished Derek got detention every now and again so that he could get one too. Maybe they’d even bond over like... what even happened in detention nowadays? Did people still clean erasers or whatever? Stiles hadn’t gotten detention in years.

Well, no, he’d gotten many detentions, but his coaches always got him out of them because they interfered with various practices. The perks of being the top athlete in the school.

Jackson didn’t count, he was a Werewolf, it was why Stiles was the favourite. He’d earned his spot as top athlete. Not that Jackson didn’t work hard but, well, Stiles wasn’t going to complain. It got him out of detention.

When the bell rang to signal the end of lunch, Stiles sat there with his chin on his arms, waiting for Derek to notice lunch was over. It usually took him a few seconds, because he was so engrossed in his various books, but the cacophony of noise that slowly began to die out tended to be his cue.

Stiles felt Jackson slap at the brim of his baseball cap, having the edge actually his the top of his spine, but he ignored him and just reached up to pull it back into place with one hand. He knew it was a douche thing to wear it backwards, but again: he had a reputation.

Besides, he turned it right-way ‘round when he needed to, he just didn’t see the point in worrying about it while sitting inside.

He heard his friends’ chatter slowly begin to dissipate while they headed off with their trays and bags, but he didn’t move, waiting for Derek. It took him a little longer than usual today, so it was probably a good book. Eventually though, he glanced up and seemed to jerk slightly, as if startled, then shut his book and began gathering up his things.

Stiles tried not to smile too endearingly when Derek shoved half his sandwich into his mouth, chewing quickly while gathering all of his things. It was kind of adorable that after four years, the guy still couldn’t get through his lunch during the break.

Derek, clearly, was not a multi-tasker. Not like Stiles was. He could eat and stare adoringly across the cafeteria without any problems. Derek apparently couldn’t eat and read at the same time. It was adorable. He probably couldn’t walk and chew gum at the same time, either.

Stiles’ eyes tracked him while he walked to the exit, heading out of the cafeteria and back into the hallway. Sighing and sitting up properly, Stiles finally stood with a stretch and flipped the chair back around, pushing it in before straightening the rest of the chairs at his table—seriously, he was friends with savages. Satisfied everything was in order, he grabbed his bag from the floor and hoisted the strap over his shoulder while heading for the exit.

There were still a few people milling about here and there in the cafeteria, but most of them were the ones who were planning on skipping their next class. Stiles had a study period next, so he could dawdle all he wanted. He had nowhere to be.

“You’re pathetic, you know,” Jackson informed him as Stiles stepped through the double doors, falling into step beside him. “Can’t you be less of a loser while pining for the guy?”
“What’s wrong, jealous?” Stiles waggled his eyebrows at Jackson.

That just earned him the middle finger and Jackson sped up, like he was regretting waiting behind for him. Stiles jogged to catch up.

“Whitty. Whitty, Whitty, wait, I’m sorry.” Stiles threw one arm around his friend’s shoulders and yanked him closer. “You know you’re the only one for me. Nobody does me like you do.” He licked a stripe up his friend’s face from chin to temple and then laughed and bounced away when Jackson let out a sound of disgust and wiped at him, claws beginning to peek through. “Hey, hey, put those away. That ain’t right, Whitty.”

“Lick my face again, and I’ll eviscerate you,” Jackson informed him, eyes flashing threateningly. He knew he’d flashed them because of the shift in hue, so he was definitely not pleased.

Stiles grinned at him, but held up both hands in surrender. He knew it was bad form to tease his friend, but Jackson was just such an easy target. They’d known one another since basically diapers, and as soon as Jackson came out as being gay, everyone was adamant that it was Stiles’ fault.

He had no boundaries—case and point, Jackson currently wiping saliva off his face—and he and his friend had always had a very open and honest friendship. Stiles didn’t care that Jackson was into guys, and as time passed, turned out he was also into guys.

And girls.

And non-binary.

Really, he was into everyone, they were all attractive and wonderful. But no one was near as amazing as Derek Hale. It was a wonder Jackson could stand being in his presence, Stiles knew he always smelled like arousal, because he was always staring at Derek.

It was easy to do given the nerd sat at the front of the class all the time, allowing Stiles to sit and stare longingly at the back of his head.

“What are you doing about prom?” Stiles asked Jackson while they headed through the bustling corridor. He nodded a greeting to one of his friends in another class, clapping hands with him as they passed each other, but didn’t slow in his stride beside Jackson.

“Might ask Danny,” Jackson admitted. “His boyfriend got early admittance, so he was gonna bail. I figured we could go together, just have a good time.” Jackson turned to him, giving him a brief once-over. “What about you? Gonna ask the nerd?”

Stiles scoffed, shoving at his friend, but he couldn’t deny the thought hadn’t occurred to him. He’d love to ask Derek to prom, but he somehow felt like that would go over poorly. He’d probably think it was a joke.

Or worse, he’d ask Stiles who he was and if he even went to this fucking school.

God he hated how much he loved that fucking guy.

Jackson could obviously tell he was distracted, because he let out a low whistle to get his attention back and Stiles turned to him. Jackson wasn’t looking at him though, so when he followed his line of sight, he caught Derek standing in front of his closed locker, back to the metal door and book open. He still had his sandwich in one hand, and seemed to be completely transfixed with what was happening on the page in front of him.
He was going to be late to class if he didn’t get moving.

Stiles let out a small sigh, because he hated having to be a dick, but it was the only way to get some kind of reaction out of the guy. Also, he wanted to know what book it was so he could read it. He loved reading the books that Derek was so engrossed in.

As they approached him, Stiles slowed slightly so Jackson could move ahead, and then switched spots with him so he would be on the same side as Derek. As soon as they were right beside him, Stiles’ hand whipped out and he smacked the book upwards. Derek had only been holding it loosely with one hand, so it jerked out of his grip easily and hit the floor pages down, giving him a clear view of the title.

“‘Sup nerd?” Stiles said with a grin at Derek, eyes shooting down to check what he was reading.

It was something called *Red, White & Royal Blue* by Casey McQuiston. He’d never heard of it, he’d have to look it up in a minute.

“You’re so fucking immature,” Derek muttered while bending down to pick up his book, Stiles walking backwards so he could keep watching him.

“Get to class before your GPA drops,” Stiles called back to him.

Derek didn’t even look at him, scowling down at his book while attempting to straighten the bent pages from the book’s unfortunate meeting with the floor. Stiles wondered if maybe it was borrowed, and felt bad for Derek having to explain why the pages were creased.

After all, Derek always took really good care of his books.

Stiles stumbled when Jackson grabbed at his strap and wrenched him back around forcefully, likely because he was acting like a lovesick idiot.

Not that Derek had fucking noticed or anything.

“The fact that he still hasn’t noticed you want into his pants makes me question his intelligence,” Jackson informed him, nose wrinkled. “You smell like a porno.”

“And how, exactly, would you know what a porno smells like?” Stiles asked him with a devious smirk. “You really been going to those extra lessons on Saturdays to get your grades up, or are you actually secretly a porn star?”

“One day, I’m going to claim I got dosed with a hallucinogenic strain of wolfsbane and claw your face off,” Jackson informed him.

Stiles winked at him. “Love you too, Whitty.”

Jackson punched him, extremely hard—*ow*, fucking *Werewolf versus human!*—and turned to head off towards his next class. Stiles stood at the break in the corridor, scowling after him and rubbing at his arm. Tough love. He knew it was all tough love, but Jackson really forgot that he was a Supernatural creature with super-strength and Stiles was a puny human who got so good at running by running away from Supernatural creatures.

True story, his dad still couldn’t get through it without laughing hard enough he started crying. Stiles didn’t think it was that funny, but hey, at least it made his dad happy.

Turning to head off towards the library, he glanced over and saw Derek still fussing with his book,
a scowl on his face. He was really adorable when he was all huffy and disgruntled.

Stiles fucking hated him. Why did he have to be so God damn adorable?

Shaking his head and continuing on his way, forcing Derek Hale from his mind, he made it to the library before the bell rang. He knew he should be in study hall, but he preferred the library to the stuffy classroom in the back of the school with no A/C. Besides, he could get away with it as long as he was actually working. The teacher always tended to hunt him down and leave him be when he saw he was doing homework.

“Dolores,” Stiles greeted warmly while walking up to the checkout, where the lovely librarian was stationed reading a book. “You look lovely as ever today. Did you do something to your hair? Is it different? It looks terrific.”

“What do you want, Stiles?” she asked with the air of someone who knew when she was being sucked up to. Stiles loved Dolores. She was somewhere between sixty and eighty—a true gentleman never asked a woman her age—but was probably more familiar with memes and various phrases-of-the-age than Stiles was, and he was a teenager.

She definitely had a Tumblr. He kept trying to get her to slip up and tell him what her name was, but after four years, he figured he’d probably never find her.

“I’m looking for a book,” he informed her with another winning smile. “A specific book,” he added hastily, before she could give him a sassy comeback about the books at his back.

“Every time you come in asking for a book, I’m convinced you’re sticking to your four-year plan to trick me into thinking you can read.”


“As JT would say, cry me a river,” she said with a spark in her eye.

Stiles just laughed, shaking his head and leaning forward on the counter, crossing his arms on it and resting his chin down on his forearms. “Dolores. Love of my life. I need a specific book. Please tell me we have it.”

She sighed, like his presence was a nuisance, but he knew she was fond of him. She wouldn’t put up with him otherwise, and that was a fact, because she’d banned Jackson from the library in sophomore year. The fact that Stiles had yet to be banned proved she had a soft spot for him.

“What’s it called, then?”

“Red, White & Royal Blue. It’s by someone named Casey... shit, I forgot the last name.” He winced when she smacked at his arm, giving him a look for cussing. “Sorry.”

“Damn straight,” she muttered, turning back to her screen, and Stiles just smiled to himself again.

She ended up finding the book, but they didn’t carry it. Unsurprising, when Stiles looked it up on his phone, because it wasn’t exactly something a high school library would have. Dolores had friends in high places though, that being the town library, and she called one of her friends to see if they had it. When they confirmed they did, she asked for it to be put aside for him, and Stiles promised he’d grab it on his way home.

He’d only just gotten his books out and begun working when his teacher hunted him down, making sure he was doing what he was supposed to be. Stiles just smiled sarcastically at him and waved.
He knew it was a bit of a dick move, but after all these months, he’d kind of hoped the jackass would just trust him and leave him be.

As soon as the teacher left, Stiles pulled his phone back out to look up some reviews on the book he was going to get after school. He smiled a little while remembering how engrossed Derek had been, and hoped he liked it, too.

Then again, he knew he would. Every time he read a book Derek was really into, he ended up loving it. They had really similar taste.

In everything except men, apparently.

Sighing, Stiles turned his screen off and shoved his phone back into his pocket, knuckling down to try and get some work done before something shiny came in to distract him.

Derek Hale hated everything there was to hate about high school, and then some. He hated the teachers, he hated the ridiculous ways in which the lessons were taught, he hated the way some people were better than others despite trying just as hard and being made fun of for it.

He hated the number of people he had to be around on a daily basis, he hated the smells that assaulted him every time he stepped foot outside his house, he hated that all of his close friends barring one had already graduated or attended other schools.

He hated never being able to beat out Lydia Martin in any class, he hated that PE was still a required course for him despite being a senior and a Werewolf, he hated having to attend classes with the children of known Hunters in the area.

But most of all, he hated, absolutely loathed, Mieczyslaw ‘Stiles’ Stilinski.

Derek liked to think his ‘hate’ of things was only ever of things, because no one was worth the amount of energy hating them would take. He had enough things to hate in his life so hating a person seemed exhausting.

He made an exception for Stiles Stilinski though.

He fucking loathed that stupid fucking human jock. He hated the way his entire face lit up when he laughed, head thrown back and throat bared for all the world to see. He hated how he could shift his smiles from sarcastic to sincere to soft to genuine at his leisure. He hated how soft his hair looked, and how he’d looked adorable with the buzzcut and downright hot with the new longer hairstyle. He hated his fucking hands, and how his fingers were all long and slender, and how he always gesticulated wildly whenever he spoke. He hated his lips, that he always worried when he was working on something particularly complicated, or writing an exam, or concentrating really hard.

He hated his bright eyes, and his inquisitive nature, and his smooth voice, and his strong thighs, and his fucking everything. Derek hated everything about Stiles Stilinski.

But he only hated everything about him because he kept trying to stop wanting him so much.

Stiles was not someone Derek could ever have. From the first time he’d seen him in middle school, racing around the track and outrunning literally everyone with ease, he’d known this was someone who was going to go far in life. He was bright, and funny, and cheerful, and just—sunshine.

He was literal sunshine. His mother had passed away, and Stiles still found the strength to get out
of bed every morning. He’d come to school the day after it had happened. He’d been heartbroken,
devastated, mourning, and he’d shown up anyway. Sure, he’d been flanked on either side by his
two closest childhood friends Scott McCall and Jackson Whittemore for emotional support, but
he’d still managed to make it through the day like it was any other day.

Stiles was a one of a kind person. Amazing, talented, just—so genuinely kind to everyone.

Except Derek.

He didn’t know what he’d done in his life to earn Stiles’ ire, but all he could assume was that it
was because he got better grades than him. Stiles was never going to be Valedictorian—neither
was Derek, not with Lydia Martin in their grade. The only option for him was Salutatorian, but he
always scored just barely below Derek did in all their classes. He was always third place, never
having been able to inch his way up above Derek.

Sure, every now and then he’d get a slightly better grade than Derek did on an exam or a paper, but
at the end of the year, Derek was always ahead of him. That constant inability to move up past
Derek into second place was the only thing he could think of as to why Stiles hated him so much.

He was nice to everyone else, so Derek knew he was a genuinely nice person, but he just seemed to
have a massive hate-on for him. And that was the only piece that made sense.

He’d seen Stiles absolutely destroy a bunch of sophomores who’d been cornering a poor freshman
girl and pressuring her into something she clearly didn’t want to do. He’d walked her all the way to
her next class, even though it had made him late for his own.

He’d heard Stiles talking kindly to the librarian on multiple occasions, bringing her presents on her
birthday and on ‘international librarian day,’ and basically making an old woman feel like she was
still someone worth getting to know.

Stiles was always the first to volunteer for any of the fundraisers the school put on, and he always,
always agreed to take on the worst jobs. Someone had to do clean-up after a huge party? Stiles
would do it. Someone had to sit out of an amazingly fun event to sell tickets at a booth for the
whole day? Stiles would do it. Someone had to take the fall for that massive prank a few seniors
had pulled a few weeks back? Stiles took it, even though Derek knew he hadn’t been involved since
he’d been out of town that day. Derek only knew that because he and Jackson weren’t quiet when
they talked about their plans in class, so he knew for a fact Stiles hadn’t been involved. The only
reason he’d taken the fall was because his academic standing, his popularity and his athleticism
were all things that had most teachers feel like he walked on water.

He was just—a genuinely kind individual. Which was why the only thing Derek could think of was
their academic battle for why he was always such a dick to him.

Sometimes, Derek almost wanted to just... let Stiles win. Give him the chance to be better, even
just once. The problem was, Stiles was guaranteed a free ride wherever he wanted to go for
university.

Derek wasn’t.

Stiles had all of his sports, which meant he could get in on various sports scholarships. That,
coupled with his good grades, guaranteed him a free ride for his entire university career. Derek
didn’t have that. For one thing, Werewolves were still heavily disliked and finding a university
willing to take him even with his good grades was already slim. For another thing, all Derek had
was his grades. If he didn’t make Salutatorian, he wasn’t going to make it into university at all.
His older sister hadn’t managed, and she’d been fourth in her class. A few had agreed to take her, but they were too far, and it wasn’t like his family could afford it. If Derek wanted to go to university, he needed at least a partial scholarship, and he needed it to be one of the closer ones.

He’d only been conditionally accepted to two in the surrounding five States, and that was provided he graduated with certain grades. One was offering a very small scholarship, and the other was offering a partial one. But if he didn’t make those grades, he wasn’t going.

Being a Werewolf wasn’t as fun as everyone seemed to think it was.

So Derek couldn’t let Stiles win. Even if he wanted to, just so the guy would fucking stop acting like Derek was the worst thing to happen to him. And he knew it wasn’t the Werewolf thing, considering he was friends with both Scott and Jackson. One was a Werewolf, and the other was a Werewolf hybrid called a Kanima. Both Supernatural. Both his friends.

He hated Stiles Stilinski. Because he so wished Stiles Stilinski didn’t hate him.

Derek started when the bell rang, his mind having wandered the past few minutes. Not that it mattered, since their teacher had spent a majority of the class bitching about the school’s archaic curriculum and how the books she wanted them reading weren’t considered appropriate, but somehow reading all of Shakespeare’s works was meant to enrich their lives. He kind of loved how much he agreed with her, because school could be super dumb.

She didn’t bother trying to speak over the din when everyone started packing up. They’d already been assigned homework, and she hadn’t been teaching them anything today anyway, so she just sat back down at her desk and looked weary. Like she was getting too old for all this.

He felt kind of bad for her, but not enough to stop and talk to her. He was getting a ride home today, so he couldn’t dawdle.

Packing away his stuff, he slung his bag over his shoulder and followed the rest of the class out the door. People chatted and joked around, making plans for the upcoming weekend while others spoke about prom, which was fast approaching. Derek didn’t have any desire to go to prom, but he knew it was expected of him. His mother wanted him to experience all the things worthwhile in life, and apparently prom was one of them.

He didn’t want to go. The only person he’d want to go with would never in a million years agree to it. He could imagine Stiles just outright laughing in his face, maybe make a big deal of it so that everyone would know that Derek Hale, nerd extraordinaire, had asked him, him, popular and amazing Stiles Stilinski to prom.

Stiles probably already had a date, anyway. The girls in this school threw themselves at him at every opportunity. Some of the guys, too. It wasn’t a secret he was bisexual, so really, anyone who was interested in him had a shot.

Except Derek, obviously.

Bypassing his locker, Derek jumped a few steps down from the front entrance to the sidewalk and made his way towards the parking lot. He could see Stiles’ Jeep a few spots down from where his ride was, and hoped that he made it out of there before the jock showed up.

No dice, because he was only a few steps away from his ride when a voice called out behind him.

“Big sis still picking you up from school, nerd? What’s the matter, too scared to drive after your reckless behaviour? Probably never gonna drive again, at the rate you’re going.”
Derek just grit his teeth and avoided turning around. He didn’t want to look at Stiles, because he still felt shame curling in the pit of his stomach over what had happened.

Namely, he’d almost killed someone.

Derek was a Werewolf, he knew he could do a lot of things without any risk to his person. He sometimes forgot not everyone was like that. He’d been driving his beat-up piece of shit clunker at breakneck speed down the road leading to his house. He’d been close to curfew, so he’d been driving a lot faster than necessary.

He’d caught up to a car in front of him and had been stuck impatiently behind it for a while, meaning he’d definitely be late getting home. Even though it was an unsafe place to try and pass, what with a blind corner and all, he’d tried anyway.

It was a mistake, because another car rounded the bend coming from the other direction and Derek had slammed into the car beside him in an attempt to avoid a head-on collision. The other car had ended up in a ditch, and he’d been devastated to find out it was a man and woman, the latter of which being seven months pregnant. Thankfully both were relatively unharmed, but the idea that he could’ve caused a bigger crash and fucking killed someone’s unborn child still freaked him out.

His parents had taken away his car after that event, and even though it had been almost two years ago, he was secretly glad he still wasn’t allowed to drive. He didn’t trust himself behind the wheel of a car anymore.

Though Stiles’ comment kind of rang true. He knew that the longer he stayed out from behind the wheel of a car, the less likely he was to ever get behind one again. It was one of those psychosomatic things where the longer he stayed away, the more afraid he was to drive. He should probably talk to his parents about that, but he was still too nervous to.

A problem for another day. Not something to focus on while Stiles Stilinski was coming up behind him and snarking comments at his back.

Pulling open the passenger side door, he slid into the seat and slammed it loudly, keeping his head down so he didn’t have to watch a laughing Stiles pass in front of the Camaro. He just busied himself with buckling in, ignoring the way his sister stared at him.

“I see things are still going well with you and Stilinski.”

“He’s a real treat to be around,” Derek shot back.

He ignored the way Laura’s lips quirked up at the corners while she started the car and eased them out of the spot she was in, following the small line of cars out of the lot and onto the road.

He appreciated that she didn’t mention anything else while they were still within Jackson’s hearing range, given he’d definitely have heard her.

“You should try talking to him,” Laura said, for what felt like the millionth time. “It makes no sense that he treats you how he does. Just pull him aside and have a conversation with him.”

“Why bother? We’re graduating in a month, and then I’ll never see him again.”

“Gee Der, I don’t know,” Laura rolled her eyes. “Maybe so that you stop hating going to school all the time?”

“It’s not him that makes me hate school, it’s everything else.” He turned to glare at her. “You’re
my driver, not my therapist. Shut up and get me home.”

“Careful, or I won’t be your driver either,” she insisted, turning to flash him a smile that was all teeth.

He ignored her threat and turned to stare out his window, resting his chin in his hand and watching the scenery pass them by. He tried not to think about Stiles while they drove home, but that was always a moot point. He had no self-control, and the guy always inevitably consumed his every waking moment. It was kind of sad, when he really thought about it.

He instead tried to force himself to shift his focus back to the book he’d been reading during lunch, but that didn’t help much, either. He just ended up replacing the two main characters with himself and Stiles, and that just proved how fucking gone for the guy he was.

Really, if he didn’t know better, he’d think they were mates. But he knew that couldn’t be it, because his mother always made mates sound like absolute certainties. Her meeting his father was literally like a fucking romance movie, and he and Stiles didn’t have that at all. They were all passive aggressive comments, insults and occasional books being slapped out of Derek’s hands.

Stiles always knocked books out of his hands. Usually in the corridors before classes, but sometimes in the cafeteria after the first bell rang, and a few times after homeroom. It was like the idea of Derek finding comfort in his books was his challenge to try and make him lose said comfort.

Fuck, he just hated him. Why couldn’t Stiles be ugly and rude to everyone? It would make Derek’s life so much easier!

When they turned onto the road leading up to their house, Derek perked up slightly when he caught sight of an old Honda civic parked haphazardly by the front of the house. She never had been good at parking, it was a good thing his mother didn’t care about her lawn.

“Welcome home, sir,” Laura said sarcastically while easing the car to a stop.

Derek just laughed sarcastically while unbuckling himself and opening his door, but he noticed Laura made no move to follow. “Where are you headed?”

“To see Peter,” she informed him, checking her rearview mirror and fixing it a bit, like it was off-centre.

“You two still trying to get that dumb idea of yours off the ground?”

“It’s not a dumb idea,” she insisted curtly, turning to level him with a sharp look. “Careful, or when we make it big, I won’t let you join us and you’ll die poor and alone.”

“Oh no,” he said sarcastically, rolling his eyes. “You won’t let me join your super lame company for which you barely have a tangible business plan to develop. I’m crushed.”

“I’ll have you know, we’re seeing a lawyer today,” she said haughtily. “About trying to incorporate. If we can get it up and running in the next year, we’ll have a good idea of how to move forward.”

“And you’ll be stuck with our uncle for a business partner for the rest of time.” Derek smirked. “Good luck with that.”

Laura shoved him in the shoulder, hard. “Bitch.”
“Slut,” he retorted immediately.

“Get out of my car.”

“Thanks for the ride,” he said sincerely, stepping out and shutting the door. He stood for a moment watching her turn around and drive off, but didn’t linger too long. He had someone waiting for him inside, and after the day he’d had, he wanted to catch up.

Not that they didn’t talk daily and see one another regularly, but it was always nice having her around.

Entering the house, he kicked off his shoes before heading down the corridor, dropping his bag by the stairs. He could hear laughter and voices in the kitchen, so he moved in that direction and smiled when he caught sight of his visitor.

“Hey mum,” he said, kissing her cheek while passing her. “Kira. Surprised you aren’t still trapped in exam review hell.”

“Ugh.” Kira Yukimura made an overly exaggerated sound of distress and draped her entire upper body dramatically across the table. “I swear, if I have to hear one more lecture on historical inaccuracies of the second World War, I’m going to murder someone.”

“It’s all going to pay off for you,” Talia insisted, rubbing her back soothingly while smiling at Derek. Kira always got over-dramatic when she was stressed. Derek knew she was just worrying about her finals, since she went to an extremely well-respected private school, and was slated to graduate top of her class. She’d held the title for four years, so the pressure was on to keep it all the way to the end.

Derek still hated her parents a little bit for not letting her come to the public high school with him. All of his closest childhood friends went off to different schools barring one, which meant he’d ended up having to make new ones. Sure, the ones he had were great, but he spent more time outside school with his old friends than his new ones.

“Come on,” Derek nudged her shoulder once. “Let’s go finish up watching the last season of Supernatural.”

Kira let out an over-dramatic groan, but obediently sat up, pushing her long hair from her face and smiling at him. Getting to her feet, Talia promised dinner would be ready in the next hour or so, and the two teens left the kitchen to head upstairs.

Derek snatched his bag up on his way past it, leading the way to his room, and tossed it down by his desk when he entered it. He fell heavily into his desk chair while Kira made a beeline for his bed, falling face first on it and snuggling into his pillow.

He just smiled, finding it endearing. He loved it when she hung out on his bed. The scent of pack was always fresh in the house, considering his family was pack, but having the other members come and go was a comfort to him. He knew it would be hard if they all managed to snag spots in various universities, because they’d head off in different directions and he honestly didn’t know what he would do.

Kira’s parents had their eyes set on Oxford, and with her grades and non-Werewolf status, on top of the money her family had, she was likely to get in. That would mean she would be across the fucking world from him, and he got anxiety whenever he thought about it too much.

“You hear from Oxford yet?” he asked, since he wanted to know sooner rather than later.
Apparently the overseas universities took longer to send out their acceptance letters, so while Kira had heard back from a lot of American and Canadian universities, Oxford still hadn’t responded.

Kira didn’t move for a long while, then with her face still buried in his pillow, she reached into the back pocket of her jeans and pulled out a folded envelope, holding it out to him. He felt his stomach drop but reached out for it anyway. Unfolding it, he pulled the letter out from inside, straightened it out, and began to read.

He only had to read the first three words to know what the answer was.

_We are pleased…_

“Congrats,” he said, voice somewhat mellow while he folded the letter back up and tucked it into the envelope once more. “Guess that’s that, then.”

“Why do they think being so far away from pack is a good thing?” she asked, voice muffled from her face smooshed into his pillow. “I don’t _want_ to go to England.”

“It’s a good university,” he insisted, standing up so he could shove the envelope back into her pocket. “They just want you to have all the opportunities you can.”

She snorted into his pillow at that, then sighed explosively and sat up, brushing her long hair out of her face with one hand again.

“If you don’t email me once a day, I’m going to make your life hell when I visit in the summers.”

“As if I can stand not talking to you once a day,” Derek insisted back, nudging her lightly with his socked foot. He tried for another smile, but kind of fell short. It was going to be hard being away from her. High school had been bad enough, but this? This would be torture.

She wouldn’t be just across town anymore. She’d be an entire ocean away from him.

“How about you?” Kira asked. “Still doing okay?”

“So far,” he agreed with a small nod. “Might actually make it through and get to go to university. Just need to stay above water and not let Stiles usurp me and I’m golden.”

A soft smile formed on Kira’s face and she nudged him back with her own foot. He noticed she was still wearing her combat boots and frowned, because one of those booted feet was on his bedspread.

“He still pulling your pigtails, then?”

Derek frowned. “What?”

“You know, your pigtails.” She pulled lightly at some of her own hair, still smiling. “You always talk about how he treats you, and it’s pretty clear to me he has a crush on you.”

Derek didn’t mean to laugh _quite_ so loudly, but hearing those words escape Kira’s mouth was the most _ridiculous_ thing he’d _ever_ heard in his life.

“Are you _insane_? Stiles doesn’t have a crush on me, he fucking _hates_ me!”

“Oh please.” Kira rolled her eyes, shifting so she was sitting cross-legged on his bed now, _both_ booted feet on his blankets. She was lucky she was his best friend, he’d have kicked Vernon Boyd out of his room if he’d tried that, and they were almost as close. “The way you describe this
little shit, he sounds like a typical douche boy who has a crush on someone and sucks at expressing it. So he pulls pigtails.”

“I don’t have pigtails,” Derek dead-panned.

“Metaphorical pigtails, jackass.” She threw his pillow at him. He just caught it and set it on his lap while she continued. “Look at the facts, Derek. If he’s nice to everyone except you, it’s because he has a huge boner for you and doesn’t know how to handle it.”

“And being an asshole is the right way to handle it?” Derek asked dryly.

“It gets your attention, doesn’t it?” She grinned. “You never shut up about him.”

“You brought him up!”

“Actually, you did.” She winked. “Nice try, but no cigar.”

“I hate you.”

“You adore me, and you won’t know how to live without me when I’m gone.”

If that wasn’t the truth, he didn’t know what was. But not something he wanted to focus on and be depressed about. They still had a month of school left, plus summer, so they had time. Granted, not much of it, but enough. He was sure they’d do something over the summer before they headed off.

Him, Kira and Boyd. They’d probably go out to Kira’s lakehouse or something. Or if they could afford a longer roadtrip, maybe out of State for a weekend. Just something for the three of them to do together before they split.

“So hey, your mom said Laura and Peter are still working on that business thing,” Kira said when the silence stretched too long, evidently realizing Derek was starting to think about life without her within driving distance. “How’s that going?”

“Who knows?” Derek snorted, crossing his arms and leaning back in his chair. His pillow almost slid off his lap so he put his socked feet up on the edge of his bed. Kira made a face at him, likely because she could smell them, but didn’t push them off.

Their friendship was truly one of a kind.

“Laura’s still smarting over not being admitted to university, and Peter’s just Peter. I don’t know why they think this is going to work.”

“I don’t think it’s a bad idea,” she insisted with a shrug. “I mean, Supernatural-geared specialized baked goods are always in high demand, and your mom has the best apple puffs I’ve ever tasted, so it could work.”

“Don’t encourage them,” he insisted with a sigh, raking a hand through his hair. He stood then, throwing his pillow back onto his bed, and moved towards the TV he had in the corner of his room, powering up his PS3 so they could access Netflix. After all, they were almost done the season and the next one was coming out soon. They needed to make sure they weren’t behind or they’d get spoiled.

It was while he was getting their plans for the evening loaded that a thought occurred to him and he turned back to Kira. “Hey, your school doesn’t have prom, right?”
She let out a mirthless laugh. “Are you kidding? If it’s fun, my school doesn’t do it. Why?”

“Mom wants me to go to prom,” he grumbled, turning back to the TV and moving the selector over to Netflix. “Says I need to experience all the fun things in life, or whatever.”

“Why don’t you ask Stiles?” she asked, voice teasing.

He thought back to what he’d imagined happening in the car, about Stiles making a huge deal of it and making fun of him for all to see. Hell, maybe he’d stand on the table in the cafeteria and scream it out at the top of his lungs: Derek Hale had dared ask him to prom.

“Yeah, I don’t think so.” He turned back to her when Netflix started loading, moving to the bed and climbing up onto it beside her. “Besides, if you don’t get a prom, why are you trying to talk me out of asking you.”

She arched a perfectly manicured eyebrow at him. “Me? You want to take me to prom?”

“Why not?” He shrugged. “You’re my best friend. Mom wants me to go, so going with you will make it more tolerable for me. And if you come, it means you actually get a prom.”

“Hm,” was all she said in response, turning to the television, but he could tell she was thinking. She was probably weighing the pros and cons of it, because going to prom at a school where she knew literally no one but Derek—and Boyd, who’d already confirmed he wasn’t going—probably wasn’t her idea of a good time. But on the other hand, she wouldn’t even get a prom if she decided not to go with him.

Derek didn’t push, knowing she’d make the decision on her own. Besides, Kira wasn’t one of those girly girls who liked to dress up in a flowing gown and wear copious amounts of makeup just to go to some shindig. Even if she agreed, he’d tell her she could show up in sweats if she wanted to.

He just hoped she did, he didn’t want to spend the whole night staring longingly—and jealously—in Stiles’ direction. He really couldn’t help but wonder who Stiles was going to be taking to prom.

“Okay,” Kira finally said, almost an hour later.

Derek turned to her, confused for a second, and then realized she was agreeing to be his prom date. He smiled and elbowed her lightly. “You don’t have to wear a dress.”

“Oh, I wasn’t going to even if you asked,” she insisted, grinning at him. “I’m sure I can find a nice suit before prom. When it is?”

“Last Friday of May.”

“Hm.” She tilted her head. “I’ll think on it, see what I can find. Maybe go out shopping with some of the girls.”

“Should bring Cora, she’d kill to go shopping with you.”

Kira grunted in acknowledgement, having a soft spot for the youngest Hale, even though she was a nightmare to shop with. She was likely still out with her friends, since she spent more time outside the house than in it, so he knew Kira’d likely not see her before the night was through.

“Don’t make me regret this,” Kira warned.

“Never.” Derek wrapped an arm around her shoulders and pulled her into his side, squeezing once
before loosening his grip. He smiled at the thought of having his best friend at his side for prom, and hoped she could keep his mind off Stiles and his unworthy date for the whole evening.

Stiles knew he was chewing his gum obnoxiously loud, but he couldn’t help it. He was kind of nervous, and the action of chomping down repeatedly on the gum in his mouth was making him feel a little better, for some inexplicable reason.

He was lurking outside one of the classrooms, watching Derek play chess against someone. He knew there was some kind of tournament coming up soon, so they were probably trying to practice before the big day. Not for the first time, Stiles really wanted to support him, but that would mean finding out where it was being held and going to it. If he showed up to a chess match, he was fairly certain he’d stick out like a sore thumb, and he didn’t want Derek to notice him.

Well, yes, he did, but not if it was going to fuck up Derek’s game. It was safer to just linger like a creeper outside the classroom he was practising in.

Also, he was kind of thinking about maybe, possibly, sort of, kind of asking him to prom. Maybe. He hadn’t decided yet. Every time he got a burst of confidence, his brain began to panic over Derek asking him who he was and his soul would literally be crushed. Which he recognized was stupid, but the brain was like that sometimes.

Honestly, the worst option was Derek thinking he was joking. Stiles liked to think he was a nice person. Sure, he knew he handled himself badly around Derek and couldn’t be nice to him if he tried, but this was the most they’d spoken all year. Stiles knew Derek was going to be someone great one day. They’d part ways when high school ended, and he’d never see him again.

He wished things had been different between them. Maybe if he’d been less into sports and more into things like chess and—ugh!—math, then he and Derek would’ve become friends. Maybe their close grades would’ve been a fun rivalry between buddies instead of something Derek seemed to resent him for.

Maybe Stiles wouldn’t have spent the whole year treating Derek like shit just to get the guy to fucking look at him! And he couldn’t even manage that! Whenever Derek spoke to him, he never made eye contact. He just grumbled something under his breath and walked off. Stiles hated that he couldn’t get the guy to even look at him.

But no, today was the day. It was after hours, nobody else was around, and Stiles could just pull him aside when he and his friend were done and earnestly ask him to prom. Pour his entire soul into the question, promise him he’d make sure he had a good time, and just hope for the best. If Derek said no, well...

Well, then he said no. And Stiles could just go wallow at home and call in sick for the rest of the month.

It wasn’t like he even knew if Derek wanted to go to prom. Would he even go if someone other than Stiles asked him? It wasn’t really his scene, it was just one of those traditional high school things to do. Hell, Stiles was only going because he didn’t want to miss out, but he wasn’t planning on bringing a date if it wasn’t Derek. Not that he hadn’t been asked.

Repeatedly.

Just—so many times.

Almost every person in their grade who was single had dropped hints that they were interested.
Some had been more subtle, but a lot had been pretty bold. Some had outright asked him to prom themselves. He’d felt bad having to turn them all down, but he wasn’t willing to take someone he wasn’t going to have fun with. And the only person he wanted to take was someone he’d been crushing on for four years.

Really, his backup had been Jackson, but given he was taking their mutual friend Danny Mahealani—who’d accepted the bro-ship date to prom—he was now sans-wingman. Scott was taking his longtime girlfriend Allison Argent, and Lydia’s boyfriend was coming home for the weekend from college to take her to prom. He literally couldn’t take one of his closest friends because all of them were already going with someone else.

So it was Derek, or no one.

Most likely no one.

Stiles jumped when his phone vibrated in his pocket and he ducked out of sight, shushing it loudly while pulling it free and hurrying down the corridor. He didn’t want Derek to know he’d been standing there watching him, so he had to make sure he was out of the Werewolf’s earshot.

“Dammit, Whitty,” he muttered when he answered the call. “You trying to get me caught?”

“You still haven’t asked him? What’s the hold up?”

“He’s still practising.” Stiles insisted quietly, crouching by the lockers, as if being lower to the ground would make it harder to hear him from the other end of the corridor. “I don’t want to bother him while he’s focussing.”

“Coward.”

“Fuck you,” Stiles muttered, rubbing at his forehead with his free hand. “This is a bad idea. He’s gonna say no.”

“Then don’t ask him.”

“You’re the least helpful person I know,” Stiles informed him dryly.

“You want someone to wax poetic with, call McCall.”

Stiles didn’t point out Jackson was the one to call him for an update. He knew his friend was just as anxious as him to know if Derek was going to accept his invitation to prom. Jackson was weird that way, he’d make fun of Stiles and call him a loser, but he’d be the first to throw down if he found out Derek said no.

Not that Stiles would let him throw down. Derek had every right to say no, especially considering how Stiles treated him. God dammit all though, he just couldn’t help it! He just wanted Derek to look at him and actually have a conversation with him for once in his life. He wasn’t asking for much, just a little bit of recognition so he hadn’t wasted his entire high school life pining after someone who was never going to give him the time of day.

He kind of found it funny when he considered that movies had it backwards. It was always the nerd in love with the jock who knew they never stood a chance—until the obligatory bullshit, “Oh my god, she let her hair down and took off her glasses and she’s suddenly hot, what?” transformation. But real life wasn’t like that.

It was messy, and complicated, and there was the possibility for a jock to be in love with a nerd
who wouldn’t spit on him if he was literally on fire. Nerds could be just as vicious, and Stiles was honestly scared that he was about to fuck up his entire high school life with just one question.

“Hurry up and rip the bandaid off,” Jackson insisted. “At least you won’t graduate on a ‘what if.’”

That was true, and Stiles said as much, though grudgingly. He hung up with Jackson, took a breath, then stood up again. He turned back down the corridor and headed for the classroom Derek and his friend were in, trying to subtly peek into it in case one of them was looking.

His heart sank when he found the room empty, the two of them evidently having finished up and left while he’d been on the phone.

“Shit,” he hissed, pushing away from the wall and jogging towards the exit. Derek still wasn’t allowed to drive, as far as he knew, so he was probably going to be waiting on someone to pick him up. Stiles could catch him in the parking lot.

Honestly, he felt like Derek needed to hurry up and argue with his parents to get back behind the wheel. The longer he waited, the more anxious he’d be when he tried driving again. Stiles had gotten into a few small accidents himself, and his dad always forced him to get right back on the road. It was like falling off a horse. Once someone fell off a horse, of course they’d be scared to get back on it. But the reason the saying went to get back on the horse was because the longer fear was left to fester and grow, the harder it would be to get back on the damn horse.

Derek had already spent close to two years without driving. At this point, he was liable to never drive again. Stiles just wanted to make sure he didn’t end up too afraid to drive.

Reaching the exit, he pushed through them just in time to see a car pull out. It looked like Derek’s chess buddy was giving him a ride home and Stiles cursed, rubbing at his mouth in a way that reminded him of his father. He’d been hoping to catch him when there was no one else around. He supposed he could try during lunch, but there would be an audience if people saw him walking to Derek’s table.

And it wasn’t like he could write him a note, he’d never believe it came from Stiles even if he signed it.

Sighing and figuring he’d just... sort it out later, he turned back to head inside to grab his bag from his locker. That was an entire evening wasted. Well, sort of, considering he’d gotten to watch Derek focus intently for a few hours. He always looked so fucking good when he was focussing hard like that.

Once he’d gathered his things, he spat his gum out into the closest trashcan and started for the door when he paused. He couldn’t go to the chess match, but he always wanted to support Derek. He wouldn’t be able to openly show said support, but he still did support him. He always left him unsigned notes in his locker before any nerdy events he went to. Something that Derek would read and believe. He usually waited until closer to the day, but he was there and no one else was around, so he may as well do it now and avoid staying late another random day.

Turning back towards the lockers for their grade, he stopped in front of Derek’s and grabbed a notebook from his bag, along with a pen. Uncapping it, he scrawled a short message, then folded the page up and stuffed it into Derek’s locker through the slots at the top.

Good luck in your chess match!
You’re one of the best, I know you’ll do well.
I’ll be cheering for you.

Satisfied with himself, he shoved his items back where they belonged and started for the exit again, feeling particularly proud of himself. He still had time before prom, he was sure he’d get around to asking Derek before then.

He was sure of it.

“I can’t believe you’re making me sit through this entire thing with you,” Cora muttered from beside him, arms crossed and slouched in her seat. “This is boring.”

“It’d look weird if I showed up on my own, you have friends on the Lacrosse team,” he argued while clapping obediently at a nice play from the other team. They clacked their sticks together while laughing and Derek saw Jackson throw his own aside furiously. Stiles went to retrieve it for him.

“Why are you even bothering to come to the game anyway?” Cora demanded. “You’re only here to ogle your crush, and you can’t even see his face.”

“I’m just trying to support him,” Derek argued, eyes tracking Stiles while he jogged back to his own position on the field. He made sure not to stare at his ass when Stiles bent down slightly, readying himself for another play.

“You’re such a loser,” Cora muttered, but there was no heat in her voice. And Derek knew if she truly didn’t want to be there with him, she’d have left. She was trying to be a good sister, and he appreciated that.

Time was ticking down fast. This was the last game of the season, and then it would be exams, prom and graduation. He only had a small window of time left to stare longingly at Stiles before everything was over and he never saw him again.

Stiles was going to do great things. He was going to go to a great university, get an amazing job, probably marry someone rich and beautiful, and live the perfect life. Derek hated him more for that, but mostly because he would never be the one in Stiles’ life.

In a way, it would be a blessing to finally have him gone. Derek could move on with his life, and try and find a way to live without Stiles in his orbit. He felt like he needed that before he messed up his senses too badly and missed out on finding his mate because he was too obsessed with Stiles.

Not like Stiles was going to be his mate, what with him being human and all.

Even if he magically somehow was his mate, Derek knew Stiles would never agree to be with him. He had options, he could have anyone he wanted.

Trying not to let the dark thoughts roll in, he focussed back on the game and stood up with a cheer with everyone else in his section when Stiles scored a point. He was laughing while walking backwards, Scott appearing at his side and throwing an arm around his shoulders.

Derek tried not to get jealous about that, because he knew Scott and Jackson were Stiles’ friends. He just hated how often the two of them touched him. Their scents were always all over him, and it was annoying.

Then again, Derek felt like the stress of the past two weeks had broken him somewhat, because
he’d found a note in his locker a week back that had smelled like Stiles, but couldn’t have possibly been from him. As with others he’d received over the years, it had been kind, and encouraging, and had actually made him really happy when he’d read it. He hadn’t won the tournament, but he’d placed, so that was what mattered the most to him.

And someone was supporting him from afar, so that was nice. He always found notes in his locker around his various tournaments or events, and despite none of them owning up to it, he knew it had to be one of his friends trying to be nice to him. This last time, maybe they’d wanted to give him an extra morale boost for his last ever chess tournament and had stolen a piece of paper from Stiles’ notebook to write the note on so that he’d have some of Stiles’ scent around. Then again, this particular one could also possibly have been a dick move from someone who knew he liked the guy and was trying to make him dumb enough to thank Stiles for something he’d never done. Unlikely, since the note was the same as all the previous ones he’d gotten but still. The Stiles scent thing had thrown him off.

Derek wasn’t an idiot, he wasn’t going to walk up to Stiles and thank him for his support just for Stiles to laugh in his face and ask him what the fuck he was talking about. And then make a huge deal about it with his friends. Yeah, Derek had survived a total lack of utter humiliation for four years, he wasn’t about to risk that in the last three weeks of school.

His eyes skirted up to the score and he couldn’t help but wince. They were trailing by a few points and the game was almost over. They probably wouldn’t win, but coming in second place was still a good achievement considering it was basically four players holding the entire team up.

Not to say the other players weren’t good, but really it was all Jackson, Scott, Stiles and Danny keeping them afloat. The new guy wasn’t doing too bad either, but he still wasn’t at their level. And really, Derek was always supremely impressed with Stiles and Danny because half the time they faced off against Supernaturals on the other teams and they always held their own. Sure, powers weren’t allowed in sports, but it wasn’t like Werewolves could always help it when they were in the heat of the moment. They sometimes shoved people too hard, or ran a bit too fast, or shoulder-checked someone roughly.

Stiles’ collarbone had been broken last year by an overly enthusiastic Werewolf player, and he’d been totally chill about it. The guy was supposed to get booted off the field, but he’d been so upset and distressed at hurting a human that Stiles had insisted it was just an accident and to leave him be. He hadn’t been able to play himself anymore, but he’d let the other guy continue on like he hadn’t just broken one of Stiles’ bones.

That was one of the main reasons Derek just... couldn’t let Stiles go. The guy had hurt him, and Stiles insisted it was an accident and to not punish him for it. And Derek had been able to tell the Werewolf felt awful, but most people didn’t care about that. The human ref had just insisted he get thrown off the field, and only Stiles’ insistence that it was an accident had allowed him to remain on it.

Stiles was just so nice. He was amazing, and kind, and wonderful and just... everything Derek wanted and could never have. Ever.

But God, he wanted. So badly. He wanted Stiles so much he could hardly stand it. So again, having some distance from him would be beneficial once school was over. Stiles would leave town, disappear into the depths of the upper class world, and Derek would be stuck here trying to make a life for himself like his sister was.

Though to be fair, her and Peter’s idea seemed to be going remarkably well so far. They’d incorporated as she’d said, and had already managed to get a loan from the bank on a place to open
up shop. So really, she was doing well for herself. If this bakery took off, then she’d have something to do with her time, and he felt like that’d be a good thing for her.

He was still thinking about Laura while watching the game unfold when someone slammed into Stiles hard enough to have him sail off his feet and crash down a good few feet away. Derek wolfed out instinctively, starting to get to his feet when Cora grabbed at his arm with both hands and wrenched him back down.

“What are you doing? Chill,” she hissed, looking around to make sure no one had noticed. Probably more for his own benefit than anything else. Some of Stiles’ friends were in the stands, and they’d definitely have mentioned seeing Derek there acting all protective to him later. Derek didn’t need that in his life.

He managed to get himself seated once more, but he was still mostly wolfed out, staring intently at Stiles while he struggled back to his feet. The ref was berating the guy who’d knocked into him, who was being a bit of a dick about it. He didn’t seem to be a Werewolf, but he was definitely something to have sent Stiles flying like he did.

Scott was helping Stiles back to his feet while Jackson got up in the other player’s face. It was obvious a fight was about to break out, but the coaches intervened quickly, Finstock shoving Jackson back while the other team’s coach got between his own player and the ref in an attempt to get him to calm down.

“That was uncalled for,” Derek growled, voice low and guttural. “Stiles didn’t even have the ball.”

“Yeah, people are dicks, this surprises no one,” Cora insisted, keeping hold of his arm for a moment longer before seeming to deem it safe to let him go. “Stiles is a big boy, Derek. He’s gonna be okay.”

Derek knew that. Stiles was tough, and he’d gotten tossed around more than once playing Lacrosse, but it didn’t make it any easier to watch. He was still human, after all. A resilient one, maybe, but still.

Scott was helping Stiles off the field, one arm around his shoulders while Stiles favoured his ribs. Jackson was at his side instantly, having abandoned Finstock and his angry yelling in favour of checking on his friend.

When he sat on the bench and Finstock came over to speak to him, Derek tuned in to the conversation, forcing himself to block out all the jeering and booing around him for the unsportsmanlike attack.

“How you doin’, Stilinski? Need to take a breather? Think you can head back into the game?”

Derek felt his heart sink when Stiles shook his head in response to the question. Jackson looked furious. Scott looked pissed, shooting an angry glance towards the other team. Danny just looked worried, sitting beside Stiles and asking him in low tones where it hurt and if he needed to get him some ice.

Stiles wasn’t a weakling by any means, which meant the hit he’d gotten was a means to get him out of the game. The other team seemed entirely too pleased at this turn of events, barring their livid coach since one of his guys was now on the bench for the unprovoked blow. They’d been aiming to get rid of Stiles because without him on the field, Beacon Hills stood less of a chance of catching up on the score.
Derek wanted to storm down there and start ripping people’s heads off. He felt the urge so strongly that he was digging his claws into his legs in an attempt to keep himself in his seat. He knew he was overreacting because Stiles was his crush, but he just felt wronged. Like, personally wronged. As if someone going after his crush was a personal sleight, and he hated it.

That, and he wanted to help Stiles feel better. He wanted to run down there and steal some of his pain, which he knew was stupid considering he had two Werewolves with him right this second, but still. He didn’t like knowing the blow had been so hard that Stiles physically felt like he couldn’t continue to play. He’d taken worse hits and kept going, which meant the player had made sure to get him somewhere painful.

Maybe he’d managed to catch him under his ribs, at just the right spot. It was where boxers aimed when they were trying to take someone out of a fight, so it wouldn’t surprise him if that was where Stiles had been hit given the way he was favouring his left side.

The game resumed a few minutes later, but Derek didn’t take his eyes off Stiles. He seemed to be getting more and more frustrated as the clock ticked down, unable to do anything from his spot on the bench, but it was inevitable they would lose. They’d already been trailing behind and with one of their best out of the game, it ended in a four point loss on Beacon Hills’ side. Better than anticipated, but still disappointing for the last game of the seniors’ high school Lacrosse careers.

Derek obediently clapped along with everyone else, and then waited while the stands cleared out, Cora shifting impatiently beside him. He just wasn’t ready to go yet. Stiles and his team were still on the field, talking to one another and making comments about who’d played well and who was MVP.

Scott started giving a sort of speech to the younger players about carrying on the legacy and whatnot, but Stiles interrupted him and turned it into something more upbeat. After all, it wasn’t the end for everyone, and Scott was bringing down an already low mood with his talks of the seniors being gone by their next game in the fall.

“Can we go, or are we gonna sit here all night?” Cora asked impatiently.

Derek figured they should head out. The stands were clearing rapidly and he didn’t want Stiles to catch sight of him. He’d probably make fun of him for coming out to watch the game when Derek didn’t have any friends on the team. Sure, that was why he’d brought Cora, but still. Stiles was an asshole to him, he’d find a way to make him feel two inches tall.

They made their way down the aisle towards the stairs, Derek occasionally glancing over at Stiles. He’d taken his helmet off while on the bench, and his hair was sticking up every which way from raking his hand through the sweat-soaked strands. He looked so fucking good, Derek hated him.

“Kira’s outfit looks amazing, by the way,” Cora said while they headed down the stairs.

“For prom?” Derek asked. “Did she get a suit?”

“She did, and she looked so hot in it, it made me question my sexuality.” Cora turned to grin at him and he rolled his eyes.

“I should probably talk to mom about going out to get my own suit. I told her she could show up in sweats, but I’m pretty sure she expects me to be in a suit.”

Cora just laughed and then asked if she could come, to which he vehemently said no. He would rather have Stiles find out he had a crush on him than go shopping with Cora, that was how
horrible it was.

They made it back to the lot relatively quickly, Derek’s eyes straying to Stiles’ Jeep and trying not to sigh like the movie version of a lovesick teenage girl. He instead just got in the passenger seat of Cora’s clunker and buckled in while she started the car.

Cora wasn’t looking forward to being a senior in the fall, because she’d already had the pleasure of seeing both her older sister and brother work hard to get into university and not even succeeding. Well, Laura hadn’t, but Derek’s was still hanging in the balance until exams were over.

He understood where she was coming from, but tried to lighten the mood for her a little bit. She was on a few sports teams herself, and she got decent grades. With any luck, she’d get a good scholarship and make it to university. It was a lot of pressure for her, he knew, but he just hoped she remembered to enjoy her last year of high school.

Derek had kind of wasted his.

Well, at least he still had prom, and while he wasn’t looking forward to seeing who Stiles had chosen for his date, he was excited to see how hot he looked in a suit.

Prom was a bit overrated, in Stiles’ opinion. It was all just about tradition. Some kind of old-time rite of passage and whatnot. No one actually cared about prom itself, they just wanted an excuse to dress up, dance, get drunk or get laid. Or all four, depending on who was asked.

Stiles himself liked dancing, so he was fine on the dancing front. He also didn’t mind his suit so much, because Jackson had bought it for him a year or so back when they’d been invited to a family friend’s wedding. Jackson was loaded and hadn’t wanted Stiles to look like a hobo, so he’d gifted him a very nice suit that Stiles actually really liked.

Getting drunk, well, he wasn’t exactly into that. And getting laid? Only if it was Derek, which he doubted. The guy hadn’t shown, not that Stiles had expected him too.

He was hanging out by the drinks with Jackson and Danny, the three of them talking about the weights lifted off their shoulders now that exams were over. Well, Danny and Stiles were. Jackson didn’t seem to care either way, which made sense since, again, loaded.

Stiles still kind of found it adorable Jackson had only applied to the same schools as him, and had only accepted the one Stiles had. He was ridiculous, and Stiles had insisted he should go wherever he wanted. Jackson had argued that if Stiles didn’t have him around to keep his fat ass out of trouble, who would?

He knew that was Jackson speak for not being able to let him go. It made sense, they’d been friends for an eternity, and were honestly pretty co-dependent. His dad talked about how worried it made him sometimes, because they’d have to split off eventually, right?

Well, not yet. And not something to think about at prom. So Stiles just focussed back on what Danny was saying while smirking to himself at the fact that Jackson had made the mistake of trying the punch. It was made by Mrs. Martin, so of course it was going to be disgusting. They’d spent enough time at the Martins to know that, so he was dumb for even trying it.

“Yo,” Joel called loudly over the music, throwing one arm around Stiles’ shoulders and the other around Danny’s. “We’re almost there, you guys! We’re actually gonna graduate!”

“It’s still a week away, don’t get ahead of yourself. Still tons of time to get expelled between now
and then,” Stiles insisted with a small smirk.

Joel just made a noise and batted one hand, still around Danny’s shoulders. “Whatever, we’re graduating. Hey, did you guys see Megan tonight? She is looking fine. Might actually try and score with her.”

“Aren’t you dating Beth?” Danny asked, confused.

“You didn’t hear?” Jackson was smirking now. “She dumped him yesterday. Caught him cheating with a random hookup.”

Joel flipped Jackson off with the hand around Stiles’ shoulders as Kevin joined them. He was acting very suspicious, looking around and curling in on himself slightly. Stiles frowned when he approached and as soon as he was huddled within their circle, he grinned and pulled a full bottle of vodka from inside his jacket.

“Check it out. Stole it from my dad’s liquor cabinet.”

“Nice!” Joel released his friends so he could grab at it, unscrewing the cap and ducking down a bit so he could take a swig without any of the teachers or parent chaperones noticing. They were by one of the many tables on the outskirts, so it was easy to hide. “Oh, that burns. I love it.”

Kevin smirked, taking it back, and ducked himself to take a swig. When he offered it to Jackson, he got an annoyed look.

“I’m a Werewolf, jackass. The fuck am I gonna drink that garbage for?”

“More for me,” Joel insisted with a laugh as Kevin held it out to Stiles.

He shook his head. “No thanks, don’t need my dad finding out and grounding me for eternity.”

“Come on, live a little,” Kevin whined, holding it out to Danny, who also declined.

“We’re underage,” Danny argued when Kevin made a bit more of a fuss about it, like he’d expected the other cool kids to do what he did because it was the cool thing to do.

“We’re eighteen,” Joel argued, grabbing the bottle and taking another large swallow. “You know that’s like, basically an adult in Canada, right? They can drink at eighteen.”

“Yeah, and live in fucking igloos, your point?” Jackson snapped.

“My point,” Joel said while Kevin took the bottle back for another drink, “is you guys are all wet fucking blankets.”

Stiles just laughed while the conversation continued, because the more Joel and Kevin drank, the more ridiculous their arguments became. None of them had really eaten before showing up since the team had plans to go out and eat after they were done with the whole prom thing, so the two of them were getting really drunk really fast because of their empty stomachs and straight vodka.

He’d admit to being curious, since all Stiles had ever gotten sips of from his dad were whiskey and beer, but not enough to risk getting caught by a teacher. He really didn’t want to get expelled a mere week before graduation, thank you very much.

They were still arguing about the pros and cons of electric cars—Stiles had no idea how they’d gotten onto that topic, but he loved that they had—when Jackson cut himself off mid-sentence,
eyes on something behind Stiles. Kevin had been taking a sip of his vodka and promptly spat it out, coughing roughly and trying to wipe at his mouth with the sleeve of his suit jacket.

“What?” Danny demanded, turning. He froze instantly and Stiles whipped around, wondering what the hell everyone was looking at when his heart hit his feet.

Derek had just walked in.

Derek fucking Hale was at prom. Even though Stiles hadn’t gotten up the balls to ask him, Derek had still shown up to prom. And God, he looked amazing. His hair was styled, his suit looked brand new, he had a tie and polished shoes and a killer smile and God, he just looked so good.

He looked so fucking good, Stiles wanted to run over and tear his clothes off.

But that wasn’t what he was looking at, not really.

No, Stiles was looking at the girl holding his arm, having walked in with him and leaning heavily into his side while looking around excitedly. She was wearing a suit herself, but it was very fitted and classy. She was Asian, and gorgeous, and absolutely not someone Stiles had ever seen before. Her long dark hair was up in an intricate hairstyle, she was wearing heels, and he thought she might have had a corsage around one wrist, it was hard to tell with how she was holding onto Derek’s arm with both hands.

Derek looked... happy. Just—so fucking happy. Smiling and laughing while they walked further into the transformed gym, moving towards where Derek’s friends were clustered in the corner.

The girl laughed at something Derek said, and Stiles felt anger and jealousy eating a hole through his stomach when she reached up with one hand to pull his face closer and kissed his cheek.

Derek smiled so wide that Stiles thought it might break his stupid, dumb face.

“Stiles...”

He ignored Danny, turning back to face the group, hands clenching at his sides and struggling to rein in the jealous monster rearing its ugly head. It was fine, really. No big deal. So Derek was already taken by some unknown beauty, whatever. Really, good for him. At least Derek wasn’t going to die alone from the amount of reading he always did.

“Hey man, I’m sorry,” Kevin said, sounding more sober saying those four words than he had in the past hour.

Stiles’ eyes caught sight of the bottle his friend still held and without giving it much thought, he snatched it out of his hand, got on his knees to stay out of sight, and tilted his head back while he drank.

The vodka burned going down, and it tasted sharp in his mouth, but he forced himself to ignore that and just kept swallowing.

“Whoa, whoa!” Jackson insisted, grabbing at the bottle when Stiles downed almost a third of the remains in only a few seconds. “Fuck, Stilinski! He’s not worth it. Don’t be stupid.”

“I’m going to dance,” he said while getting unsteadily to his feet from his kneeling position. Shit, that had gone up real fast, but that was kind of what he’d wanted.

He grabbed at Danny’s hand while he turned, dragging the other teen out onto the floor and
beginning to dance like an idiot. Danny looked worried, casting glances back over at Jackson every few seconds, but he obediently danced along with him, though much better.

It didn’t take long for Scott to appear beside him, Jackson evidently having gone to tell him what had happened. Or maybe Scott had seen Derek with his girlfriend, too. Wasn’t like they weren’t sticking out, what with the fact that Derek was having a swell time!

“Hey,” Scott said, eying him worriedly while Stiles swayed on the spot to one of the slow songs playing. “Are you okay?”

Stiles scoffed loudly, spittle flying from between his lips, and flapped a hand at Scott. The vodka had really hit in the past ten minutes he’d been on the floor, and he was now in some weird, cotton candy sort of head-space where everything was swaying and nothing mattered.

“M’fine, Scotty.” He fell into his friend, wrapping one arm around his shoulders and patting him lightly on the chest. “Totally fine.”

“Were you drinking?” Scott asked, sounding scandalized.

That meant he’d seen Derek on his own. Jackson was probably trying to make sure he kept the path between Derek and Stiles blocked in case Stiles went after him.

And whatever! So Derek had a girlfriend, big deal. Wasn’t like Stiles had spent the last four years crushing on him. Wasn’t like Stiles had tried to get Derek to notice him all through high school. Wasn’t like Stiles had been angsting for days over asking Derek to prom.

Didn’t matter, because Derek didn’t matter, because he had a girlfriend, and good for him. Soon, they’d all graduate and go their separate ways and he wouldn’t even care about Derek Hale. He’d be a nobody in the pages of his history, and good fucking riddance.

“Where’s Kevin?” Stiles slurred, looking around and basically only being held up by Scott, now. He wondered if Danny had been holding him up before this, and he just hadn’t noticed.

“Kevin’s by the far wall with Joel and Jackson.”

“Whitty!” Stiles grinned dopily at Scott. “Bring me to Whitty.”

“Okay, come on.” Scott dragged him back across the floor, Danny following them. Stiles was sure he meant to have his legs cooperate, but it was hard. Wow, he’d had a lot more to drink than he’d thought. “What the hell, you let him get drunk?”

“He grabbed the bottle before I could stop him,” Jackson snapped, grabbing at Stiles to get him away from Scott, like some territorial Werewolf bullshit they always did. “He was happy out there dancing, why did you bring him back here?”

“He wanted to see you, Whitty,” Scott sneered.

Stiles let out a laugh at that, because it was funny. Or it had been funny, once upon a time.

When he’d come up with Jackson’s nickname, his friend had seemed proud of it. Like he enjoyed it because he thought Stiles was calling him witty, like he was quick on his feet at comebacks and verbal banter.

He’d liked it less when he clued in it was literally just part of his last name. Still, Stiles was never going to stop using it, it’d been years since then and it was sticking, the same way ‘Stiles’ had
stuck for him when Jackson had started using it.

His parents used to call him Mietek when he was little, since Stiles couldn’t pronounce his full name, but once he and Jackson had started nicknaming each other, Stiles had come up and it had stuck. Even his dad called him Stiles, now. Everyone called him Stiles.

He was still the only person who called Jackson Whitty, but Stiles had high hopes for university! If he said it often enough, maybe it’d stick.

Jackson and Scott were still snarking insults at each other and Stiles noticed Kevin was holding the vodka loosely in one hand. When he made a grab for it, Jackson pivoted so that he just barely missed.

“Don’t be stupid, think about graduation,” Jackson snapped. “He’s just a guy, Stiles. You’re hot and popular, you can have anyone.”

“Not anyone, apparently,” Kevin supplied helpfully. Joel snickered and Stiles’ happy state began to crumble a little.

“I need to piss,” Stiles muttered, pulling away from Jackson and swaying slightly in place before taking a step. When both Jackson and Scott went to follow, he turned to them sharply. “I can take a piss on my own. Don’t fucking touch me.”

Scott looked worried, but Jackson just looked pissed off. Like he was contemplating storming over to Derek and demanding to know what the fuck he thought he was doing. Stiles really hoped he didn’t, he felt humiliated enough for one night, thank you.

Stumbling his way around the crowd to the other end of the gym, he pushed through the doors leading into the locker room and made his way through a few couples making out. He ignored them and disappeared into the bathroom, the door swinging shut behind him.

It helped with the thudding in his brain, which had begun to match the bass of the song that was now playing. He stumbled his way into a stall, the bathroom empty, and shut the door. Locking it, he swayed on the spot while struggling to undo his pants and just sat right down on the toilet to piss, his head spinning.

He didn’t trust himself to use a urinal, or piss standing up right now, so this was his solution. Just sit down and pee and try not to think.

Try not to think about how much he wanted to run his hands through Derek’s hair. How much he wanted to taste his skin. How much he wanted to kiss him once, just once. Just so he could see what it felt like.

His chest was beginning to ache, and he figured he’d bail early. If the alcohol wore off before he left, he was liable to do something stupid.

Then again, he was liable to do something stupid with the alcohol in his system.

Fuck that girl. Fuck her all the way to the moon.

And fucking fuck Derek Hale!

“I gotta admit,” Kira said with a smile, leaning back against the wall with a bottle of water in one hand and her hair beginning to come loose from her bobby pins, “this is a lot more fun than I was
“Right?” Derek hadn’t been able to stop smiling all night. Kira looked so good, he felt amazing in his suit, and he was just... having such a good time. The two of them had gone to dinner before coming to the school, they’d danced for a while, spoken to some of his friends, had a good laugh. Things were good. He was having a great time.

And to top things off: he hadn’t caught sight of Stiles even once. He’d seen Scott around with his girlfriend, mostly on the dancefloor, and he’d caught sight of Jackson once or twice, but he usually averted his eyes whenever he saw either of them. Because where Scott and Jackson were, Stiles wasn’t far behind, and he didn’t want to ruin his night.

So far, he hadn’t seen who Stiles had brought, and he didn’t want to know. He really didn’t. His night was going amazingly well, and he wasn’t going to let Stiles Stilinski ruin it.

Man, but he probably looked so good. He was probably in a suit, and his hair was probably all slicked back, and Derek wondered if he was wearing a tie. Or a bowtie? Maybe he had a vest. He wondered what colour it was. Derek’s own suit was navy, but he wondered if Stiles had gone classic black. Or maybe he’d gone nuts and worn some kind of multi-coloured, hideous thing that would somehow still look amazing on him.

Derek wanted to look for him, wanted to see how fucking hot he looked, but he didn’t want to ruin his night. It was going really well, and he just wanted to keep it that way.

“Want to head back out there?” Derek asked when Kira was done nursing her water.

“My feet hurt,” she admitted with a wince. “Should not have worn heels. Can we take a break for a bit longer?”

“Sure. I need to take a leak anyway.” He looked around for an empty chair and then motioned for Kira to follow him, leading her over to it and motioning for her to sit. If she sat down, it would take some pressure off her feet and hopefully by the time he was back, her slightly enhanced healing would have kicked in enough to solve her aching feet problem.

Only downside to being a Kitsune instead of a Werewolf: the healing was just that bit slower.

“I’ll be right back, okay?”

“I’ll be here, trying not to get hit on.” She winked at him and Derek rolled his eyes. Not like he hadn’t noticed everyone eying her with interest, but Kira wasn’t going to get with anyone when she had the promise of McDonald’s fries and a McFlurry before they headed home. Besides, with everyone graduating soon, meeting someone was kind of a moot point.

Derek headed through the gym towards the locker room, scoffing and rolling his eyes at the few couples practically fucking in the place. They were dumb for doing something like this where literally anyone could see them, but he didn’t concern himself with it. A teacher or chaperone would come in eventually, he was sure.

Pushing open the bathroom door, he headed for the urinals to do his business, the music still loud enough to be heard even here. He couldn’t stop smiling while he relieved himself, thinking about how much fun Kira was having. And how much fun he was having because of her.

His mom was right. As annoying as this entire stupid thing was, it was still really fun and he was glad she’d forced him to come out. He was glad he hadn’t just bailed without telling her.
Finishing up, he went to the sinks so he could wash his hands, hearing a toilet flush in the occupied stall behind him. He was in the middle of soaping his palms up when there was a loud thud and someone said, “Fuck!”

He froze, heart beginning to pick up speed in his chest.

He knew that voice. He knew that voice!

Holy shit, Stiles was here. In the bathroom. With him.

This was perfect! Derek would get the opportunity to see him without having to see who he’d brought along as a date! His night couldn’t possibly have gotten any better if it fucking tried!

Slowing down in washing his hands, he tilted his head to listen to Stiles in the stall. He seemed to be having trouble doing his pants back up, and he was muttering obscenities under his breath. He kept referring to someone being a giant asshole, and a loser, and not good enough for him anyway, with his dumb hair, and his stupid ears, and his gross suit.

Derek honestly wondered if Stiles’ date was a guy, and if he’d ditched him for someone else. How anyone could pass up an opportunity to be with Stiles Stilinski at prom, Derek had no idea, but the more Stiles muttered about it, the more positive Derek felt that he’d gotten stood up.

He tried not to feel happy about it, but it was hard, because he’d been jealous for months leading up to prom. Finding out Stiles was alone today made him feel so relieved he could hardly stand it.

Though Stiles was really taking a while getting his pants done back up. He seemed to be struggling with the belt, if the clinking sound was anything to go by.

After what seemed like entirely too long, the stall door unlocked and opened, hitting Stiles with how hard he yanked on it. He cursed again, stumbling and almost falling backwards onto the toilet before he managed to get out from behind the door.

Derek understood immediately why he was taking so long to get himself organized the moment he stepped out.

Stiles was drunk.

Or tipsy, but clearly some level of inebriated.

He smelt like vodka and his eyes were all glassy and he was stumbling forward towards the closest sink.

That gave Derek pause, because while Stiles was definitely popular, he was one of those people who didn’t really do things like that. Stiles was still eighteen, same as Derek. They weren’t legally allowed to drink, and with his dad being the sheriff and graduation right around the corner, this was very uncharacteristic for him.

Stiles stopped at the sink beside him and finally looked up into the mirror. His eyes seemed to focus ever so slightly when they shifted to the side to stare at his neighbour’s reflection, and then they sharpened. Derek frowned, hands still under the tap, but soap long since washed away.

“Having fun?” Stiles asked sarcastically, pumping much more soap than necessary into his hand. He struggled to turn the tap on with his other hand and then started washing them, splashing himself and the counter with water.
“Yeah,” Derek said uncertainly. He didn’t really know how to react to this Stiles. He was hard, and cold, and seemed really angry.

But beneath the anger and inebriation Derek could smell on him, there was also pain. A pain so visceral that it seemed to be all-consuming. Whoever his date was, they’d really hurt him.

“Good,” Stiles spat sarcastically, still splashing water everywhere in his attempts to wash up. “That’s awesome. Congratulations, Derek Hale. Real fucking happy for you.”

Derek frowned, not sure he understood the aggression. Stiles was always a dick to him, sure, but this seemed different. This seemed like resentment. Maybe because Derek had shown up with a date himself? After all, Stiles had probably assumed a loser nerd like Derek would be alone for prom, so maybe he was just bitter that even the bottom of the barrel in his eyes had managed to snag a date.

“So glad you got to come to prom with your fucking girlfriend,” Stiles spat, turning the tap off and stumbling for the paper towel dispenser. He yanked a sheet out, then turned to glare at Derek while continuing to pull out paper towel without looking. Sheet, after sheet, after sheet, like he didn’t realize he was doing it. “Must be a special night for you two. Hope you have tons of fun and lots of fucking sex. Hope it’s the best fucking night of your stupid, miserable fucking life!”

He finally stopped pulling the paper towel out and started drying his hands roughly. Derek’s were still under the water and he hastily turned the tap off, wiping his hands on his pants since Stiles was blocking his ability to use the dispenser.

Derek was... Actually, he was kind of worried about him. It was more than just the fact that he had a crush on Stiles. Even if he hadn’t, and even if Stiles was always a dick to him, he could tell how truly, thoroughly, heartbreakingly upset he was.

All of his actions were jerky and rough, his eyes were sharp as glass, and even though he was slurring, the level of anger and hatred in every syllable was palpable.

“Are you okay?” he asked, taking a step forward while Stiles continued to dry his clearly already dry hands with the paper towels. A few of them had fallen to the ground since he’d pulled out so many.

“Oh, fucking peachy, Derek Hale!” Stiles snapped, and Derek started when the paper towels he’d been holding were thrown at him. Most of them were still dry and just fluttered to the ground, but the damp ones reached his chest, bouncing off his suit jacket harmlessly. “Just—so good. Yeah, having a great time tonight! So glad I came!”

When Stiles turned to head unsteadily to the door, Derek moved quickly to grab at his arm, honestly worried about him. He couldn’t go back out there like this, the parents and teachers would know he was trashed in a second.

He’d opened his mouth to say something but Stiles jerked his arm free so roughly that he actually fell back into the door and Derek almost stumbled into him before catching himself.

“Don’t fucking touch me!” Stiles shouted, eyes burning with hatred beneath the haze of alcohol.

“Look,” Derek insisted, hands out in front of himself in the most calming fashion he could muster, “I’m sorry tonight isn’t turning out how you were hoping it would. But whatever happened, it’s not worth getting suspended. Just... Can you just come have some water and sit here for a minute?” He motioned the counter.
Stiles let out a mirthless laugh, the sound cold and hard, with an edge so sharp that Derek felt like it could've cut right into his skin. “Oh, the great Derek Hale wants me to come and sit and have some water. Well, how can I refuse when he asked so fucking nicely?”

Derek frowned even more. What the hell was going on right now? Why did Stiles keep saying his name like that?

When Stiles flipped him off and went to open the door again, Derek grabbed for him against his better judgement. He really didn’t want him getting into trouble, and if he had to trap him in the bathroom by force, then he would. At least until he sobered up enough to stand on his own two feet without falling over.

The second he grabbed his arm, Stiles whipped around and slammed his fist into Derek’s face. It didn’t hurt, not really, but he knew Stiles had probably broken his hand and Derek was... stunned. Stiles was not a violent person by nature. Sure, he played sports, but he didn’t go out of his way to beat on people, so to have him punch at him like that...

Something was really wrong. And somehow, Derek grabbing his arm had set him off.

When he opened his mouth to apologize, to ask Stiles to just wait and talk to him, he didn’t get the words out because Stiles shoved roughly at him with his trapped forearm, pressing the length of it across Derek’s chest and pushing hard.

Derek let him go reflexively, taking a step back even as Stiles shoved at him again with both hands. He barely managed it, unsteady as he was, but Derek still jerked back a few steps at the action.

“Fuck you!” Stiles shouted, taking another step forward and shoving at Derek again. He just let him, because at least they were moving further into the bathroom and away from the door. “Fuck you, and your stupid fucking face, and your stupid hair, and your stupid everything! Fuck you! I fucking hate you! I fucking hate you!”

Derek knew that. Stiles had made that perfectly clear to him. For years. For literal years. Derek knew Stiles hated him, but something was clearly wrong and he was extremely upset and Derek just wanted to help him.

He just wanted to take the pain away.

Derek’s back hit the opposite wall, and when Stiles went to shove at him again, nevermind he had nowhere left to go, Derek grabbed at his wrists and flipped them around. Stiles was already off-balance, so it was easy for Derek to shove him back against the wall with his hands trapped on either side of his head, shifting to press his knees against Stiles’ legs to keep him in place.

Derek let out a harsh exhale, but Stiles was breathing so hard he might as well have been hyperventilating. He tugged uselessly at his wrists, trying to free himself, but they weren’t out on the field right now. There were no rules against using super-strength right now, and Derek wasn’t above keeping Stiles pinned against the wall for a fucking hour if it got him to calm down.

“Stiles,” Derek said, voice a low growl and eyes flashing. He heard Stiles’ heart do a weird double-thump in his chest at the sight of it, but figured it was because they were blue.

Same as Jackson’s, but still.

“What is going on?” he demanded heatedly, face inches away from Stiles’. “Talk to me. Seriously. Are you okay?”
It seemed like such a stupid question to ask. Stiles was very clearly not okay, but Derek didn’t know how to help him. He just wanted to take this pain away, that was only growing stronger by the second, but he couldn’t. Because this wasn’t physical pain he could just steal, this was something deeper and he just wanted to help.

Stiles’ head slammed back against the wall once, very hard, and when he closed his eyes, Derek felt the shift in his scent. The anger left him instantly, like someone had sucked it right out of him, and all that remained was pain.

Pain and betrayal.

“Why did you do this to me?” Stiles asked, voice tight and thick with emotion.

Derek frowned. “What?”

“How long?”

“How long what?” Derek asked, wishing he could just reach into Stiles’ mind and figure out what the fuck he was saying.

“How long have you been with her?”

“With who?” Derek demanded, confused. “With Kira?”

“Fuck her,” Stiles insisted, spit flying from between his lips and hitting Derek in the cheek. He let out a small, almost painful sounding laugh. “But you’re going to, right? I shouldn’t encourage you to, since you probably already will.”

Derek was very, very confused right now.

“Stiles, I’m not going to fuck Kira.” He leaned back slightly, but didn’t let him go.

Stiles was still breathing hard, but his eyes opened then, and somehow they seemed to focus a bit more. Like he was looking at Derek, really looking at him. His lips parted while he continued to try and get his breathing back under control, and then he said the most confusing thing ever.

“You’re not—”

She’s not—” Stiles cut himself off repeatedly, like he didn’t know what he wanted to say. And Derek couldn’t help him, because he had no idea what Stiles wanted to say.

He didn’t even know what was happening right now. They’d barely spoken a civilized word to each other for four years, and now suddenly they were having some weird heart to heart in the
bathroom at prom?

“She’s just a friend,” Derek said again. He didn’t know why, probably because he was a glutton for punishment and he was waiting for the old Stiles to come back and make fun of him for not being able to get a date, but he felt like he needed to say it.

Stiles moved so fast that Derek couldn’t react. For a second, he thought he was being attacked again, but then realized Stiles had just stumbled forward to hug him, Derek losing his balance and almost falling over. He managed to just take a few quick steps back until he felt the door behind him, stopping him from falling on his ass with Stiles on top of him.

“She’s just a friend,” Stiles repeated, hugging Derek tightly with his face buried in his neck. That was a bad place for Stiles’ face to be, it was doing things to Derek. Things he didn’t want to have done while Stiles’ front was pressed right up against him.

“Yeah,” Derek confirmed, hands hovering awkwardly since he didn’t know where to put them. It felt almost like this weird ass dream might shatter if he touched Stiles right now. “Stiles, seriously, are you okay?”

“I am now.”

That made no sense. “Because Kira’s my friend?” Did Stiles have the hots for Kira or something? She was beautiful, Derek couldn’t fault him for liking her, but he was positive his best friend would’ve mentioned it if she’d met his crush at any point in the past few years.

Stiles let out a shaky exhale against Derek’s skin, all the hairs on the back of his neck and arms standing on end. Then, Derek felt his breath freeze in his lungs when Stiles’ lips pressed against the area he’d just exhaled on.

What?

No seriously, what?

He stood perfectly still while Stiles’ lips pressed against his skin, over and over, slowly moving up his neck, across his jaw, along his cheek, and then stopping at the corner of Derek’s mouth. Then, Stiles just stood there, lips barely touching Derek, hot breath ghosting across the skin of his face with every exhale.

“I fucking hate you, Derek Hale,” Stiles breathed against his skin. “But only because it’s easier than focussing on how much I love you.”

Derek was pretty sure the floor didn’t exist anymore. He was positive the entire Earth had just fallen out from under him. This couldn’t be real. This couldn’t possibly be real!

“You’re drunk,” he said in response to that.

“Tipsy.”

“You’ll hate yourself tomorrow for this,” Derek argued. “You don’t love me. You don’t even like me.”

Stiles pulled away then, letting out a soft exhale. His hands shifted out from around Derek, moving up and burying themselves in his hair. God, Stiles’ fingers in his hair felt so good, but Derek forced himself to keep his eyes open, staring at Stiles while the other teen locked gazes with him with a remarkably focussed expression.
“I’ve been in love with you for four years.”

And that... that was impossible.

Because Derek was pretty sure if Stiles Stilinski was in love with him, he sure as shit would’ve known about it by now.

“I am going to kiss you,” Stiles informed him. “If you’ll let me. I would very much like to kiss you.”

Derek had no idea what to say. A part of him couldn’t help but think this was all some elaborate joke, but Stiles’ anger and pain earlier wasn’t fake. The sharp focus in his gaze right now wasn’t fake. The way arousal was slowly beginning to waft off him definitely wasn’t fake.

Stiles’ heart was beating rapidly, his breathing coming a bit faster, and his eyes kept dipping down to stare at Derek’s lips while he licked his own, like he was physically restraining himself from kissing him. Like he was honestly fully in control right now, and was just waiting for approval.

If Derek was dreaming, he didn’t want to wake up. He felt like he was floating, because Stiles loved him? Was he serious? It felt like his whole body was on fire right now, he didn’t even know what to say, or do, or how to react.

But Stiles was still standing there, waiting for an answer, and if this was all Derek was going to get, well, he’d take it.

So he just nodded once, still unsure this was real, and Stiles didn’t even hesitate. Didn’t wait another second. He just dove right in, pressing those God damn perfect lips against Derek’s and kissing him like this was all he’d ever wanted for his entire life.

Derek brought one hand up, rubbing it harshly against Stiles’ cheek while his eyes slid shut, and he felt Stiles tugging insistently on his hair. He pressed forward, parting his lips and didn’t even have time to do anything else before Stiles’ tongue was in his mouth.

He pressed Derek back hard against the door, the length of his body flush against him, mouth warm and wet while he licked into Derek’s. It was confusing, and exhilarating all at once, and Derek never wanted this to end. His hand was on the back of Stiles’ neck, and Stiles’ grip was almost painful in his hair, and he felt like he couldn’t breathe, and this was everything, this was everything!

And then someone tried to open the door and the moment broke. Derek jerked into Stiles from the action and they parted, both breathing hard and staring at one another almost incredulously.

“Stiles?” It was Danny’s voice. He was probably the safest person to come and fetch him, considering how fucking angry he’d been. Nobody could be mad or hurt Danny, not even a drunk, angry Stiles. “Are you okay? They’re about to announce prom king and queen, and we all know you’re probably going to win.”

Stiles let out a shaky exhale and took a step back out of Derek’s immediate space. His hands slid out of his hair and Derek forced himself to release the other teen as well.

“Damn straight,” he said, voice a little unsteady, but not from the alcohol. “I’m gonna look great in that tiara, and Jackson will make a fine prom king.”

Danny let out a small laugh. “You’ll piss off Lydia if you take prom queen, but I can’t say I wouldn’t pay good money to see that.”
“I’ll be right out.”

“Okay.” A brief pause. “Hey, I’m sorry about Derek.”

“It’s fine,” Stiles said quickly, and Derek knew now that this wasn’t all a joke. Or a dream. Or a hallucination. “It’s—I’m okay. I’ll be right out.”

“Okay. See you out there.”

Derek listened to Danny walk away, head tilted slightly and eyes shunted to the side. When the outer door shut, he focussed back on Stiles. His long, deft fingers were pressed against his lips, gaze on the floor.

Even before he spoke, Derek felt his stomach begin to drop.

“We’re graduating next week,” Stiles said softly.

“Yeah,” Derek confirmed.

“I’m probably never going to see you again.” A sharp, too-loud laugh escaped Stiles at those words and he let his hand drop, looking up at Derek once more. “This was stupid.”

Much as it hurt to hear, Derek couldn’t exactly say he disagreed.

Apparently Stiles was in love with him. And Derek was in love with Stiles. And they’d just been making out in the fucking bathroom of their high school gym’s locker room at prom literally six days before graduation next Thursday.

They couldn’t start something now. Not when they were about to part ways, likely forever.

“Yeah,” Derek finally agreed.

Stiles swallowed hard, and Derek wondered if a part of him had been hoping he would argue. That Derek would insist it wasn’t stupid, and that they could make this work somehow, and they could figure things out and write or whatever.

But they couldn’t do that. They both knew it. They had too much history between them, too much had happened, and there were too many conversations they just wouldn’t be able to have before they split up.

He knew Stiles was going to Stanford in the fall, but he and Jackson would be driving up a week and a half after graduation to get themselves settled in and find jobs for the summer out in the area so they could hopefully maintain them through the school year.

Derek himself had plans with Kira and Boyd for the weekend right after graduation.

They’d run out of time. This couldn’t work, not now. Maybe before, maybe if they’d spoken about this days, weeks, months ago.

But not now.

“Right,” Stiles finally said, clearing his throat and wiping his mouth. He was still a little shaky, but Derek didn’t know if that was the alcohol or the making out. “Well. I should go.”

“Yeah.” Derek didn’t move for a moment, then remembered he was blocking the door and shifted aside, pulling it open for him. “Good luck.”
“Thanks. And congrats on Salutatorian,” Stiles said.

“Thanks,” Derek replied.

They stared at one another for a long moment, then Stiles moved forward and eased out of the bathroom. Derek let the door go, watching it swing shut, then leaned against it and let his head fall back, closing his eyes and letting out a small exhale.

He didn’t have to go out into the gym to hear Stiles win prom king. Predictably, Lydia won prom queen. They danced together, as was customary. Derek heard Stiles laughing and joking with her, but it sounded almost hollow, like he was propping his voice up.

Derek left the bathroom while they were still dancing, found Kira, and asked to go home. She left with him without asking any questions, and didn’t pry when he made it clear he didn’t want to talk about it by giving her the silent treatment on the way home. He hadn’t meant to, he just really, really didn’t want to talk about it.

About what could’ve been, if only they’d... tried.

Six days later, they graduated high school.

They avoided one another for the last few days of school, and Stiles’ usual boisterous personality was somewhat subdued.

Derek was Salutatorian, and having kept his grades up, was guaranteed a spot at Berkeley for the fall.

Stiles was third in their class, and was headed for Stanford with Jackson.

Derek, Boyd and Kira went to San Francisco for a post-grad celebration. By the time he’d returned, Stiles and Jackson had already headed off to Stanford, California to get settled for school.

Laura and Peter’s business opened in the late summer months.

Kira left for England in early August. Boyd left for New York a few days later.

Derek headed out to Berkeley over Labour Day weekend.

Derek and Stiles never spoke about what had happened. They never tried to connect, or touch base, or discuss anything. They definitely didn’t keep in touch.

Time passed, life went on, things changed, some didn’t.

But they never forgot.

After all, it’s not every day someone finds their soulmate.

**TBC...**
Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

TEN YEARS LATER.

Stiles knew the smugness would wear off very soon. When reality kicked in and he realized exactly what he’d just done, he knew it was going to be a very sharp slap to the face and he was going to panic. But that was future Stiles’ problem. Current Stiles was still feeling remarkably smug as he walked out of the office with his head held high and his box of belongings in his arms.

Bianca was giving him a subtle thumbs up with a kind smile, and he knew she’d text him later about this. For now, she had to stay put, or else she risked getting fired for consort ing with someone like Stiles. He didn’t want her to get fired, so he just offered her a small smile and kept walking.

His boss was following right behind him, as if wanting to be absolutely sure Stiles fully left the building. Which he would, because fuck this place, there was a damn reason he’d literally just quit. He was sure he could’ve done it a little less dramatically, but to be fair, they had it coming.

Three years!

Three years he’d been working there, trying to argue the higher ups into submission, trying to insist that they weren’t working according to current standards, trying to help improve the way things were being run. Three years he’d been forced to sit in his little cubicle down in HR, positively fuming over how miserable literally every single employee was. How often he got sobbing phone calls after hours from people being verbally abused by their bosses. How often he had to help people pack up their things and walk them out after a giant blowout firing or someone quitting almost as dramatically as him.

This place had the potential to be amazing, but that would mean consequences to some of the abhorrent behaviour anyone outside management was forced to endure. Verbal abuse, physical abuse, sexual harassment, the works. Stiles couldn’t handle it anymore. He was Human Resources, for fuck’s sake, and he couldn’t do anything to help people.

So this was it. Today had been the day. The final straw. After yet another complaint from one of the girls on the fourth floor about her boss making inappropriate comments about her rack, he’d hit his breaking point.

He’d called the Workplace Injustice Institute, right there from his work phone, and had asked them to come in and conduct a thorough investigation promising full cooperation. He’d given them his personal home number, and upon confirming the address and that he had no plans of remaining employed there, he’d hung up. His coworkers had stared at him while he typed up the most obnoxious resignation letter he could muster—used Comic Sans and everything—printed it, signed it, and slapped it on his boss’ desk.

His boss, who had overheard his conversation, and had been frozen in shock until Stiles had appeared in his office with his resignation letter.

Because he’d had ample opportunities to listen to Stiles, to improve this place, to make changes by holding people accountable for their actions, and the fucker hadn’t. So now, he was going to
force change, even if it meant he had to go down in flames to do it. These people didn’t deserve to be treated this way, and Stiles would not stand for it.

So that was how he found himself walking out with his head held high and his box of belongings in his arms literally ten minutes later. His boss didn’t say a word to him the entire walk out, the two of them taking the stairs down two floors to the ground level and Stiles walking purposefully towards the exit.

“Later Gene,” he called over to the security guard, who had the most startled look on his face Stiles felt he’d ever elicited from anyone. “Tell Gary I say hi, and I hope you guys finish the back deck before summer!”

Gene just gave him an awkward sort of confused wave and Stiles moved to the doors. He had to turn around so he could push against it with his back and shoulders, and saw his boss standing a few feet back, looking a little broken and defeated.

“All you had to do was do your job,” the man said, almost sounding confused. “Why couldn’t you just do your job?”

“I did do my job,” Stiles spat back. “You’re the one who didn’t. Enjoy the investigation, I expect I’ll be hearing about it on the news.”

His boss’ face fell even further, but he said nothing else and Stiles pushed fully through the heavy door and out onto the bustling street.

It was a little after three, so a few people were already out of the office. Banks and finance mostly, but he was sure a few people milling about were students or part-time workers. It felt weird being out of the office before five, but also kind of liberating. He was glad to finally have escaped the place, it hadn’t been healthy for him.

He’d been dying inside a little more each and every day, constantly listening to the myriad of complaints and the higher ups doing absolutely nothing about it. It wasn’t right, and it wasn’t the way to run a fucking business.

Of course, while he stood waiting for the bus with his box of belongings and his mind slowly beginning to calm down from the adrenaline rush, reality began to creep in.

Stiles had a mortgage. Sure, a shared mortgage, but still. He had to pay bills, and buy groceries, and put funds aside for retirement. He’d been making good money where he was, but he barely had enough from his last paycheck left to pay off expenses that were coming up. Expenses he would’ve been able to cover when he got his next paycheck, but he was sure after what he’d just done, they’d delay his payment, if they gave it to him at all.

And he’d burned all his bridges there now. Three years, and he didn’t have any supervisors to use as references. Sure, he had Bianca, and he could call up his old boss at the pizza place from his university days, but from a company’s perspective, Stiles had no one substantial in his back pocket as a reference.

He’d literally just thrown himself back out into the world with no plan and no future.

“Oh my God, what was I thinking?” he breathed to himself, staring unseeingly at the traffic passing by in front of him.

He knew he’d done the right thing. He knew he couldn’t keep working at that place, that it wasn’t healthy, that he had to do something. But by protecting all those other people, he’d essentially
screwed himself over and now he was... fucked.

He was so, so fucked.

He forced himself not to panic. This was fine, it was okay. He could talk this out with his friends and his dad, no big deal. He’d figure things out. The important thing here was that he’d helped people. That was all that really mattered. Everything else was fixable, he knew it was.

Stiles repeated this to himself over and over in his head up until the bus arrived. When he climbed on, it was fairly empty, likely due to the hour since he generally took it during rush hour, and he stared down into his box of belongings. He hadn’t really had much at the office, but it was still kind of surprising to see it all crammed into one little box.

It reminded him of what moving out of home had felt like. Scary, but exciting. Also sad. He missed his dad, though he still visited him a lot. But it wasn’t the same, living so far away from him. Not that San Francisco was necessarily far, but it wasn’t exactly close, either. Then again, if Stiles was now jobless, it meant he’d have more time to go down and visit.

Though he really shouldn’t procrastinate finding a new job, he had bills and a mortgage and fuck, he had to tell his co-owner that he probably wouldn’t be able to pay his half this month. Not that he was worried about it, since he knew he wouldn’t react badly, but still. Stiles hated having to rely on other people. He’d hated it his entire life, it was why he’d always worked hard to earn things on his own merit.

When his bus neared his stop, Stiles stood and climbed off at the corner. He had to walk two blocks through the residential area to reach his street, turning onto it and continuing along until he got home.

He lived in the penthouse apartment of a rather large and lavish apartment building. It wasn’t huge by any means, but it was big enough and reasonably priced given the city he lived in and the fact that it was a fucking penthouse. It was a two bed, two bath with a den and a joint living/dining area. The living room was overflowing with all kinds of books, movies and consoles, and the dining area was generally unused since the table was always littered with a plethora of papers and files his co-owner had spread out everywhere.

There were three of them living in the apartment, but one party was only a resident, not an actual owner. Stiles hadn’t been super thrilled about it at first, since it was comfortable for two people and a bit tight for three but well, it made his friend happy, so he’d tolerated it. And now he was fine with it. Happy, even. He supposed his biggest complaint back at the beginning had been he didn’t like change, and having a third person around who wasn’t Scott was change.

But Scott was married to Allison and living on a ranch in Texas, for some inexplicable reason, so he was out of the picture home-owner-wise. He visited every Christmas, and they Skyped a lot, so Stiles didn’t miss him too badly.

Besides, it was hard to miss Scott when he literally lived with his crutch. His dad was right, he and Jackson were fucking screwed and would never be able to live apart.

It made things awkward sometimes when he and his boyfriend Ethan had loud, raunchy sex. Stiles wished so badly that earplugs worked to block that out, there was only so much he wanted to know about Jackson, and at this point, he kind of knew all of it.

Apparently he was a God in bed, if Ethan’s loud exclamations were anything to go by.
Sighing while staring up at his building, Stiles bowed his head and walked towards the entrance, hitting the wheelchair access button so it would open automatically. He’d have used his hands, but he had the box, and was already going to have to juggle with it in a minute. Walking through the lobby, their concierge did a double-take, noticing the box and the early hour.

“Mr. Stilinski,” he said, somewhat cautiously.

“Hey Max. How did Logan’s presentation go today?”

“It went well,” he said, still speaking slowly, like he was worried about spooking a dangerous animal.

“That’s good, tell him I hope he gets a good grade,” Stiles said while he continued on towards the elevators.

“Did you need—”

“Nope, I got it,” Stiles called back, bypassing the lifts and moving to the stairwell door. He had to manoeuvre a little to get his fob to swipe at the lock beside the stairs, but he managed it. Once it clicked, he quickly pressed the box against the wall so he could use one hand to pull open the door, struggling his way into the stairwell and letting the door shut behind him.

Sighing again, mostly at how Jackson was going to react for this act of ‘humanity,’ Stiles began the slow climb up the nine flights of stairs to the penthouse. Reaching the top floor, he had to use his fob again to get the door unlocked, and then repeated the same action as downstairs to actually get it open.

Once he was in the corridor, he walked up to the only door on the floor and used his elbow to lower the knob so he could just push it open. They never locked the door except at night, because it was impossible to reach their floor without a specialized fob in either the elevator or the stairwell. His dad hated that, but Stiles lived with two Werewolves, so his concern of being attacked was fairly low.

He tripped over a pair of shoes as soon as he walked in, cursing viciously since he’d almost dropped his box, but couldn’t get too mad about it since the shoes belonged to him. He kicked off the ones he was wearing by the door while letting it slam, and then moved further into the apartment.

Stopping just beyond the threshold into the main part of the unit, his eyes found Jackson sitting at the head of their six person table, a pen between his teeth and shuffling through a huge stack of papers. He had some items highlighted on various documents and others with scribbled notes and arrows, which meant he was starting to get overwhelmed. Not that Jackson would ever admit that, but Stiles knew him well enough to be able to tell. Not that Jackson would ever admit that, but Stiles knew him well enough to be able to tell.

Well, he supposed he could make dinner today. It was technically Jackson’s turn, but he was home early, so might as well.

“Hey Whitty,” he said, not moving from where he stood.

He got a grunt in response, Jackson still flipping through papers. When he found the one he evidently wanted, he yanked it out of the pile it was in and then pulled the pen from between his lips.

“Sorry, lost track of time,” he muttered, scowling at the page in front of him. “We can order in today, I’ll pay.”
“I can make dinner,” Stiles said.

“We’ll eat too late, just order in before Ethan gets home, it’s fine.”

“It’s barely four, I can make dinner.”

“Four?” Jackson asked, scratching away at his notepad while comparing what he was writing to the page he was reviewing. “Why the fuck are you home if it’s only f—” He finally looked up and his face went carefully blank.

Stiles shrugged, still holding his box in both arms. He shifted his weight slightly, then sighed and turned to walk into the living room so he could put it down somewhere out of the way. For now, he wasn’t going to worry about it, nothing in there needed unpacking.

“What happened?” Jackson asked after a long silence.

“I quit,” Stiles said, shoving his hands in his pockets and moving back towards where Jackson was sitting. He shrugged again at Jackson’s still-blank expression. “I couldn’t handle it anymore. People were being mistreated, and I’d had enough. So I called the Workplace Injustice Institute and tendered my resignation.”

Jackson said nothing, he just kept staring at him. He was probably worried about Stiles, in his own way, not that he’d admit it. Stiles didn’t think Jackson had anything to worry about, he was fine. Stiles was going to get back on his feet soon, and he’d done a good thing. If he had to do it all over again, he would.

“Might be a little tight on paying my half of the mortgage this month,” Stiles admitted quietly. “I can probably pay about half of it, but—”

“Fuck you, Stiles,” Jackson said, turning back to his notebook. “Go be my bitch in the kitchen and we’ll call it even.”

Stiles just half-smiled at the comment and moved around behind Jackson to head for the kitchen, pulling one hand from his pocket to squeeze his friend’s shoulder on his way by. Heading into the kitchen, he started pulling open the fridge and cabinets to figure out what the plan was for dinner. Jackson had likely been banking on pasta, since it was quick and easy, but Stiles felt like he could probably get away with making something a bit meatier before Ethan got home from work.

Though he hadn’t had lunch today, what with all the excitement, so he opened the freezer before getting started and pulled out a box of Super Natural Foods, flipping it over to see which one it was. Elk meat pizza rolls, so definitely not one of his. He tossed it back into the freezer and yanked out another one. Spinach puffs.

Thinking for a moment, he decided that should be good enough to last him an hour, and he pulled a pack out before tossing the box back into the freezer and slamming it shut. He got the puff onto a plate and then microwaved it for five minutes while working on pulling ingredients out for dinner.

Honestly, the amount of times they’d just survived off Super Natural Foods was kind of ridiculous. Especially two years ago, when Jackson and his dad had gotten into a fight and he’d been cut off financially. Sure, they all had money given the three of them had jobs, but Werewolves ate a lot, and food was expensive.

Except for Super Natural Foods. And to make it even better, it was a wholly owned Werewolf corporation, so they really cared about their kind. Any Supernatural of the Were variety got a twenty percent discount on every single box of the frozen items they purchased. All they had to do
was flash their eyes at the cash, and they were guaranteed the discount \textit{per box}.

Considering the product was already cheap, it had made a huge difference for all Werewolves nation-wide who were having trouble finding or keeping jobs, and were struggling to pay for food. And the best part was, almost everything they sold was healthy. Sure, it was frozen goods, but they had so many options and so much variety that while it was possible to buy a frozen apple strudel with a hundred grams of sugar, it was also possible to buy frozen moose pot pie with extra protein for all a Werewolf’s dietary needs.

Jackson and Ethan had been the ones buying the food during that stint, since they were always guaranteed the discounts, and Stiles was tasked with buying all the other items they needed in their day to day. Ethan tended to go more often, given he also happened to \textit{work} for Super Natural Foods, and received an additional twenty-five percent discount on \textit{top} of his twenty percent Werewolf discount.

Really, that company had single handedly saved them all from starving until Jackson and his father had made up. It wasn’t that his father really supported them a lot, but living in San Francisco was expensive, and sometimes they needed a bit of help. Thank God for Super Natural Foods, really.

Stiles didn’t even remember how he’d found out about the brand. The whispers of it had kind of started when he and Jackson were in their second year of university, some Werewolf family in a small California town opening up a shop with the fresh baked goods for cheap. Since Werewolves tended to do their own hunting, it made it easier to obtain game for no cost, so they only really had to pay for the ingredients they couldn’t hunt for.

As time passed and business boomed, the small shop turned into a franchise, and they started making frozen goods that could be bought at their stores. After another few years, the frozen goods could be purchased at supermarkets in addition to their own stores, and as far as Stiles knew, business was booming.

Ethan had only been working there for about three years, but he said that every day was a comfort that the world was changing, because he saw how much people liked Super Natural Foods—humans and Supernaturals alike—and it was a step in the right direction.

Stiles was happy for Ethan, considering he’d been working a shit job before this one. And really, he was happy for Jackson \textit{and} Ethan, because they’d found each other. Ethan’s twin brother had gotten killed by Hunters a few years back, and he’d honestly thought he’d never recover. Jackson had swooped in like a knight in shining armour—Stiles \textit{loved} teasing him about that—and now, here they were.

Jackson was a lawyer working for a fairly well-known Werewolf law firm, Ethan worked in marketing for Super Natural Foods, and Stiles... was jobless.

\textit{But!} Stiles and Jackson were almost done paying off the mortgage on the penthouse, and Jackson was probably a few weeks away from proposing. It would be weird having a legitimate married couple living in the penthouse with him, but whatever. Ethan had long ago gotten over the fact that Jackson and Stiles had a unique co-dependent relationship, and until Stiles found his own partner, Jackson was forever going to be worried about him in his own asshole way.

Stiles tried not to focus on how lonely life got sometimes while he ate his spinach puff. He had bigger things to worry about, like finding a new job sooner rather than later. He’d probably start looking around online once he was done making dinner.

He really hoped he found something. He would not last very long in San Fran without a steady,
Derek tugged irately at his tie while walking purposefully down the corridor towards his office, briefcase in hand and glasses sliding down his nose. He didn’t know if it was the shirt or the tie, but he felt like he was choking, for some reason. This was not a great start to the day, he was going to end up taking both items off before long if he stopped being able to breathe.

Glancing towards his executive assistant’s desk while passing it, he frowned slightly when he noticed she wasn’t there. That was strange, she always got in before he did. Maybe she was running behind today. Maybe she was sick.

He didn’t worry about it, figuring he’d have an email or a voicemail on the matter and just moved into his office. He dropped his briefcase on his desk and fell into his chair, pushing his glasses back up and tugging again at his tie in irritation.

He hated wearing ties, but it was expected of him. Laura was adamant that if she had to walk around in a skirt and suit jacket with heels, he and Peter could damn well wear suits and ties. He supposed he understood, because it wouldn’t be fair for the woman to dress professionally while the men got to slack off, but still.

Ties. They were the worst.

Booting up his computer, he opened his email right away to check for anything urgent. Upon finding nothing of importance, he started trying to locate an email from his assistant, then checked his phone.

He had four voicemails, but when he listened to them, none were from her. That was kind of concerning, and he sent an email to HR to ask if someone could touch base with her to make sure she was all right. He didn’t mind if she was late or needed the day off, he just wanted to ensure nothing had happened.

Once that was taken care of, he pulled files from his briefcase before setting it on the floor by the cabinet behind him and started looking through his emails properly before checking his calendar. He groaned when he found a Board of Directors meeting, but knew he couldn’t bail on it. After all, he would be a shitty Director if he bailed on all the meetings.

Besides, Laura liked to threaten him with stripping him of his position whenever he complained too much, considering she still hadn’t let him live down the fact that she was right and he was wrong.

In his defence, when she and Peter had opened up their little shop in Beacon Hills, as supportive as he’d wanted to be, nothing had pointed to the fact that this would turn into what it was today. At first it had been nothing, just the local packs and a few neighbouring counties sending people over for all their baked goods.

As time passed, more and more people started showing up from all over the place, looking to try the amazing Werewolf-inspired recipes. They were a much bigger hit than Derek ever could’ve imagined, and by the time he was finishing up university, Laura and Peter had made friendly with a few different packs across the country and their little shop in Beacon Hills had turned into a franchise across the United States.

One thing led to another and now they were... this. It was crazy when he thought about it. Laura hadn’t even gotten into university, and his family couldn’t afford to send her without a scholarship. Derek had barely survived his four years on his scholarship, and the only reason Cora had made it
all the way through was because Laura had started helping out financially.

Now, they were the richest Werewolf family in the country. Nowhere near as close as having the funds the human millionaires had, but they were all extremely well off. His parents had moved out of Beacon Hills and lived in a nice house in Florida, Cora had moved to Germany to live with her long-time boyfriend, whom she’d met during a trip to Europe, and he, Laura and Peter ran the new family business together.

Technically speaking, Laura and Peter were the owners. Derek was a shareholder, but the business was primarily Laura and Peter’s. Laura had opted to allow Peter to be CEO, so she ran the business as VP of the Human Resources department. Derek was VP of Finance, considering his business and accounting degree.

Things were good. Really good. He never in a million years thought his sister would do this well, and he was happy that she’d made it. Just because he hadn’t expected it didn’t mean he wasn’t thrilled about it, and he was thankful every day she’d been kind enough to allow him to work for her company. She didn’t have to, nor did Peter, but they’d welcomed him with open arms when he’d graduated and asked, rather hesitantly, if he could help grow their business.

It was crazy how much could change in a few short years. It felt like only yesterday that he was still in high school, sitting alone reading at lunch and snarking at his friends if they dared interrupt him. To be fair, he was still like that at work, but he tried to have a bit more of a social life.

Having Boyd and Kira around definitely helped on that front, and he’d made a lot of great friends both through them and at work. Actually, Boyd’s fiancé had started out as a friend from work, but after the two of them hanging out so often led to Boyd and Erica Reyes hanging out without him, well, one thing led to another and Derek was going to be his best man next spring when they finally tied the knot.

It was exciting, and terrifying, and amazing all at once. He couldn’t wait, and he was so happy to have brought them together, however unintentional it had been.

Even as his mind drifted towards Erica and all the conversations she’d been having with Laura about her wedding dress, he saw a response from HR and, unsurprisingly, it came from Erica. She always picked up his emails in the shared inbox whenever she saw them, and he loved that she prioritized his requests.

Clicking on it, he frowned when he read her response, unsure of how to take it, then picked up his phone to call down. She didn’t answer, so he hung up and thought for a minute before getting to his feet and exiting his office. He nodded greetings to his staff when they offered him ‘good mornings’ and made it to the elevator, hitting the button to head down to the third floor where HR was located.

When he got to the appropriate section, he hung back for a few seconds when he saw Erica chatting with one of her friends from Marketing. Derek didn’t really know the guy, but he’d been around for a few years, and was an exceptional worker. Apparently he’d come to them with no experience in the field, and had risen in the ranks so fast Laura was contemplating making him manager provided the VP agreed to it. The department didn’t have a manager at the moment, since some of them were small enough to get away with just associates and a VP—like Derek’s Finance department—but Marketing was starting to expand so it’d be a good idea.

Erica noticed him out of the corner of her eye and waved him over while confirming with her friend they’d have lunch. Boyd was working on a project, so it made sense he’d bail on lunch with Erica today. Derek was glad she had someone else to go with, since he never had time for lunch.
“Mr. Hale,” the guy said while passing him, nodding politely. Derek had run into him a few times, mostly because of when he and Erica were chatting and Derek happened to come by. He always smelled like something familiar, another Werewolf he was clearly intimate with and undertones of another scent that he recognized but couldn’t place. He always meant to ask him more about himself, just in the hopes of figuring out why he recognized a scent on him, but he’d never really found the time.

And he definitely didn’t have time today, so Derek just nodded back without a word while moving over to Erica’s desk. She was leaning back in her chair, watching him approach with a somewhat apologetic smile.

“Jenna quit?” he asked in way of greeting. “When?”

“Literally four am this morning,” Erica said, offering him a small shrug. “She emailed Laura about it, but since she’s out of town right now, it bounced to Peter. He forwarded it to the main inbox as soon as he got in.”

“I don’t understand, is everything okay?” Derek asked with a frown. “I thought she was happy here. She was doing really well, I liked her a lot.” Actually, Jenna had been one of his favourites to date. She was always punctual, she never took personal calls at work, she was polite, and she made his coffee perfectly every morning.

“You might want to talk to Peter,” Erica offered, shifting her chair slightly from side to side while she spoke. “He was going to stop in to talk to you, but then you emailed us before he got the chance.”

Grumbling about having to see his passive aggressive, overly cheerful uncle so damn early in the morning without his coffee, Derek just muttered a thanks and turned to head back out of HR. He got to the elevator quickly and was on the seventh floor in seconds, walking through the open office towards Peter’s door. He nodded to his Executive Assistant, who was on the phone and looked scared at the sight of him, but didn’t let that bother him and just knocked on Peter’s open door.

“Nephew,” Peter said jovially, motioning him in. “Good morning. How are you?”

“Uncaffeinated,” he informed him, taking a seat and pushing his glasses back up the bridge of his nose. He was pissed at himself for running out of contact lenses, but he always forgot to order more until he was on his last pair. His glasses were infuriating, and even moreso when he considered the fact that he was literally one of maybe a hundred-thousand Werewolves with the misfortune of having to wear them.

Being myopic while a Werewolf was something people literally laughed about behind his back.

“Yes, I had the misfortune of being the first to know about Jenna.” Peter folded his hands together on the desk. “You seem to be having trouble keeping assistants.”

“I have no idea why she quit,” Derek argued. “I really liked her. What did she say?”

“Apparently you were cold towards her.”

Derek tried not to let the words hit him too hard, but he was sure he didn’t succeed. It wasn’t the first time people had accused him of being cold. Sure, he didn’t verbally say good morning to people, but he nodded politely! He just didn’t feel like a real person until he had his coffee, and Jenna had the misfortune of being the first person he saw every morning. He’d always tried being
nice to her, though.

He’d bought her that all-expenses paid spa day for her and a friend for International Women’s Day! And he’d gotten her flowers for Valentine’s Day as a thank you for being such an amazing assistant! She’d lasted almost four months, one of his longest yet. He’d really thought this one was going to work out.

“Rumours are spreading about you again,” Peter said with a small sigh. “Laura and I are trying to mitigate them, but people talk. Erica’s doing her best, as is Isaac, but you know how people are.”

“Great,” Derek muttered, rubbing his face with both hands, fingers digging into his eyes beneath his glasses. “What’s the latest one then?”

“Apparently you were given this job because it was the only way the family could keep an eye on you to stop you from constantly impregnating all the women you came into contact with.”

“So I’m a man-whore now,” Derek said dryly, hands falling to his lap. “That’s nice.” It was especially nice when considering he hadn’t gotten laid in almost two years. It wasn’t that he didn’t have needs, it was more that he just... never followed through. He’d go out, pick someone up, and then change his mind at the last minute and just take care of his problem himself.

He didn’t know what was wrong with him. He’d been plenty active in university, but as the years had passed, he’d slowed down a lot. He just felt like something was missing. Like he was waiting for something, but had no idea what it was.

Apparently his self-imposed, unintentional celibacy had somehow turned into him having a slew of illegitimate children. Why didn’t people ever start rumours about Laura and Peter? Why was it always him? Was it his resting bitch face? It was totally his resting bitch face. Or maybe it was the beard. He hadn’t been keeping it as neat and trimmed as usual, maybe he was looking a bit too much like a bad boy.

Though how anyone thought he could look like a bad boy when he was wearing glasses and a suit and exuded nerdism, he had no idea. He was born a nerd, he lived a nerd, he’d die a nerd.

He liked math, for fuck’s sake! He could talk about the mathematical constant of Pi for hours because it was just so interesting, and he loved it. How did people think someone like him was going out and knocking people up for fun?

“Jenna probably quit because she thought I was coming onto her,” Derek muttered. God, he couldn’t even be nice and buy someone flowers as a thank you anymore without being accused of trying to get into their pants.

“I’ve asked Erica to put up a new posting for the position,” Peter said instead of answering his question. “Laura’s aware, we spoke this morning. Geoff also gave his notice in HR, and Lindsay is going on mat leave in Marketing soon, so we’re looking to fill a few spots.”

“Right,” Derek muttered, getting to his feet. “Can you maybe ask for an old man as my assistant? I’d probably have better luck keeping one of them around, at this rate.”

“You could always make your own coffee,” Peter said jovially.

“Sure, I’ll let Hayden know that, too,” Derek informed him while walking out. Peter’s assistant glanced over at the sound of her name, but he didn’t actually say anything to her. He wouldn’t want her to think he was coming onto her and perpetuate the spreading rumour that he was having wild sex with any woman he saw.
Which was ridiculous since he was bisexual and just as likely to fuck a man, thank you.

He tried not to let the irritation bleed into his expression, but it was hard. He just stabbed angrily at the up button, waiting for the elevator to arrive so he could head back to his office on the ninth floor.

What kind of world did they live in where his purchase of flowers and a spa day for someone he appreciated was seen as an attempt to get into her pants? He was pretty sure Jenna was engaged, why on earth would he be hitting on her?

Once he was back in his office, he went straight for his phone and pulled the handle off the cradle, dialling a number he knew by heart without a moment’s hesitation.

“Do you know what time it is?” a sleepy voice demanded.

“Time for you to get out of bed, I need coffee.”

A loud groan followed this statement, along with some rustling, but he knew the only action that had occurred was a body rolling over in bed. “I don’t have to be at the dojo for another three hours, jackass.”

“Means you have plenty of time to come for coffee with me.” He paused for a moment, then said, “Apparently I’m a man-whore now.”

“What?” Kira asked, confusion bleeding into her sleepy voice. “Says who?”

“The office. Jenna quit.”

Kira let out another long, aggrieved groan, then he heard the distinct shift of her sitting up. “I hate you. I’ll be there in twenty.”

“See you soon.” He hung up and fell back into his chair, rubbing at his face beneath his glasses again.

Today was going to be a fucking terrible day.

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Stiles tossed his messenger bag on the floor before falling face first onto the couch and screaming incoherently into one of the cushions.

“Went that well, huh?” Ethan asked from his spot in the armchair, Xbox controller in his hands and shooting sounds coming from the television to Stiles’ right.

“No one is ever going to hire me,” Stiles insisted into the couch. “I’m going to be penniless in no time.” He lifted his head and propped himself up on his elbows, still on his stomach on the couch while turning his attention to his best friend’s boyfriend. “Do you know this is the twelfth interview I’ve had in four days? Twelfth! No one will hire me because they all ask why I left my previous job, and I’m not gonna lie. So they’re all scared I’m a rat and don’t want me in their damn company.” He let himself fall back down face-first onto the couch, whining loudly.

He hated being an honest person. Any other person would lie about why they left their previous job, but not Stiles! Oh no, he had to be a good person and tell the truth. And that just had him crash and burn. He could always tell as soon as the interview was heading in a bad direction, because once the questions stopped and the conversations became short and stilted, it was clear they’d already made up their minds about him and he was not going to be hired.
Stiles heard the game pause, but didn’t look up from his wallowing on the couch. He figured Ethan was going to grab some food, maybe a pop for Stiles. Or some ice cream.

“I admire you a lot, you know.”

Stiles frowned and lifted his head, chin pressed against the couch cushion while looking over at Ethan. He was staring right back at him intently, with an expression Stiles had never seen before.

“Because I can fail so miserably at life?” Stiles asked curiously.

Ethan rolled his eyes, and Stiles half-smiled, because he looked so much like Jackson when he did that. Clearly they were rubbing off on each other in non-sexual ways as well as sexual ones.

“You always do the right thing, even if it backfires on you. You’re not willing to let anyone be wronged, and you care a lot about people.” Ethan put his controller on his lap and turned more fully to face Stiles. “When Jackson brought me home, you didn’t care that I was an unknown Alpha Werewolf who was suddenly in your space, you jumped into action trying to help Jackson find out who’d killed Aiden and how to get them put away for it. You’ve stuck by Jackson for years, despite his Werewolf status, and have always been the first person ready to stand up for him, and me, when people say things that are inappropriate about what we are. You quit your last job because people were being mistreated and you called the Workplace Injustice Institute to get that handled, even though you knew it meant you couldn’t work there anymore. And even now, you’re being honest with the people interviewing you about why you left your previous workplace. You’ve always been like this, for as long as I’ve known you, and Jackson wouldn’t stick with someone for all these years if there wasn’t something exceptionally phenomenal about them.” Ethan shrugged, leaning back in his seat once more and crossing his arms. “You’re a good person, Stiles. You deserve better things in life than feeling like you fail at it.”

Stiles was surprised, because Ethan wasn’t much of a talker. That was probably more words than he’d said all week so far, so it was kind of a shock. And it had all been so fucking nice, he was actually sort of touched.

He didn’t think he was any better than anyone else, but hearing Ethan say he was a good person meant a lot to him. Considering he was about to be his brother-in-law—kind of, since he and Jackson may as well have been brothers—it was nice to know that Ethan actually respected him despite his very human status.

“Thanks Ethan,” he said with a smile. “I appreciate it.” He let out a sharp exhale before sitting up properly, clapping his hands together. “But first, dinner. Whitty’ll be pissed if he comes home to something ready-made again.”

“Want some help?”

“Nah, I got it.” Stiles waved one hand dismissively. “Until I get my own job, you and Whitty are the breadwinners. It’s the least I can do.”

“You know you’re not freelading, right?” Ethan asked with an exasperated sigh while Stiles headed towards the kitchen. “This is your apartment.”

“And yours,” Stiles argued, even if Ethan’s name wasn’t on the land title. “Don’t be coy.”

“You’re an idiot.”

Stiles just grinned while pulling open the fridge. They had a few ingredients in there to make sweet and sour pork, but he didn’t think they had any pork left. He opened the freezer to check on their
frozen meats and found some deer.

He could make it work. Sure, deer and pork tasted very different, but he was sure he could pull something amazing together while he went. He was a master of throwing ingredients together in a pan and creating a masterpiece.

The sound of gunfire filled the apartment while Stiles hummed to himself in the kitchen, chopping vegetables and cooking the deer while they both waited on Jackson. Ethan had a flex day every other Friday, so he always stayed home and played video games on those days. Jackson hated the violence, surprisingly, and Ethan was considerate enough not to play things like Call of Duty or Halo when his boyfriend was around.

Stiles was almost finished with dinner when Ethan finally turned the TV off and wandered into the dining area, sitting at his usual spot opposite where Jackson was when he worked from home, and booting up his computer. Stiles heard him typing for a bit, maybe looking up new recipes since they were almost always making the same things over and over.

Jackson got home a few minutes later, calling out a greeting to them both and moving to kiss Ethan on his way past to head for their shared bedroom. Stiles’ was upstairs, since the penthouse had two floors, and he was glad that he had at least a bit of separation from the lovebirds, even if the distance didn’t stop the noise.

God, they had sex a lot. He really wished they would show him some mercy.

He could hear Ethan muttering under his breath, and he knew he was speaking to Jackson. Stiles didn’t try to listen, since he knew his puny human ears wouldn’t manage it, but he was sure Jackson had replied because Ethan pulled his phone out a few seconds later and Stiles heard him texting.

Ethan was one of those horrible, terrible people who had a BlackBerry, so he could always tell when Ethan was typing, the clackity clack of his tiny keyboard loud enough to actually be heard by Stiles from the kitchen.

Sure, the dining area was separated from the kitchen only by the counter, but still!

“How did your interview go?” Jackson asked while exiting his room, finishing up with pulling a loose shirt over his head. It had some kind of weird logo on it that Stiles didn’t recognize, but he thought it might be an obscure Marvel shirt.

“Horribly,” Stiles muttered, turning back to what he was doing as Jackson stopped beside him. “Sorry, I’m trying, but it’s been a challenge. I’ll—”

“Shut the fuck up, Stiles,” Jackson insisted, his aggressive way of insisting he didn’t care how long it took, he’d support and help him no matter what. “Smells like shit, by the way, what are you forcing us to eat today?”

“Deer, but if you don’t want any, more for Ethan and I.”

“Smartass,” Jackson muttered. He reached out one hand to rub it along Stiles’ cheek and down his neck before moving out from behind the counter to join his boyfriend at the table so they could chat about their days. It was one of those cute things they did and Stiles pretended not to notice since it made them both embarrassed and aggressive. They were Werewolves, after all.

It was also why Stiles knew he reeked of wolves wherever he went, because Jackson had been scenting him for years, and living with Ethan meant he sometimes also unconsciously did it.
Jackson did it more as a claim, letting other people know Stiles was in his pack, and not to fuck with him. Ethan did it mostly out of habit, because they lived together and Stiles was always there, smelling of pack.

Stiles didn’t mind, he’d long ago gotten used to it, and he kind of liked it when Ethan felt like they were close enough he could do it, too. They’d known one another for almost five years, by now, so it was a comfort knowing that maybe one day Ethan would rub a hand along his face, or lay his head in Stiles’ lap, or just be normal with him like Jackson was. Granted, he’d known Jackson his entire life, but still. Slowly but surely, he was getting there with Ethan.

The fact that Ethan trusted a human so much after everything he’d endured was still a huge weight off Stiles’ shoulders, because he’d been worried near the beginning of this relationship that Ethan would make Jackson choose between him and Stiles, and he honestly would’ve hated the resentment over Jackson choosing him and regretting it. Stiles was great, he knew he was great, but even though neither of them really talked about it, Stiles knew that Ethan was Jackson’s mate, so the level of resentment Jackson would’ve unconsciously held towards Stiles for something not at all his fault was a very real fear.

Thankfully, everything had worked out, and they were a tiny pack of three in a penthouse in San Francisco. Though Stiles kind of felt like their servant lately, what with all the cooking and cleaning he’d been doing. But, he was jobless, and he was going to earn his damn keep until he could get back on his feet. His money was already basically gone, since he’d used it up paying the mortgage. Jackson had handled all of Stiles’ other bills, and he was grateful, but also kind of ashamed.

He tried not to let it bother him too much.

When dinner was ready, they all grabbed themselves some food and headed into the living room to eat. The dining table wasn’t so much for eating as it was for Jackson and Ethan’s work stuff. Mostly Jackson’s, but Ethan sometimes took up the opposite half when he had a big project coming up.

Stiles worked in HR, he didn’t need a table, he could basically do everything on his laptop. And if he did need space, he usually just went up to his room and spread everything out on his floor. His bed didn’t take up much of the room, so he had enough space to throw papers everywhere.

They watched a random movie on Netflix while they ate, Ethan checking his phone a few times as messages came in and replying to them. When the movie was finished and Stiles started to stand so he could clean up, Jackson shoved him back down with one hand on his shoulder and took both his plate and Ethan’s before heading for the kitchen.

“So,” Ethan said, making Stiles turn to him. “I was talking to Jackson after he got home, because I was looking up some things while you were making dinner.”

“Oh,” Stiles said slowly, uncertainly.

“We have some openings at Super Natural Foods,” Ethan said. “One of them is in HR.”

Stiles’ heart immediately leapt up into his throat, but he forced it back down. He couldn’t get excited, there was nothing to get excited about! Ethan was just telling him about it so he could apply, he wasn’t guaranteed a position.

“I have a friend in HR, so I was talking to her about the chances of a human getting hired. She said that sometimes the bosses will agree to it, but they tend to try and give Weres more opportunities
since it’s harder for them to find jobs. She asked me a bit about you, so I told her what kind of person you are, and she agreed she’d do what she could to get you an interview. If you send me your resume, I can submit it for you and fill out a referral form to let them know my thoughts on you. It’s not much, but it’s a foot in the door.”

“Dude,” Stiles insisted, feeling touched. “Thank you! Oh my G—Ethan, seriously. Thank you so much. That’s amazing. I know how hard you worked to get your job, and I know how much you’re putting on the line for me, this is amazing, thank you!”

Ethan shrugged somewhat uncomfortably, eyes shunting to the side. “You put a lot on the line when you let me stay, too. It’s the least I can do. And you care about people, which every company needs. If they get past your being a human, I’m confident you’ll be hired.”

“Thank you!” Stiles scrambled off the couch and grabbed at Ethan to hug him. The other man seemed uncomfortable, but he hugged him back anyway. Stiles knew it was more about being thanked so much when nothing was guaranteed, but he was trying to get him hired, and Stiles really appreciated that.

“Send me your resume,” Ethan said when they pulled apart. “I’ll submit it tomorrow. Erica said she’d try and get you an interview as soon as possible. She usually does the pre-screen, but she said she can call you first thing and then schedule the interview for the afternoon if you pass all the usual requirements.”

“Sure, I’ll send it right now! Thank you!” Stiles grinned and turned to hurry upstairs to his laptop so he could send Ethan a copy.

He was trying really hard not to get his hopes up, but maybe things were about to turn around for him. Maybe things were starting to look up.

“I will literally pay you to be my assistant,” Derek said heatedly.

“If I was your assistant, you would be paying me, so that’s a stupid thing to say.”

“You know what I mean,” Derek insisted, sighing and letting his head fall into his hands. “I’ve interviewed at least thirteen people, and they either turn the job down or I can’t see myself working with them. Please, I’m desperate.”

“Why Derek Hale,” Kira said, sounding scandalized and pressing one hand to her chest, “are you coming on to me? I’ll have you know, I am not interested in your frivolous activities in the bedroom!”

“Hilarious,” Derek muttered, lifting his head to glare at her. She just offered him a small smile and picked up her water, taking a sip of it before putting it back down on the table.

They didn’t often have lunch together, but every now and then Kira came to kidnap him from the office and they made it out for a quick sushi lunch down the street. Kira didn’t work far from Derek’s office, so it was right in between both of their workplaces.

Despite having been shipped off to England and Oxford, and graduating second in her class, Kira had never been interested in the life her parents had wanted for her. As soon as she had her diploma, she’d returned to the States, moved into a small flat with Derek in San Francisco, and had started applying to various martial arts schools.

Her parents had not been happy, but Kira wasn’t interested in their feelings, because they’d never
once been interested in hers. It had been a rocky few years, but they seemed to be on better terms now than they had been. Derek knew Kira had plans to visit them for Christmas this year, so that was a step in the right direction.

And she was doing well, too. She was happy. She worked as an instructor for both Kendo and Kenjutsu—which was sword fighting—and occasionally covered for the Karate sensei when vacation time rolled around. She made good money, and she loved her job.

She and Derek had moved into their own apartments about a year ago when she started seeing some guy and needed the privacy. It hadn’t lasted long given she was asexual, and despite telling him so, the guy expected a lot more from her than she was willing to give. Still, it allowed them both to get their own places with features they liked, and they still lived fairly close to one another so they saw each other regularly. They were both in a good place, both financially and work-wise, so it was a comfort knowing that both of them were happy in their own lives.

Even if Kira’s beau had ended up being forcibly expelled from the premises because he was an asshole, and Derek had been single for basically his entire life. They had friendship and family, and stable jobs and roofs over their heads. Derek felt like he was pretty lucky, all things considered.

“You’ll find someone,” Kira insisted, popping a piece of tempura into her mouth and pointing her chopsticks at Derek. “And they’ll be an amazing assistant. Just have faith.”

“I’d have more faith if people would stop spreading rumours about me all the time. Did you know that apparently I got fired from my last job for trashing my boss’ car when he refused to give me a raise?”

“Better tell Laura to watch her Camaro,” Kira said with a wink.

Derek just groaned and shoved at her shoulder, somewhat thankful that she always found ways to turn the rumours about him into jokes. It annoyed him having them run rampant in the office, but at least his friends knew they weren’t true.

He moved the topic of discussion away from his work and towards Kira’s, since he knew some of her students had a Kendo competition coming up, and he was curious to know how she was feeling about it. She raked one hand through her short hair while she spoke, constantly having to push it back or behind her ears.

She’d cut it recently to something just below her chin, which Derek felt made her look a bit more severe than her long hair had, for some reason. She was still the same old Kira, but she seemed more intense somehow, like the short hair turned her into a fierce warrior.

Kind of like when Mulan cut her hair and went all badass. Kira was kind of like Mulan, in a way. Going against what her parents wanted, excelling at martial arts, cutting her hair. He smiled to himself at the comparisons, but refused to explain when she asked what he was smirking about.

Lunch seemed to end far too quickly, but Kira promised she’d be by for dinner the following day so they parted ways after Derek fought her to pay the bill and he headed back for the office. He kept thinking about the last interview he’d had and what could’ve gone wrong with it, because it had seemed to go really well. He’d thought for sure that one would pan out, but lo and behold, the call went out and they changed their mind.

Derek didn’t know what else to do. He couldn’t change his entire personality, he just needed someone who could tolerate his prickliness and know that he wasn’t actually an asshole. Or a man-whore.
He wasn’t asking much, just for people to not act like he was a horrible, terrible person. How had he earned himself that kind of reputation anyway? Was it his face? It was his face. Or his beard. Maybe he should shave. He just hated shaving, it was so time-consuming.

And he was lazy, he didn’t want to shave.

Once he got back to his office, he saw he had a missed call from Erica, but no voicemail. When he checked his email, he found one from her saying Peter wanted him in an interview that was scheduled in fifteen minutes for the HR position that had opened up since Laura was still out of town.

He really didn’t have time for this, and was sure someone from HR could handle this without him, so he called up to Peter’s office to insist he wasn’t going.

“Nephew,” Peter said pleasantly. He sounded positively tickled about something, which never boded well for Derek.

“I’m not doing that interview, I just got back from lunch and I have things to work on. Besides, putting me in that room guarantees the person won’t want to join our company.”

“If you insist,” Peter said, still sounding extremely pleased.

Derek frowned suspiciously. Peter never made it this easy, he usually always got all passive aggressive about it and Derek ended up folding and going.

“I mean it, take someone else.”

“Not a problem, I’ll let Erica know someone else will be joining me. Goodbye.”

Peter hung up, and Derek pulled the receiver away from his ear to stare at it incredulously. Was this some kind of weird reverse psychology shit? Peter was acting like he didn’t want Derek to come just so that Derek would come?

Well, he wouldn’t. He had things to do. No reason to be in an interview when he had things to do.

He clicked on one of his emails, reading it over and answering it before sending it off, but his eyes kept straying to the time as the minutes ticked down.

Twelve minutes.

Eight minutes.

Five minutes.

“Fuck,” Derek muttered angrily, scrolling back up in his inbox to find the one from Erica. The candidate’s pre-screening interview with HR as well as their resume was attached, so he angrily clicked on the resume, cursing his uncle for making him so curious, and felt all the air in his body leave him abruptly at the name staring back at him from the top of the page.

Mieczysław Stilinski.

No. That was—impossible. He was hallucinating or something, that couldn’t be right.

Clicking out of the word document, Derek closed his inbox, waited a second, then opened it again. He went back to Erica’s email, double-clicked on the resume, and waited for it to open.
It still said Mieczyslaw Stilinski.

It was like a door he’d nailed shut in his brain suddenly exploded open, all of his past confusion and anger and hurt and adoration flooding out at once. Stiles? Was it actually Stiles?!

Stiles, the guy he’d had a crush on for fucking years growing up. The guy who’d been an absolute dick to him their whole last year of high school.

The guy who’d told him he loved him in a dirty men’s bathroom on prom night while drunk and upset because he thought Kira was Derek’s girlfriend.

That Stiles? But it couldn’t be!

He knew it had to be, because that name was fairly unique, but he still didn’t believe it. He scrolled down in the document to check the education and, sure enough, Beacon Hills high school. Stanford University.

It was him. It was Stiles. His Stiles.

Derek’s eyes snapped to the clock and he jerked out of his seat so fast it almost toppled over backwards before just rolling away from him. He rushed around his desk and did an awkward half-jog towards the elevator, stabbing at the down button a few times before straightening out his suit. Then he stabbed at the button again, as if it would make it come faster.

When the doors opened and he started to step into the lift, he found his uncle leaning back against the far wall, arms crossed and looking infinitely pleased with himself, like he’d specifically come up to fetch him knowing Derek’s curiosity would’ve been piqued by the easy dismissal.

“That’s a name I haven’t seen in a while,” Peter said cheerfully. “According to Erica, he’s Ethan’s roommate.”

Derek had no idea who Ethan was, but he assumed it was Erica’s Marketing friend.

Suddenly, it made sense. The scent. The Werewolf he could smell, with the underlying tones of someone else.

It was Jackson Whittemore. He could smell Jackson on Ethan! And because Jackson and Stiles were close, and apparently living together along with Ethan, there was just that barest hint of Stiles on Ethan, too. But it was so buried under all the Ethan and Jackson that he’d never recognized it. He’d only known it was familiar, but all this time... all this time... all this time!

Derek tugged at his tie while the elevator started descending to the third floor where HR was. He felt like he was suffocating a little bit, and he knew Peter could hear his heart was beating a mile a minute. God, Stiles Stilinski. It had been so long. So long!

Ten years, actually. God, a lot had changed in ten years. Derek didn’t even know how to react. He was actually surprised Stiles had applied here. To their company. But maybe he didn’t know it was their company? Surely he must, they were from Beacon Hills, same as him. But it was still strange, Stiles had always been charismatic and smart and amazing. Why was he applying here of all places? Surely he had plenty of other places dying to have him under their employ, so why here?

God, what even did he look like now? Was he still just as attractive as he used to be? Had he aged well? Derek knew he looked similar enough to how he did in high school, but he’d shot up in height in university somehow, and then his eyes had gotten all stupid and he’d needed glasses, and he’d filled out a lot, and he had a beard now.
Shit, what if Stiles didn’t like beards? Maybe he should’ve shaved this morning. And why hadn’t he picked up his contacts when he got the call yesterday that they were in? He felt like he was just advertising his fucking nerdism! Stiles would take one look at him and laugh at the fact that after all this time, Derek was still a nerd!

Derek was starting to feel hot, eyes shifting to the numbers as they slowly went down from the ninth floor to the third. It felt like they were moving in slow motion. Fuck, he just wanted to get there! To see him!

But then... what would happen once he did? Derek was suddenly regretting this, because what if Stiles had gotten even more attractive? And what if... what if he was married?

What if Derek walked in and saw a ring on his finger, and he and Peter joked and laughed about kids, because Stiles had two of them with some beautiful model-like wife, and he had all the money in the world and was just looking for a job because he was bored?

He shook the thought off quickly, because if he was living with Jackson and his boyfriend, then obviously he wasn’t married.

Or maybe he was and they lived in some weird polyamorous relationship. Honestly, finding out that Jackson and Stiles were still as close as ever after all these years wasn’t really that big of a shock to him, so it wasn’t impossible for Stiles and his wife and kids to live with Jackson and his boyfriend.

The doors opening startled Derek so badly that he jerked into the side of the elevator. Peter just gave him an amused smile before leading the way out. Derek watched his back for a few seconds before letting out a slow breath and following, forcing himself to hold his head high and determined not to make a fool of himself.

After all, it had been ten years. They hadn’t kept in touch.

He doubted Stiles even remembered who he was.

Stiles felt like he was sweating through his shirt. He hoped it was a white one and not some weird light blue one, but both Jackson and Ethan had already been gone when he woke up, and neither had replied to his texts when he’d sent them pictures of his closet. He supposed he could’ve texted his dad or Scott, but he didn’t know his dad’s schedule, and he hadn’t wanted to wake him up.

Whatever, no big deal. People sweated, it was a thing. And besides, there were Werewolves coming, they’d know he was sweating regardless of whether or not he had huge, visible pit stains.

He just—hadn’t exactly expected this. The interview with Ethan’s friend this morning had been really good. She’d been funny, and friendly, and things had gone really well. Then he’d come in to do some kind of written exam—it had been easy, but he supposed it was just to ensure that he knew how to write an email without being a dick—and now he was waiting for the big boss to come and interview him.

That was mostly why he was sweating, because he’d assumed the HR manager would interview him, or someone else in that department. Apparently not. The HR VP was currently away, so the CEO and VP of Finance were coming down to conduct the interview instead.

Nothing nerve-wracking about that at all!

He knew this was a family business, so he figured the HR VP was probably one of the family and
that was why the CEO and another department’s VP were coming down to do the interview—they were probably related to the HR VP—but still! Having the fucking CEO in the damn room with him for an interview into the HR department was stressful!

“You can do this,” Stiles insisted, slapping his cheeks lightly in an attempt to keep calm. “It’s fine, everything’s fine.”

He ignored that everyone outside the room he was in could hear him, considering most if not all of them were Werewolves. He was just really nervous, was all. And he was worried about what would happen to Ethan, if he was honest.

If things went wrong, he didn’t want Ethan to pay the price for having recommended him. It would reflect poorly on Ethan if the CEO decided Stiles was garbage, and he’d fucking beg for them not to punish Ethan for having a shitty roommate. Ethan loved his job, and he was really good at it, so he really hoped if things went south with this interview that nothing happened to him in retaliation.

From the sounds of this company, Stiles doubted it, they seemed to be good people, but still. He was worried about him.

He glanced over at the door when he heard voices, and knew that meant people were approaching. He stood up, smoothing down his shirt and really hoping it was a decent colour, folding his hands in front of himself and waiting.

The door opened, with Erica walking in first. She smiled at him encouragingly before stepping to the side to allow the second party entry. The man looked a little bit familiar, but Stiles couldn’t place him. The smile on his face was a little daunting, but he tried not to let it bother him.

“You must be Stiles. Peter, nice to meet you.” He held one hand out to him and Stiles nodded with a tight smile, shaking his hand. He had a firm grip, which was expected of Werewolves, and Stiles hoped his own handshake was strong.

“Good to meet you,” he said, trying for charismatic but still pretty terrified. He knew the guy could smell it, but he ignored that fact. He was sure anyone would be terrified in an interview, most especially with a CEO.

When he stepped aside to let the second party in, Stiles felt his heart drop and was positive the world had just tilted at an impossible angle.

Dark hair, high cheekbones, glasses, a beard, tall, built frame, bright eyes, amazing lips. He looked nothing at all like Stiles remembered him, and yet exactly the same all at once. He’d been in love with the guy for four years, so it wasn’t like he wouldn’t have recognized him on sight, but of all the places to run into him, why here?!

Stiles hadn’t thought about Derek Hale in-in years. He’d been someone Stiles had always wanted but never truly had. When he’d reached university, after angsting about him for a long time, he’d forcibly purged everything about the guy from his brain, not wanting to dwell on all the ‘what ifs’ when he knew they would never happen.
Derek Hale had been the only person he felt like he’d ever truly, honestly loved, and he’d done everything in his power to forget about him.

And now here he was, standing in front of him, shaking his hand and looking—just, so good. Fuck did he look good. That beard made him look so much more attractive than he had any right to be, and those glasses were just the epitome of nerdism that he loved about Derek so much and fucking Christ, that suit! Stiles wanted Derek to forever wear suits, because every time he did, it made his downstairs area all nice and happy.

Exactly as it was doing right now. Which was bad with three Werewolves in the room, two of which were the owners of the company and about to interview him for a position.

Honestly, a part of him had already deflated internally. If Derek was about to interview him, he didn’t stand a chance. Sure, their last encounter had gone swimmingly, what with the kissing and touching and whatnot, but Stiles was pretty sure Derek’s memories of him from high school were all the bad ones. Derek wasn’t going to remember one event out of hundreds where Stiles had been nice to him.

He may as well thank them for their time and leave right now.

“Let’s sit, shall we?” Peter asked with a smile, taking a seat in one of the chairs across the desk from Stiles and folding his hands together.

Derek released Stiles’ hand and turned away from him, moving to sit down as well while Erica closed the door.

Stiles wasn’t sure what to do. Derek had just... It was like he didn’t recognize him. He’d barely looked at him, and was now sitting down with his hands folded together, watching Stiles expectantly, like he would any other candidate here for an interview.

Was it actually, honestly possible that Stiles had made such a bad impression on Derek that he didn’t remember him at all? Not even enough to hate him?

Somehow, that seemed worse than being hated. Being completely and utterly forgotten. It... stung. A lot.

Stiles slowly sat down in the available chair, trying to get himself back under control. He’d been nervous enough thinking this interview was happening with two of the owners of the company, but having one of them be someone he’d been in love with for years who didn’t even remember him was a bit of a shock. And kind of a huge blow.

But this wasn’t about him and his past with Derek. This was about needing a job, and about making sure he didn’t do anything to get Ethan in trouble. So he buried his panic and hurt deep down to be dealt with later, and forced himself to focus on the interview.

It started out all right, in his opinion. Peter did most of the talking, which helped a lot, because it meant Stiles only had to look at him. Derek just sat there expressionlessly and listened while the two of them spoke.

Peter asked him the usual questions, same as he’d been hearing in all his other interviews. How had he heard about the company, what were his strengths, what were his weaknesses, what could he bring to the team, could he provide examples of situations he’d defused, and so on and so forth. He felt good about his answers, even when he sometimes had to slant them Derek’s direction the few times he’d been the one to ask them.
And then, of course, the dreaded question. The one he knew meant he wasn’t going to get hired, regardless of any sour history between him and Derek.

“It shows here you were working at your previous job for three years,” Peter said, staring down at Stiles’ resume, which Erica had left on the desk for both him and Derek. “That’s a long time. Any particular reason for your separation of employment with them?”

Even if Stiles wanted to lie, which he didn’t, he knew that he wouldn’t have been able to. Having two Werewolves interviewing him and catching him in a lie was basically like sabotaging himself. So, he just sighed and gave the same answer he always did, hoping they wouldn’t ask him to elaborate, but knowing they would.

“I quit,” he admitted. “My boss and I were having some disagreements, and I decided I couldn’t work there anymore.”

“Disagreements?” Peter cocked an eyebrow, looking up at him from the resume. “About what?”

Stiles stared at him for a moment, then sighed and raked one hand through his hair, avoiding looking at either man in front of him. “I called the Workplace Injustice Institute because there were multiple complaints coming from multiple departments and my boss wasn’t doing anything about it. People were quitting, and unhappy, and in relatively uncomfortable working environments. I couldn’t sit by anymore. So I called them to come and conduct an investigation, and tendered my resignation immediately afterwards before they had the chance to fire me for it.”

He honestly almost followed up with, “Thanks for your time, I’ll see myself out,” because this was always when things went south for him. He wasn’t expecting a good reaction.

Which probably explained why his head shot up when Derek said, “That was noble of you, I’m sure it was a difficult decision to make, knowing how it would impact your career.”

“Well, Mr. Stilinski,” Peter said with another smile, standing up and straightening out his suit jacket. Stiles hastily got to his feet as well, but unlike the other interviews which had felt very final after that last question, this one was a bit more... hopeful.
Provided Derek didn’t immediately tell Peter no fucking way were they hiring Stiles Stilinski.

If he even remembered him...

“You’ve given us a lot to think about,” Peter said, holding one hand out for Stiles to shake again. “It was a pleasure meeting you. I expect we’ll speak again really soon.”

“Thank you. Yes. You too.” Stiles winced internally at how badly that came out, but didn’t have time to dwell on it long since Derek had stood up too. When Peter released Stiles’ hand, Derek held his own out and Stiles reached for it, closing his fingers around Derek’s and wanting to say something.

Anything.

“I’m sorry,” was almost what came out of his mouth, but before he could manage it, Derek shook his hand once, nodded in parting, then turned to open the door, walking out of the room first. Peter followed along behind him, seeming amused, and placed one hand on his nephew’s shoulder, squeezing.

Erica walked in a second later, smiling a bit ferally at him. “That seemed to have gone well.”

“Did it?” Stiles asked, feeling like he was literally a fucking sweat machine right now. “I’m not so sure.”

“Nah, Peter liked you, I can tell.” She moved forward to grab the resumes both men had left behind, slapping them on the desk to straighten them and motioning for him to follow. “Come on, I’ll walk you out.”

Stiles moved out from behind the desk, hoping he wasn’t leaving behind a huge sweat patch on the chair, and followed Erica out of the small room he was in. They walked down a long corridor to the elevators, and when she motioned them, he nodded in thanks and pointed towards the stairs he’d climbed to come up.

“Thanks. I’ll take the stairs.”

“Okay.” She shrugged. “I’ll let Ethan know you’re out. Good luck.”

“Thanks. And thank you. You know, for helping. For giving me a shot.”

She waved one hand at him, still smiling a little ferally. “Ethan’s hard on trusting people, especially humans. I wasn’t going to pass up the chance to meet the human roommate. And turns out you’re pretty cool.” She winked. “Hope to see you in my department before long.”

“Thanks. Have a good day.”

He pushed through the stairwell door and let out a small sigh while heading down to the lobby, exiting moments later and walking across the large entryway towards the exit. Once outside, he walked half a block to the closest bench, sat down, and then buried his face in his hands while allowing everything he’d been holding back to slam forward.

Derek Hale. After ten years, he’d just run into Derek Hale in a fucking interview. Derek Hale, who hadn’t recognized him. Who’d looked right through him. It was like high school all over again.

And he looked good. So good. He looked like he was doing so well in life. He was part of a huge company, one of the top ranking officials in said company, probably one of the owners, too. He’d
filled out and grown up and he was so fucking attractive, and Stiles had been right. He’d grown into his ears and his bunny teeth. He’d looked amazing. So fucking amazing.

And shit, Stiles was... nothing. Nobody and nothing. Derek probably had a huge house with four cars and a wife, or husband, and all these kids running around, and a huge pack, and a loving family and...

Stiles wanted to be happy for him. He wanted to be happy that Derek had the life he deserved, and he was, for the most part. Not about the wife/husband and kids part though. It hurt to imagine Derek being intimate with someone else, and Stiles remembered all too well how much it had hurt seeing Derek walk in with that girl—Kira, he thought her name was, if memory served—at prom. He remembered how much he’d hated seeing them together, so he couldn’t imagine how much it would hurt seeing Derek married, with kids.

“Fuck,” Stiles hissed, pulling at his fringe, palms digging into his eyes.

He’d managed to bury these feelings deep. He’d managed to forget all about Derek Hale. He’d been happy with his life, he’d had a good thing going. Why did Derek have to pop back up now? When everything was already going to shit, and he was jobless and broke and alone.

Why did Derek always have to show up at the worst possible moments?

He couldn’t decide if he would be happier or more upset to have Derek reject his employment due to their history. On the one hand, at least it meant he remembered him, which would be some small consolation considering the completely blank stare and lack of recognition he’d gotten in that office. On the other hand, he really needed this job. He’d had all the right connections to get this fucking job, and now everything had gone to shit because Derek Hale was one of the family members of the family business.

Fuck, he should’ve looked up Super Natural Foods long before now. Should’ve thought to check out the website before going to the interview. Now he hated Derek Hale all over again, and God only knew how long it would take him to forget about him again.

And of course they lived in the same fucking city! Because why not? Not like Stiles wasn’t suffering enough, why not throw his长时间 childhood crush at him and laugh hysterically at having him just out of reach, like always?

It took a few minutes for Stiles to calm himself down, but he eventually managed to get himself back under control and got to his feet to head for the bus stop. He didn’t really remember getting home, everything a bit of a blur, but next thing he knew he was climbing the last flight of stairs to the penthouse and opening the door into the corridor. He pushed open the apartment door, kicking his shoes off, and then headed further into the apartment before falling onto the couch face-first.

He didn’t intend to stay there as long as he did, but he’d either lost track of time while wallowing and pining, or he’d fallen asleep, because suddenly someone was shaking his shoulder and he glanced up to see Jackson staring down at him, face pinched in that way Stiles recognized as concern but Jackson tried to play off as annoyance.

“Derek Hale was in my interview today,” Stiles said in way of greeting.

The way Jackson went perfectly still suggested that was definitely not what he’d expected to hear come out of Stiles’ mouth. He very slowly sat down on the edge of the couch by Stiles’ hip, watching him carefully while keeping his hand tight on Stiles’ shoulder, like he worried he was about to run for the liquor cabinet.
To be fair, the last time Stiles had seen Derek Hale, he’d tried to inhale a bottle of vodka, so Jackson had a reason to be concerned.

“What are you talking about?” he demanded.

“Derek Hale’s family is the Werewolf family that owns Super Natural Foods.” Stiles shifted so he could sit up, leaning back against the armrest of the couch and raking a hand through his hair. “He and his uncle were the ones who interviewed me.”

“I don’t imagine that went well,” Jackson muttered.

Stiles felt a stab of hurt zing up his spine when he remembered Derek’s expression, and felt Jackson tense beside him, like he was bracing himself for the bad news.

“He didn’t recognize me.”

“What?” Jackson asked, voice half-crossed between furious and incredulous.

“He didn’t recognize me,” Stiles repeated, as if Jackson had merely missed what he’d said as opposed to being in disbelief. “He walked in and shook my hand like any other interviewer. Then he sat there and listened while his uncle asked questions, said maybe ten words to me, then shook my hand and left. No recognition at all, nothing.” He let out a bitter laugh, raking one hand through his hair again. “I wasn’t even worthy of being remembered, that’s how much Derek hated me.”

Stiles felt an ache beginning to form in his chest at the realization that he really hadn’t ever been anything at all to Derek. Stiles was the jock, the popular one, the favourite. He’d made fucking prom king, and had turned down twenty-seven invitations to prom.

And yet nerdy, dorky, unpopular and uninteresting Derek Hale had grown up to become some big shot and had completely forgotten him. Like he was nothing.

Like he was garbage.

Apparently that kiss in the bathroom at prom had really only meant something to Stiles. He must’ve been a horrible kisser if Derek had deemed it necessary to purge the event from his mind.

“Stiles, that’s impossible,” Jackson said. “You have the most horrific name in existence, there’s no way he forgot you.”

“Well clearly, there is a way, because he did,” Stiles snapped, then let out a frustrated growl and rubbed at his eyes. “Fuck, I got over him!” he shouted, slamming both hands hard against his thighs. “I got over him! We graduated, we went our separate ways, I pushed him to the back of my mind! I was supposed to be done with this! I was supposed to stop feeling like this!”

One small interaction with Derek, and all the feelings came bubbling back up to the surface. The stupid crush he’d had in high school was now banging pots and pans in his head, demanding attention and forcing him to remember how badly he’d wanted him. And that was not at all helped by how attractive Derek was. He’d grown up so hot, Stiles was positive he could snap his fingers and have men and women fighting to the death for just a moment of his time.

Stiles was going to have to get over him all over again, and he didn’t know that he had the strength to do that a second time. Fucking hell, why hadn’t he looked up the owners of the company before going? Sure, seeing a picture of Derek on the website would’ve been bad, but nowhere near as much as seeing him in person.
Having him right there. Where he could smell him. And touch him. And just... see him.

They sat in silence for a long while, Jackson evidently knowing Stiles was processing and letting him get through it. Apparently he was taking too long, which was likely making Jackson nervous, because after a time, Jackson spoke.

“Why the fuck are you wearing a pink shirt, by the way?”

“Is it pink?!” Stiles demanded, brain screeching to a halt and staring down at the shirt he was wearing. “Fuck, perfect! Great. I see my crush again after ten years, and I’m wearing a pink fucking shirt. Tell me it’s at least like, salmon pink.” Not that it made a difference to Stiles, considering, but apparently salmon pink was an acceptable colour.

Or so he’d been told.

“More like baby pink.”

“Baby pink?!” Stiles demanded. He might not know what that meant, but he knew it was bad. “What the fuck, why do I even own a baby pink shirt?!”

Jackson somewhat smirked at that, like he was trying to get them back into familiar territory. “I might have lied to you when you were buying shirts a few months back. You also have a hideous army green shirt that clashes really badly with virtually every tie you own.”

“You’re an asshole,” Stiles snapped, kicking at Jackson rather hard. He didn’t worry about being violent, Jackson barely felt it, anyway. “Stop taking advantage of my achromatopsia!”

“I can’t help it, it’s entertaining.” Jackson shrugged easily, still smirking. “You honestly think Scott and your father haven’t done the same thing? You know the shirt you wore to graduation was canary yellow, right?”

“Shut up, it was not!” Stiles insisted, horrified. His dad would never!

“Oh it was, and it was hilarious.”

Stiles remembered people snickering at him all throughout the evening, but he’d honestly thought that it was just his imagination. He couldn’t believe his dad had done that to him! Realistically, he was sure it was funny, and he’d have laughed about it any other day, but today was not the day to be laughing about the fact that he was one of thirty thousand people who was black and white colour blind.

Just his luck that he was born without the ability to see what colour Derek’s eyes were. People told him they were green with flecks of blue and gold, but Stiles didn’t know what that meant. It was like someone saying sunshine tasted like sound. He didn’t know what colours looked like, he only knew what black, white and shades of grey looked like.

He didn’t miss it, since he couldn’t miss something he’d never known, but he was sad that he didn’t know what colour Derek’s eyes were. Or even Jackson’s, or his dad’s. Or his.

And he knew people discriminated against Jackson a lot because he had blue Werewolf eyes, which meant eyes of a killer, and apparently Ethan had red ones, which was for Alphas, but Stiles didn’t know these things. When he encountered Werewolves and they flashed their eyes at him, he couldn’t tell the difference between ones to be wary of or ones that were powerful. He only knew their eyes flashed because they brightened slightly for a few seconds before returning to normal.
Which led him back to what colour Derek’s eyes were, and what his Werewolf eyes looked like, and the fact that he was somehow wearing glasses? Did Werewolves need glasses? He knew that Werewolves couldn’t get sick, and the fact that they healed should’ve technically extended to something like the eyeballs needing a reset, right? So why was he wearing glasses? Were they a fashion statement or something?

But man, he’d looked so good. And Stiles was never getting over that beard, good Lord. He wanted to drag his fingernails through it and kiss that stupid mouth, and suck on Derek’s stupid tongue, and just fall to his knees and suck his fucking dick.

Fuck. Fuck! He didn’t want to have a crush on Derek again.

Though was it really again if the crush had never gone away to begin with? Sure, Stiles had stopped thinking about him, but the crush hadn’t ever really left. It’d just been buried for a time, that was all. If the crush had gone away forever, he wouldn’t have had such a hard time finding a partner. But everyone he started getting serious with just didn’t feel right. He felt like something was missing, like he was expecting something different, something more.

Maybe Stiles was doomed to love Derek Hale forever. Having him right there, just out of reach, for all of eternity.

Life was so fucking unfair.

When Jackson said he was going to order pizza, clearly able to tell Stiles needed some comfort food, he just grunted in confirmation and resisted the urge to call Scott. Or his dad. Or Danny. He wanted to tell everyone about what had just happened, but the more people he told, the more real it would be. If he stopped at Jackson, then maybe he could just pretend it hadn’t happened. It was all a huge, elaborate, libido-induced dream.

Jackson was still on the phone ordering the pizza when Stiles’ own began to buzz in his pocket. He pulled it out with numb fingers, and stared down at the unknown number for a few seconds. It was probably someone calling him to schedule an interview. He’d applied to a shit-ton of places since he’d quit his job two weeks ago, so here was another place willing to give him a shot before deciding he was too risky to keep on.

Sighing, he answered the call and put it to his ear. “Stiles Stilinski.”

“Mr. Stilinski! Hello.”

Stiles froze at the voice. It was jovial, and happy, and overly excited. And one he’d heard literally three hours ago while sitting across from Derek Hale.

“Mr. Stilinski! Hello.”

Stiles froze at the voice. It was jovial, and happy, and overly excited.

And one he’d heard literally three hours ago while sitting across from Derek Hale.

“This is Peter Hale from Super Natural Foods. I do hope I’m not calling at a bad time.”

“No,” Stiles blurted out, heart beginning to pound in his chest. He got to his feet, one hand in his hair and trying to stay calm. Jackson was beside him instantly, partially wolfed out, like he wasn’t sure why Stiles was reacting in a fight or flight way over a phonecall. “No, now’s not—it’s a good time. Everything, uh, is everything okay Mr. Hale?”

“Oh yes, quite. We had some people calling your references today. Glowing praise, I’ll have you know. We even had someone touch base with your old company, and while your boss wasn’t very happy with what you did, he actually had nothing but good things to say about you.”

Wait, they’d what? Were they even allowed to call people outside the references he put down?
“I thought I should call you personally, given I was the one who interviewed you. I first wanted to thank you for coming in, we don’t often have many humans in our office, and it was quite refreshing having one around, brief as it was.”

“Thank you?” He hadn’t meant for it to be a question, but that was a bit of a weird thing to respond to.

“Oh no, thank you. I had quite the day after you left.” Stiles had no idea what that meant, but he didn’t have time to make up a response anyway, because Peter continued. “While you’re certainly qualified, and both Derek and I enjoyed the interview a great deal, we don’t feel as though you would be a good fit for our HR Department.”

Stiles deflated instantly, sitting back down on the couch and burying his face in his free hand. Jackson shifted beside him, but very wisely walked away, knowing he wouldn’t be welcome.

Great. Just great. Another interview he’d apparently done swimmingly on, but somehow still managed to botch.

“I see. Well, thank you very much for the oppo—”

“That being said,” Peter cut off, speaking loudly over Stiles, “there is another position available that I thought might be of interest for you. It’s not glamorous, by any means, but just because you wouldn’t suit our needs in HR doesn’t mean you can’t be of service elsewhere.”

Stiles frowned, trying not to get his hopes up. He wasn’t sure what Peter was saying, but it sounded like... he was still offering him a job? Just not in HR.

“I’m sorry?” he asked, hoping for some clarification.

“Our HR department is structured very specifically. We have far more Werewolf employees than human ones, so while we try to be fair, we have to keep the ratio even. We lost a Werewolf employee in HR, so while we believe you are a splendid candidate, we already have three humans in our HR department, and adding a fourth would upset the balance. Having said that, what you did at your previous job, despite the clear repercussions it would have, made it clear to us that you are someone we would prefer to have under our employ. We have three openings at the moment, and while you won’t be able to work in HR now, that isn’t to say that should an opening come up, you can’t always move departments, if you so choose. So rather than lose you entirely, I thought perhaps you would be open to one of the other jobs we’re hiring for.”

Holy shit, he was offering him a job! Holy fucking shit! Stiles was desperate, he’d be the fucking mouse catcher if it meant he started getting a paycheck again.

“That—yes. That would be amazing, thank you! What—what was this other job? If I’m qualified for it, I’ll definitely take you up on it.” He winced, finding that probably sounded a little desperate, but he was desperate, God dammit!

“As I said, it isn’t glamourous, but we seem to be having some trouble maintaining an Executive Assistant for one of our VPs. I understand you are a bit more qualified than the job requires, however it is a foot in the door, and I wanted to extend the offer in case you were interested.”

Executive Assistant? That was kind of like a secretary, wasn’t it? That sounded totally fine to him! People ragged on secretaries a lot, but they didn’t have an easy job, despite what the common belief was. It was a bit outside his area of expertise, but he was sure he could figure it out.
“I’m willing to give it a shot,” he agreed.

“Wonderful! Erica will email you the offer letter and paperwork we need signed. It’s digital, so you can review the terms and sign it electronically before sending it back. If all goes well, you can start on Monday.”

Stiles was going to fucking kiss Ethan when he got home.

“Thank you! Thank you so much, this is—I really, really appreciate this. Thank you!”

“My pleasure. It’s going to be hard work, but we try to be competitive in the industry, so you’ll have a fifty grand salary.” Less than Stiles was used to, but a lot for the job he was going to be doing. He knew HR Associate and Executive Assistant were vastly different jobs, and money was money so he’d take what he could get.

“That sounds perfect. Seriously, thank you.”

“Erica will send the papers along. I’ll let Derek know you’ve accepted the position. He’ll expect you on Monday.”

Stiles’ brain screeched to a halt.

Had he... Was he implying...?

“Derek?” Stiles asked. “I’m—I’m working as Derek’s Executive Assistant?”

“Is that a problem?” Peter sounded like he was grinning.

“No,” Stiles said hastily before the man changed his mind. “No, no problem. Perfect. Awesome, even. I’ll—I’ll send the documents right back once I get them.”

“Wonderful. We’ll see you Monday. Good evening, Mr. Stilinski.”

Peter hung up.

Stiles let his hand drop from his ear, staring unseeingly at the floor in front of him. He could hear Jackson shifting his weight somewhere behind him, but he didn’t acknowledge him.

Either Derek remembered him and wanted to make his life a living hell because he could tell how desperate for a job Stiles was, or the universe was laughing hysterically at him.

He honestly didn’t know which was worse.

“Stiles?!” Kira demanded incredulously, staring at Derek like she’d never seen him before, her burrito halfway to her mouth with sour cream dripping out the bottom. “Like, pulling your pigtails in high school Stiles? Like, literal love of your life Stiles?!”

Derek felt like he was still in shock, if he was honest. Even though a full twenty-four hours had passed since the interview, he felt like every time he blinked, he could see Stiles behind his closed eyelids.

And he looked just as good as Derek remembered. It had been so hard shutting down all of his emotions, but he hadn’t known what else to do. He didn’t want to make things awkward, and he’d figured it would be best if he just locked himself down tight and stayed professional. Peter said it looked like Derek hadn’t recognized him when they left the room, and he felt kind of bad for that.
That hadn’t exactly been Derek’s intention, to pretend like he didn’t recognize Stiles, but he hadn’t known what to do! Stiles had just looked so good, and honestly, he wasn’t entirely sure Stiles had recognized him! He’d barely looked at him the entire interview, and while his heart had been beating extremely fast throughout, Derek was sure he was just nervous. Everyone got nervous in interviews, every single one he’d had to date, the candidate’s heart was pounding.

While he’d acknowledged the brief spike of arousal at the beginning there, that wasn’t unusual either. People often took one look at Derek and thought improper things, and Stiles had tamped that down relatively quickly, so it was entirely likely he’d just had a brief moment of thinking Derek was hot before focusing on why he was there to begin with.

Which was the interview.

Derek had forgotten how much he loved Stiles’ voice. The way he spoke, the way his hands moved while he spoke, the openness on his face. Everything about Stiles was just amazing, and he couldn’t believe they’d run into each other again after all these years.

And more than anything, Derek was so glad Stiles hadn’t changed. Hearing why he’d quit his old job, it was just such a classic Stiles thing to do. Worrying about other people, caring about other people. He quit because he’d done something he knew he couldn’t come back from by ratting out the company he worked for for not being honest. He’d sacrificed his own job in an attempt to improve the jobs of everyone else in the office. It was such a Stiles thing to do that Derek had almost wanted to laugh and say, “Classic Stiles.” He hadn’t, but he’d really wanted to.

Fuck, and best of all, he wasn’t wearing a ring. That didn’t really mean much, since he was sure people who were married didn’t always wear rings, but it gave him some hope, at any rate. Not that he was expecting anything to happen. Hell, he wasn’t expecting to see Stiles again, if he was honest.

He and Peter had gone back up to his uncle’s office after the interview, where they’d called Laura to talk about what had happened. After she’d stopped laughing hysterically over the fact that Derek’s high school crush had come grovelling for a job, she and Peter had started speaking a bit more seriously.

And unfortunately, Derek agreed with them. Stiles was human, he had a lot of options available to him. He could work almost anywhere. Their HR department already had a few humans, and most of their Werewolf staff had been burned by humans before. He was qualified, and he sounded like he’d be perfect for the role, but they couldn’t give it to him.

Derek had left after the decision had been made, because he wasn’t needed any longer, though he knew Peter and Laura had stayed on the phone after his departure. He felt kind of bad for Stiles, because it sounded like he was kind of in a tough position. He’d have loved to give him a job, crush aside, but it just wasn’t in the cards for him.

He wondered what Stiles would do now. Probably apply somewhere else, go through the whole thing all over again. Derek wondered if he’d run into him again. He doubted it, San Francisco was pretty big, and God only knew how many years they’d already spent in the same city without coming into contact before yesterday.

Still, now that he’d seen him again, he couldn’t stop thinking about him. Derek could admit he’d, very shamefully, jerked off in the shower last night while thinking about Stiles. It had been years since he’d done that, and he’d felt bad for using Stiles as fapping material, but it had just been so long, and all the buried feelings were back and he could not handle it.
“Are you okay?” Kira asked when the silence stretched for too long. She’d put her burrito down without taking a bite, clearly having to process this the same way Derek was still struggling to.

“I thought I was over him,” he admitted. “I tried so hard to just be over him. How is it that seeing him for literally one second had everything I buried down come flooding back up? I should be better than this, I’m an adult!”

“You liked him for a long time,” Kira said quietly, reaching out to grip one of his hands with her own. “It’s normal to be confused, Derek. He was an asshole to you, you guys parted ways, and you thought you’d never see him again.”

He couldn’t decide if he was happy or pissed to have seen him again. On the one hand, words couldn’t begin to describe how good it felt seeing him after all these years, but on the other, it’d taken an exceptionally long time to get over his crush on the guy, and now he was going to have to do it all over again.

“We made out.”

He hadn’t meant to say it, but it came out without his consent. Like word vomit.

He hadn’t told anyone about what had happened at prom. It had hurt too much, and still felt like it wasn’t real. He didn’t think Stiles had said anything either, because he was sure Jackson or Scott would’ve reacted in some way, but they hadn’t. Both of them had kept it to themselves.

Until now.

“I’m sorry, you what?” Kira asked, eyes wide. “After the interview?!”

“What?” Derek was confused for only a second before realizing where the confusion came from. He’d literally just been talking about the interview, so it was normal for Kira to think that was what he was talking about. “No, not—in high school. At prom.”

“I’m sorry, what?” Kira demanded, leaning forward more, eyebrows almost disappearing into her hairline. “You and Stiles? You made out?”

“Yeah.”

“At prom?” she asked incredulously. “When? Where? Why the hell am I only hearing about this now?!” She punched him in the arm, relatively hard, but he deserved it. After all, they’d never kept secrets from each other before, so Kira was probably feeling a little hurt.

She’d told him about her extremely embarrassing BDSM adventures with one of her ex-boyfriends before finding out the reason sex wasn’t her thing was because sex literally wasn’t her thing, so hearing he’d made out with Stiles in high school was probably a bit of a blow.

“When I went to the bathroom.” Derek rubbed at his face with both hands, feeling exhausted all of a sudden. “He was in there when I went in, and he was drunk and upset. Apparently it was my fault, he thought you were my girlfriend. We kind of, well, there was like, a weird scuffle where he tried to hit me and failed, and when I said you weren’t my girlfriend he started trying to lick the back of my throat from the front.”

“I can’t believe you never told me this,” Kira said, sounding both awed and annoyed. “So what the fuck happened? Was he too drunk to remember or—?”

“No, he seemed pretty okay by the time the kissing started. More tipsy than drunk.” Derek sighed
and picked his own burrito up, though he didn’t take a bite of it. He just picked at the tortilla absently until he created a small hole near the top and put it back down. “Danny came to check on him and said the prom king and queen announcements were about to start. Stiles said what we’d just done was a bad idea, and in a way, he was right. We didn’t have a lot of time left to talk things out, and we were heading off in different directions in a few days. So I guess we both just kind of silently agreed to pretend it hadn’t happened and... moved on.”

“And now?” Kira asked cautiously.

“I don’t know,” he admitted. “I’m probably never going to see him again.”

“But—you have his resume,” she said slowly. “Which means you have his number.”

“Don’t,” Derek said sharply and she held up both hands in surrender before picking her burrito back up and finally taking a bite.

Derek had thought about that, of course he had! Stiles’ number, right there on his resume. His email. His address. He’d thought about it a lot over the past twenty-four hours, but that was a huge privacy breach. He couldn’t use that information for personal gain, and the temptation was so fucking great that he’d actually deleted Erica’s email entirely to avoid a lapse in judgement.

No, Stiles was gone. He was gone, and Derek was going to move on again. It would be hard, because he knew for a fact trying a second time would be downright impossible, but he’d manage somehow. Stiles had probably moved on, he likely had tons of people still vying for his attention. Derek could survive this. It was fine.

Totally fine.

Picking up his burrito, he took his own bite while trying to stop thinking about Stiles. Kira could obviously tell he was a little distracted, but she tried her best to talk about normal, mundane things in an attempt to get his fucked up brain to calm down a little bit. They managed to make it through their meals without incident, Kira paying this time and Derek offering to pay for the ice cream they were getting.

“We didn’t plan on getting ice cream,” Kira reminded him.

“We are now,” Derek informed her, wrapping an arm around her shoulders while they walked down the street and kissing her temple. She shoved his face away from hers and he smiled. “Sorry I didn’t tell you about Stiles.”

“It’s fine.” She sighed dramatically. “Just confirms you’re an asshole, like I always knew you were.” She nudged him lightly to make it clear she was joking, turning to him and offering a small smile. “I’m sorry he popped back up again. I know this is going to be a confusing period for you, but you got over him once, you can do it again.”

“Yeah,” he said with a sigh just as his phone buzzed in his pocket. He pulled it out, frowning slightly when he saw it was a work email. Nobody worked on Saturdays, so he wasn’t sure who could be emailing him.

When he saw Laura’s name on his home screen, he realized she’d gotten back that morning, but he hadn’t seen her yet. She was probably just catching up on her emails, though he noticed that the one she’d just sent was a NESF—New Employee Setup Form. They went out any time there was a new hire, and select people who needed to get them were on the distribution list.

Derek didn’t technically need them, but he was one of the Hales, so he’d been added to the list
anyway. He figured maybe she’d found her new hire and wanted them set up in time for Monday. He didn’t know what she was expecting, given it was Saturday and it wasn’t like IT was going to be working tonight, or tomorrow, but maybe she was paying someone overtime to get this done right away.

Clicking on the email, he opened the form so he could see what it was, mostly out of curiosity, and stopped dead in his tracks, Kira managing two steps before realizing his arm had just slid off her shoulders.

“What’s up?” she asked, moving back to his side and looking down at his phone.

It felt like he couldn’t breathe. God was punishing him, this was a punishment. His sister hated him and wanted to make him suffer for all those times he hadn’t believed in her.

Because the NESF boasted the name ‘Mieczyslaw (Stiles) Stilinski’ and under position, it said ‘Executive Assistant.’

And under his direct report, it said ‘Derek Hale.’

TBC...

Chapter End Notes

Note: I have 2 friends who are EAs and their jobs sound horrible! Like, so so so awful even though one of them loves her job (idk, she says it's awful but loves it so she's weird?). So just wanted to make it clear in case Stiles come off acting like this is no big deal, but EAs and secretaries and assistants and any of those types of jobs are hard as fuck and they deserve so much respect for their hard work.
Was he having a heart attack? He was pretty sure he was having a heart attack. What did heart attacks feel like? Probably this, the speed wasn’t normal, he was definitely, totally, absolutely having a heart attack right now.

Stiles gripped his messenger bag tightly with both hands, fingers digging into the edge of it where it was sitting on his lap. The bus was in a weird state between empty and full, like this was just enough of an off-hour that there weren’t that many people, but close enough to regular hours that there were enough of them.

He’d wanted to leave the house with Ethan, head to work together, have some kind of emotional support until they split up, but unfortunately for him, unless he had a project looming that required an earlier start time like the past few weeks, Ethan usually started at nine.

Stiles started at seven.

He was sure Ethan would’ve come early if he’d asked, but he didn’t want to do that to him. Having him walk him to work wasn’t going to make his heart pound any less, and Ethan had been helping Jackson with something the night before so they’d both gone to bed late. Stiles hadn’t felt right asking him to wake up early just because he was having a meltdown over working for his old high school crush who was also apparently his adult crush.

He’d double-checked his outfit with Jackson three times the night before, making him swear up and down that it wasn’t a hideous colour and that he wouldn’t walk in looking like a total fucking idiot. Then he’d showered before bed, woken up early to shower again before work, and drowned himself in so much cologne he was positive the dirty looks he was getting was because of the smell as opposed to his extremely rapid breathing.

What the fuck else was he supposed to do?! Derek was a Werewolf! Stiles had already found him attractive when they were in high school, and that was before Aphrodite had decided she liked Derek and gave him a makeover fit for a God. Jesus, Stiles was so screwed, he was so, so screwed.

When his stop came up, he very stiffly stood and managed to make it out the door and onto the sidewalk. It was still kind of dark, but not so much that the street lamps were still lit. Just that weird in between stage where dawn had hit but wasn’t quite bright enough to illuminate everything yet.

He walked one block to the building, heart still slamming in his chest, and made it to the entrance in time to see Erica coming out of the elevator. She smiled brightly at him and waved, then hurried forward on her stilettos to the door. He could see a black box beside the handle on the outside, and assumed he needed a fob to get in outside regular hours.

“Good morning,” Erica said, pushing open the door and smiling just as ferally as she had the last time he’d seen her. “I was kind of estimating your arrival time, but looks like I was right. I figured you’d want to be early on your first day and you can’t get in without a fob.”

He nodded awkwardly while gripping the strap of his messenger bag tightly in both hands and eased through the door. She let it shut behind him while turning to face him, holding out a plastic folder.

“Here you go. It’s got everything you need to start your day. Fob for the main door and the elevators, passcode for the lobby bathroom since we were having vandalism problems, some
paperwork I need you to complete for your paycheck’s direct deposit, and all your usernames and passwords. I also took the liberty of adding in some of Derek’s preferred places to eat, and his usual morning coffee.”

“Cool. Thanks.” He felt like his tongue was made of sandpaper. “Is-is Derek here?”

“Not yet, he usually gets in at seven on the dot.” She checked her phone for the time, and Stiles saw it was only six forty-two. He was pretty early, but it would let him get settled and have a meltdown in peace. “Come on, I’ll bring you up.”

“Thanks.” He followed her across the lobby, but when they reached the elevators, he paused and motioned the stairwell door. “Is it cool if I meet you up there? I like taking the stairs.”

“Oh, stairwell’s locked from the outside in the morning,” she said. “You can only open it from the inside before nine, so it’s the elevator or nothing.”

Stiles’ heart sank at those words, but if Erica noticed, she didn’t react because the elevator doors opened then and she walked into it. Stiles stood there for a few additional seconds, still gripping his strap painfully tight, then let out a slow breath.

He was with Erica. It was fine. No big deal, just a few floors up. Maybe like, three? How high up could Derek be, really?

Stepping into the lift, he stood against the back corner and somehow managed to tighten his grip around his strap even more, keeping his breathing perfectly even as the doors slid shut. His eyes shot to the buttons and saw the number nine was lit up. Because Derek’s office was on the ninth floor.

Because of course it was. Couldn’t be on the third or fourth, oh no! Had to be just as high up as his penthouse was, except without the luxury of stairwell access. Perfect. Awesome. Amazing.

“What happened, by the way?” Erica asked, turning to him.

His eyes shot back to her and he struggled to keep breathing. In and out. In and out. Everything was fine. No big deal.

“Happened?” he asked.

“You smell like you fell into a tub of perfume or cologne or something.” She wrinkled her nose. “It’s a little overpowering. And by a little, I mean a lot.”

“Sorry,” Stiles said obediently, but he wasn’t going to stop wearing it, because no way could he survive a day with Derek if he wasn’t able to cover up a few scents.

Fucking chemosignals, they were the worst. Unfair advantage for Werewolves, really.

When the doors opened, Stiles rushed out of the elevator, feeling himself relax ever so slightly once he was on solid ground again. Erica didn’t seem to notice, leading him down the corridor and past a huge open space of cubicles. Some people were already there, working or chatting with each other, but it was clear they all started at seven and were just getting settled in.

A few people offered him smiles and one of them waved, but nobody said anything while Erica led him all the way to the back of the floor where a large corner office was visible with floor to ceiling windows. The office wall facing outward was made of glass, evidently so that Derek could see out of his office, and right across from it, of course, was Stiles’ little cubby.
So that he could stare at Derek all day long.

Super. Like, on the one hand, literally, super. But on the other hand, this was so awful and terrible, he kind of wanted to turn around and leave.

“So, this is you,” Erica said, patting at the mid-section height partition before moving around behind it to Stiles’ desk. “You should be all set up, but if you have any problems, IT’s number is right here.” She tapped a post-it that was stuck to the receiver on his phone. “Put your stuff down and I’ll show you to the kitchenette and the bathroom. Did you have a lunch you needed to put away?”

“No, I was going to eat out,” he admitted. Ethan had agreed to take him out for lunch to save him from what was sure to be a horrible and emotional day, so he hoped that was still the plan because he was very broke right now.

“Cool. This way.”

He followed after Erica while she led him around, bringing him to the men’s bathroom and showing him where the kitchenette was for coffee, tea, and hot chocolate, along with the smallest vending machine Stiles had ever seen. It looked to only have three options, but it was nice knowing if he was starving and couldn’t leave the floor that he had a source of sustenance.

She didn’t bring him to the lunch room, but she told him what floor it was on and where it was located, and also mentioned that there was another much larger vending machine down there for legitimate snacks and pop.

She helped him make Derek’s coffee, which Stiles found to be a weird thing—did secretaries still make coffee for their bosses?—and he brought it back to his office, setting it down on a coaster by his keyboard.

When he went back to his desk, Erica told him where all the other important places were located—the IT department, the stairwell in case of emergencies, as well as HR, though he already knew that last one. She made him log in to make sure his computer worked, and then kind of explained the gist of what he was expected to do, though promised Derek would tell him more once he was in.

As it turned out, he didn’t have to, because there was already an email waiting for him in his inbox when he opened it. It was time-stamped around eleven the night before and looked like it was from Derek’s work email. There was a huge list of expected duties, up to and including ensuring he kept track of Derek’s calendar so he didn’t miss any meetings.

Stiles was kind of overwhelmed. He knew how to do HR, and he could handle most things, but this was new territory for him, and it was fucking Derek, of all people, so he was... concerned.

“You good, then?” Erica asked, slapping his shoulder lightly. Well, he was sure she meant for it to be lightly, but it kind of hurt.

“I think so,” he said. Not a lie, but not the whole truth, either. He’d figure it out, he just needed a bit of time.

“Awesome. Well, here’s my extension if you need me,” Erica said, grabbing the IT post-it and scribbling down another four number extension. “And here’s Ethan’s if you need him.” She added a third one and he was kind of relieved to have it. “I’ll see you around, okay? Good luck.” She winked at him, and he let out an awkward laugh, because man she had no idea how much luck he needed!
She left moments afterwards and Stiles opened the plastic folder she’d given him to check everything inside. He stuck the fob onto his keychain, and then started reading through all the papers that had been included. He also got some kind of weird pass that was meant to gain him access to the CEO’s floor after hours—he assumed that was only because he was Derek’s assistant—as well as an employee discount card for all Super Natural Foods purchases.

He put the last item in his wallet, then started putzing around on his computer to figure out all the programs he needed for the job, since Derek’s list was... quite long. And a bit confusing.

When the clock on his computer hit seven on the dot, he heard chatter out around the corner cease immediately, and a few seconds later, Derek appeared. He was wearing a suit again, and was carrying a briefcase, but his glasses were gone. He’d also shaved, which Stiles was kind of disappointed about, but he didn’t say anything and just hastily got to his feet before realizing how fucking weird that was.

Too late now.

“Good morning,” he said, trying for cheerful and worried he’d just sounded hysterical instead.

Derek turned to him, started to nod, then paused halfway through his office door. His chin was lifted and Stiles saw his nostrils flare.

Oh no. Oh no!

“Are you wearing cologne?” Derek demanded, voice sharp as glass and expression even worse.

“I—yes. It’s—”

“You work with Werewolves,” Derek snapped, not having moved from his doorway, but turning more in his direction. “This is a scent-free office, we’re very sensitive to smells.”

Oh fuckity fuck fuck.

“I understand,” Stiles said quietly, pressing his hands together, as if in prayer for things to please, please just go his way for once. “But—I need to wear cologne. I can find another one if you don’t like this one, but I—”

“No,” Derek interrupted sharply. He seemed to realize he was being a bit harsh, because Stiles saw him inhale through his teeth before he softened his tone. “I’m sorry, but no. This is scent-free office. If you come in wearing it again tomorrow, you might as well not come back.”

Stiles opened his mouth, then closed it, unsure of what to say. Apparently, his silence was deemed to be understanding, because Derek just nodded once, then turned to head into his office. Stiles noticed him glance at the coffee, but he made no move to pick it up, instead shucking his suit jacket and hanging it on the back of his chair before taking a seat and opening his briefcase.

Stiles very slowly sat back down in his chair, heart pounding at the realization that if he didn’t think of something quick, he was going to have a really hard time working with Derek. If Derek didn’t remember him—as all evidence suggested—he wasn’t exactly eager to have him remember because Stiles started lusting after him.

He was really sad about the beard though. He didn’t know why Derek had shaved, but figured maybe he was usually clean-shaven and had just come back from a trip of something when he’d met up with him last week.
Forcing himself to focus back on learning his new job, he started checking all the applications he
needed, cross-referencing usernames and passwords with the sheet of paper he’d been given. Each
program prompted him to reset his password upon log-on, and he really hoped he remembered
them all since there were a lot of them.

The first hour went pretty well, actually. Derek just sat in his office typing away and making
phonecalls, and Stiles figured out what he was meant to do by reading Derek’s email, as well as a
random manual he’d found in one of the drawers. It was hand-written in a loopy sort of font, so he
felt inclined to believe it had belonged to a girl. It was really helpful though, he kind of wanted to
send her a thank you card.

Around nine-fifteen, Derek’s phone rang for the first time and Stiles almost lost five years of his
life when his own phone went off shrilly. He glanced over at it and saw Derek’s line was
connected to it, which made sense, since he was his assistant.

Glancing up, he noticed Derek was on the phone, but his line was still ringing. Evidently, Derek
wouldn’t be able to answer the call while still on the phone, so was Stiles supposed to pick it up
for him? Was that—was that allowed? This was new territory for him, he had no idea what he was
doing!

When Derek’s phone rang a third time, said individual turned to look at Stiles and motioned for
him to do something. That was all the confirmation he needed and Stiles hastily picked up the
phone, the post-it sticking to his hand, and put the receiver to his ear.

“Derek Hale’s office.” He winced, not entirely sure that was how he was meant to answer the
phone, but too late now.

It was a woman on the other end, asking about a spreadsheet and throwing out numbers she needed
added at lightning speed. Stiles hastily opened an email and began typing as quickly as he could,
barely catching her name, but managing to get everything down. Thank God he typed quickly, he
was going to have to figure out a system if this was how all the calls were going to be.

When he hung up with her, he reformatted the conversation into something a bit more legible, and
then printed it so he could hand it to Derek. It popped out of the printer on Stiles’ left and he
waited until Derek was off the phone before steeling himself and getting up. Moving around his
desk with the sheet of paper, he stopped at Derek’s door and knocked hesitantly on it while
watching the man type.

“What is it?” Derek asked, not looking over at him.

“Um, Amrit in Payroll called about a spreadsheet and some numbers she needed? I uh, I wrote it all
down for you, she said you can call her back in an hour if you need to go over anything with her.”

Derek turned as Stiles approached, and held out his hand to take the piece of paper. He looked it
over briefly while Stiles waited, resisting the urge to fidget. Eventually, Derek grunted and turned
back to his computer.

“Thanks.”

Relief flooded through him and Stiles beamed. “No problem.”

He turned to head back out of the office, but paused when Derek spoke again.

“And thanks for the coffee. A little heavy on the sugar, though.”
“I will keep that in mind for tomorrow,” he promised, receiving a grunt in response again.

Moving back to his desk, Stiles let out a small breath, and then smiled, glancing up over his cubicle wall at Derek. He was staring at his screen, like he was reading something, his fingers motionless on the keyboard.

So far so good. Things weren’t going quite as horribly as Stiles had expected.

At least Derek acknowledged him now, which was a far cry from how he’d acted around Stiles in high school.

He might actually be able to do this. Crush on Derek aside, maybe he wasn’t going to be jobless again by week’s end like he’d originally thought.

That was comforting, at least.

Derek had never been so happy in his life for the clock to hit three. Because that meant the day was officially over for everyone in Finance. Sure, he was planning on sticking around a bit longer since he had some things to catch up on, but the time meant that Stiles would leave!

He’d been distracted all day having Stiles sitting right in front of him. Every time he’d looked up in thought, his eyes caught sight of Stiles sitting right there and he lost his train of thought. He kept getting distracted watching him mouth words, or rub his nose, or scratch his head. He looked like he was trying really hard to figure this whole Executive Assistant thing out and while there had been a few rough patches throughout the day, he seemed to be getting the hang of it.

Derek resolutely didn’t look up while he waited for Stiles to leave, but he just kept sitting there! It was now five minutes past three, and he was typing away at his computer! Everyone else in his department, previous assistant included, always watched the clock and left at three on the dot! So why wasn’t Stiles?!

God was punishing him. He was being punished. He’d angered some higher being and they were making him pay for his transgression by having him completely fail at doing his job because Stiles wouldn’t go home!

He literally couldn’t concentrate while being on alert for movement, because a part of him worried Stiles would startle him and he’s blurt out something stupid. Or rude. Derek didn’t handle being startled very well so he was just as likely to shout, “ Fucking shit!” as he was to shout, “Get the fuck out, you motherfucker!”

Which would be a terrible thing to say, not only because it was rude, but because he knew Stiles’ mother had passed away years ago and that wasn’t something he wanted to say to him, even by accident.

Derek sat staring at his computer without really seeing it, just trying to be hyper-aware of Stiles and what he was doing. At quarter-after, he was ready to storm out and tell him to leave right now when finally, mercifully, Stiles stood up. He gathered up his belongings, threw the strap of his messenger bag over his head, and then walked to Derek’s open door. He knocked lightly, almost hesitantly, and Derek just grunted, not trusting himself to look over.

“Um, have a good night. I’ll see you in the morning.”

“See you in the morning,” he acknowledged. “Scent-free workplace.”

Derek didn’t bother saying it back, he just kept staring at his computer while Stiles walked off, and tried really hard not to let out an annoyed groan when he heard heels heading his way. They were muffled slightly on the carpeted floor, but he’d recognize that gait anywhere.

“Hi there! You must be Stiles!”

“Oh–yeah. Hi.”

“Laura. Nice to meet you. Hope Derek’s been tolerable today. I know he looks like an asshole, but don’t let that fool you. He’s _totally_ an asshole.”

He wished she’d fucking stayed _gone_.

“I’ll keep that in mind,” Stiles said, a smile in his voice. “Nice to meet you. And thank you, uh, you know. For the opportunity to work here. I know it’s not exactly common practice.”

“Not a problem. Peter had nothing but good things to say about you. Welcome to the team. I expect I’ll be communicating with you a lot. Derek screens my calls.”

“I look forward to our continued conversations.”

“You. I like you. Go on, get out of here before I drag you out for coffee. Have a good night.”

“You too.”

Derek turned to glare at the corner of his office where Laura would appear in mere seconds. Sure enough, when she rounded the bend, he watched her walk past the large glass wall with a feral smile on her face before stopping at his open door. She leaned against the jamb, arms crossed, but at least had the decency to wait for Stiles to be gone. Of course he probably couldn’t hear them, being human and all, but still, he appreciated it.

They both stared at one another, Laura’s head tilted slightly to the side and Derek’s turned in the direction of the corridor. After a few seconds had passed, he heard the stairwell door open loudly, Stiles evidently bypassing the slow-ass elevators in favour of the stairs, and Laura waited until it had fully shut with a click before speaking.

“That’s someone I didn’t think I’d ever see again,” she said with a feral grin. “Baby brother’s heart must be going thumpity-thump all day long.”

“Fuck you,” Derek snapped, crossing his arms angrily and levelling her with the fiercest glare he had in his arsenal. She just kept grinning at him. “You and Peter are assholes.”

“Really?” she drawled, slinking further into his office and moving to perch on the edge of his desk, crossing her legs and raising her eyebrows at him. “He was clearly desperate for a job. We couldn’t justify putting him in HR, and he doesn’t have the background for Marketing. You need an assistant, he needs a job. It was logical. Don’t pretend this is a hardship for you, you’ve been in love with him since forever. I’d have thought you’d be happy to see him.”

Derek didn’t have the balls to admit he _was_ happy to see him, just really, _really_ distracted about it. And to be fair... they were right. He’d been thinking about it while out for dinner with Kira, how desperate for work Stiles had seemed. What he’d done at his previous job had put a black mark on his resume, even though he’d done it with good intentions and the people he’d left behind had likely appreciated it.
Really, was it so bad? Sure, Derek was distracted a lot, but Stiles seemed to genuinely appreciate the opportunity and he was trying really hard. Even without his crush on him, Derek could tell Stiles wanted to make this work.

“By the way,” Laura said almost matter-of-factly, inspecting her nails, “why the fuck did you shave? You look like a forty year old man.”

Derek frowned at her before reaching up to rub his hand across his cheek. It had been smooth this morning, but already had that scratchy sensation that showed hair was growing back. Great, he was going to have to shave every fucking day now to avoid looking like a lumberjack.

“No I don’t,” he argued.

Laura turned her head dramatically to give him a condescending look. “Yes you do. Honestly, you’re that weird exception to the rule where having a beard actually makes you look younger when it makes other people look older. Your beard makes you look like the bad boys mom and dad warned Cora away from in high school. When you shave, you look like one of those soccer dads who argues with the refs on a shot your daughter did that they didn’t like.”

“Fuck you,” Derek said heatedly, but he couldn’t help wonder if she might be right. He did feel weird when he shaved. And honestly, as much as he hated his glasses and wore them as little as possible when he was at work, the contacts always made his eyes itch. He was pretty sure it was because of his Werewolf physiology. Something foreign was in his eye, and his body was trying to expel it.

But he needed to shave and wear his contacts! He didn’t want Stiles to see him as the same nerd from high school! He wasn’t that nerd anymore, he was an adult! A successful adult!

“Did you seriously shave for Stiles?” Laura asked, as if reading his mind. His eyes snapped to her and she raised her eyebrows at him. “What if he likes beards?”

“He probably doesn’t,” Derek shot back instantly, because there was no point in denying it. He rarely shaved because everyone knew he was too lazy to. He only trimmed just enough to not look like a wild bushman, but he tried not to fully shave as much as possible because, again, lazy.

“Derek,” Laura said with a deep sigh. “Trust me. You look like an old man. Grow it back, or you’ll regret it.” She slid off his desk, smoothing out her skirt and stretching with a loud grunt. “Also mom and dad said they’d be coming up for a visit sometime in the next couple of months. You cool if they crash at yours and you bunk with me, or would you rather the other way around?”

Derek shrugged, indifferent. Wouldn’t be the first time he lived with Laura for a while, so it didn’t make a difference to him either way. She was a respectful roommate, and they were Werewolves. And siblings.

Besides, he kind of liked going home after his parents left to either their scents or Laura’s in his place. It was comforting, having his pack’s scent everywhere. Even better when it was his Alpha’s. He missed them a lot and wished they hadn’t moved to Florida.

“I’ll let mom know. Don’t stay too late, okay? I don’t pay overtime.”

Derek just waved her away, knowing that was a dirty, filthy lie. She paid people overtime all the time, because if she noticed people staying later, it was obvious they cared about their job and were being overworked, so she compensated them for it. That was why working for Laura was the best, she was such a good person. She knew what it was like to have very little and wanted to make sure
no one went home exhausted and poor.

Once he was alone again, he was able to focus on the work he’d mostly been neglecting all day in favour of paying attention to Stiles. He was hoping this was just a temporary thing. After all, they’d gone to high school together, and while Derek had spent a lot of time watching him, he’d also paid attention in class. It was likely the first few days would be a challenge, but then it’d be back to normal with him just sneaking glances at Stiles instead of flat-out staring. The fact that Stiles hadn’t noticed yet was a miracle, if he was honest.

Also disappointing, because he so wished Stiles remembered him. He kind of wanted to grab him and shake him and demand to know why he’d kissed him and if they could please do it again. Probably not the best idea though, he didn’t want to get in trouble for sexually harassing his EA. Then the people would really have fuel for all those rumours they spread about him.

Rubbing at one of his eyes in irritation, he scowled at his screen while his vision struggled to focus with the blurry contact and was halfway through an email when his phone rang. He finished the sentence he was working on before glancing at the number flashing back at him, then reached out to answer it.

Kira had probably tried his cell phone, but it was on DND, so work was always the best bet since he basically lived there until she dragged him out.

“Do I look old when I shave?” he asked in way of greeting.

The horrified gasp that greeted him suggested he was in for bad news. “Oh God, Derek! Please tell me you didn’t shave!”

So he did look like an old man? Great. Apparently trying to look less nerdy had backfired horribly. Well, at least he didn’t own a baby pink shirt. Why had Stiles thought a baby pink shirt was a good colour to wear to an interview?

“Yes?” he asked with a sigh, rubbing at his eyes again. His contacts were seriously bothering him, maybe he’d forego them for a few hours when he got home.

Kira inhaled deeply before replying. “Derek. I love you. You’re my best friend. But if you shaved, I can’t see you until you at least have some stubble. You look so fucking weird and old when you shave, I hate it. And you hate shaving, it’s been like, the highlight of our friendship, your dislike of shaving! Why would you do this to me? You’re tearing us apart, Derek!”

He rolled his eyes at the over-exaggerated drama, but knew he wouldn’t have wanted anything less. Kira had always been relatively mellow growing up, and he liked that she felt more comfortable being her boisterous, loud self now that she could do what she wanted.

“Guess we’re not on for dinner anymore.”

“Oh God,” Kira insisted, sounding horrified. “No! We must be on for dinner! Today was Stiles’ first day and I need all the details! You can’t leave anything out like the last time!” She paused, and Derek silently prayed for her not to get it. Please, please! It was bad enough Laura had figured it out, his luck wasn’t that bad! “Please tell me you didn’t shave for Stiles!”

No dice. God clearly hated him.

“What if he doesn’t like beards?!” Derek demanded again, because that was a distinct possibility! What if Stiles legitimately thought Derek looked hideous with a beard?!
“Oh my—Derek! Who cares what he likes?! I like your beard, and I am your best friend, and my opinion should be the only one that matters.”

Derek rolled his eyes again, but knew this wasn’t a fight he was going to win. Besides, Kira was right. He didn’t owe Stiles anything. And so what if Stiles didn’t like beards? Derek wasn’t about to change his way of life just for Stiles. After all, he hadn’t cared in high school, why should it be different now?

He didn’t like shaving, and the fact that everyone said it made him look like an old man had nothing to do with his very mature decision that he should grow his beard back out because Stiles’ opinion didn’t matter. And maybe Stiles liked beards. Derek would have to pay attention to what Stiles smelled like tomorrow. Not that he was growing it back out for Stiles! No, he was doing it for himself. And Kira. Mostly himself. He was lazy.

“I’ll grow it back out.”

“Fuck yeah you will,” Kira proclaimed, and he heard the smile in her voice. “Dinner in an hour?”

“Sure. Your place?”

“I think I have some leftovers,” she confirmed. “See you there?”

“Yup. See you in a bit.” Derek hung up.

Turning back to his computer and the email blinking back at him, he thought about what Laura and Kira had said. He didn’t think he looked old when he shaved, but he also didn’t really shave often in general. And as much as he’d done it for Stiles, Kira was right. He shouldn’t be changing who he was because Stiles had magically shown back up. They had to keep this professional. He was just his EA, nothing more.

And besides, it wasn’t like Stiles was sitting there obsessing over whether or not Derek had a beard so really, it didn’t matter either way if he had it or not.

Stiles wanted to thank Derek’s mother, his father, his siblings, his friends, God, and everyone else in existence for the reappearance of Derek’s previously shaved beard. Clearly his prayers had been answered because there was no other reason for the beard to have made a reappearance and damn did Derek look good with that stubble.

He’d come in on Tuesday sporting a bit of scruff, like he hadn’t had time to shave that morning, but Stiles was pleasantly surprised to see it growing more and more as the days passed. Still wasn’t wearing the glasses though, which was a bummer, but he’d take the beard. At least he had that.

It was now Friday, and Stiles had managed to survive an entire week without incident. Derek acknowledged him regularly, which was so much more than he’d ever gotten in high school, and Stiles felt more comfortable in his job now. Whenever Derek left his office, he didn’t have a mini panic attack over not knowing what to do. He had plenty to keep busy with, and he’d even gone home on Wednesday to create a worksheet for missed calls.

He didn’t like how informal it was to just take a message and stick a post-it on Derek’s desk. Most people rambled at him anyway, with details they expected him to pass along to Derek. So he’d gone home and typed up a worksheet to help him collect all the information from the various phone calls, including name, department, urgency, and specific needs.

He hadn’t needed it on Thursday, since Derek had been at his desk all day working, but Stiles was
pleased to have been able to bring it up four times today since Derek was in meetings. He’d typed everything out in the little worksheet as people were relaying information to him, had fixed up some typos after the calls, and then printed them to stack them neatly on Derek’s desk.

He’d even managed to make friendly with someone in Finance, which had been doing wonders for his mornings. He’d bumped into one of the guys outside the building on Tuesday morning. He’d forgotten his pass, but Stiles had recognized him since the guy had passed by his desk a few times to grab coffee so they’d headed in together. It meant Stiles had someone to ride up the elevator with, and he asked the guy—Liam Dunbar was his name—if he arrived at that time every day. When he confirmed he did, Stiles figured he could try and make it for the same time, that way he’d have someone to head up with every day.

That had given him a new lunch buddy on Wednesday too, since he couldn’t constantly hog Ethan given he had his own friends. Stiles had managed to snag lunch with Ethan on Monday, then Ethan and Erica on Tuesday, Liam on Wednesday, and Ethan on Thursday again. He’d been spoiled with people all week, but now Liam was working through lunch, Ethan had a project meeting and Erica had plans with her fiancé so Stiles was sans-lunch buddy for the day.

Which was fine, he didn’t mind. It was just going to be weird having it be the first time he ate without someone across from him but he figured he could call his dad or Scott while he ate and catch up. His dad was off today and Scott was a few hours ahead so they should both be available.

He tried to wait for Derek to get back before going to lunch, but when it started nearing two, he was getting a little too hungry to wait. Besides, Derek had already told him he could go to lunch whenever he wanted, even if he wasn’t at his desk, so Stiles just hoped he was being honest and went to grab his food from the fridge.

A lot of the people there ate stuff from Super Natural Foods for lunch, but seeing as how Stiles and his roomies ate that for dinner more often than not, he tried not to over-eat it or he worried he’d get sick of it. So today, he had a sandwich and some chips. And a cookie, because dessert was a must.

The lunch room was busier than he was expecting considering the hour, but he didn’t worry about it and just went to find himself a seat, sitting down in the corner while pulling out his phone. He was halfway through his sandwich by the time he’d tried both his dad and Scott, neither of whom had answered, so he just putzed around on his phone instead, browsing Tumblr and then Twitter.

He’d just opened the bag of chips when the conversation happening beside him caught his attention and he frowned.

“He looked so mad in that meeting, I swear. I thought he was going to rip someone’s head off,” a girl was hissing quietly. “Why do they think it’s okay to have him working here? And in a position of power, too. He’s dangerous.”

“I heard that his family paid off some girl he got pregnant in high school,” another one of the girls at the table said quietly. “She didn’t want to get an abortion, so they paid her off to make her go away and not put his name on the birth certificate.”

“Oh, he was totally a dog in high school,” the guy sitting with them confirmed. “I heard from Becca in Benefits that he got detention so often he basically spent the whole year in detention. Had a huge attitude problem.”

“Seriously, he freaks me out,” the first girl insisted. “He only got hired because he’s Laura’s brother.”
The second Stiles realized they were talking about Derek, like, *his* Derek, he immediately whipped around just as some guy across the room stood up, looking furious.

“Excuse me, but can you please not spread rumours?”

The three at the table jumped and turned to look at him, startled. He wondered if they were humans like him, because they should’ve known better than to talk about something like this in an office where a majority of the staff had super-hearing.

“We’re not spreading rumours,” the guy insisted. “What do you know about Derek Hale?”

“Clearly more than you do,” Stiles snapped, feeling angry people were saying such things about Derek. About *his* Derek Hale!

The guy who spent all his lunchtimes reading in the cafeteria and smiling at his books because he loved them so much.

The guy who’d joined the chess club, and mathletes, and the debate team, because he loved to learn and was enthusiastic about challenges.

The guy who had not *once* gotten a detention, or a tardy, or an absence in his entire four years of high school.

Stiles was *mad*, okay! They were saying Derek was a shitty person, that his family had always been rich—which Stiles knew wasn’t true because Derek had *barely* managed to get into university—and that Derek was fucking people left, right and centre.

“Derek is a good person,” Stiles said heatedly. “He’s kind, and honest, and he likes to read, and play chess, and make sure people know they’re appreciated. He’s awesome to his friends, he’s ridiculously smart, and he wants nothing more than for people to get along. He didn’t get anyone pregnant in high school, his family *certainly* didn’t pay anyone off, and he is the epitome of nerdom that I’m pretty sure getting a detention in high school would’ve made him have a fucking heart attack.” He motioned the three of them angrily. “Shut your fucking mouths on something you don’t know about. It’s rude to spread rumours.”

“Who the fuck do you think you are?” the guy at the table asked, somewhat angrily.

“His new EA,” Stiles said, his smile all teeth. “He’s been nothing but nice to me since I got here, and trust me when I say I do *not* deserve his kindness. So shut the fuck up, finish your lunch, and get out of my face. Keep your bullshit theories to yourself before I get HR involved.”

He knew invoking HR was a low blow, but he was *not* going to tolerate people badmouthing Derek. He didn’t even know where those bullshit rumours had *come* from! Were people *blind*? It was easy to take one look at Derek and see that all he did with his time was work, and go home to read. Like a nerd.

God, Stiles loved him, he wanted to curl up with him on a couch and watch him read.

The three of them just sneered at him, one of them flashing their eyes—Werewolves, then—but obediently gathered their things and headed out of the lunch room. Stiles noticed the guy across the room watching them leave, seeming a little smug, but Stiles just turned back to his chips and Twitter.

He tensed when the chair beside him was pulled out and the guy who’d gotten to his feet across the room plopped down into it, eying him with curiosity while folding his arms on the table in front of
“Can I help you?” Stiles asked when the guy just sat there silently, watching him.

“Not a lot of people in the building would defend Derek,” the guy said, still eying him curiously. “You’ve known him less than a week, and you jump to his defence. What, expecting a raise?”

“No,” Stiles snapped, irritated. He should’ve just eaten at his desk. “He’s just a nice guy and people shouldn’t talk shit about him behind his back.”

“I find it hard to believe he’s been nice to you. All his EAs to date have been terrified of him.”

“Why?” Stiles asked, a little startled. “He’s a fucking teddy bear, look at him.”

“Hm.” The guy kept watching him, like Stiles was a puzzle he was trying to put together, then uncrossed his arms and slid one across the table to him. “Isaac Lahey.”

“Stiles Stilinski.” He shook his hand briefly then went back to his chips. “You know Derek?”

“Kind of.” He shrugged. “Erica’s engaged to one of his friends, and she’s basically my sister, so we’ve spent a lot of time together as a group. He’s a good guy, like you said.”

“Yeah.” Stiles licked some salt off his fingers, eying the guy who was still watching him intently. “So where do you work?”

“Corporate Communications,” Isaac replied. “Boring stuff, for the most part. Trying to get into Marketing, but I don’t have the background so I’ve been taking some night classes.” Isaac started telling Stiles all about his thoughts on virtually everything related to Marketing without prompting. It was kind of surprising, because when he’d first spotted him, he’d seemed like one of those quiet, kind of introverted guys. But man could he talk, and he was sassy as fuck, Stiles wasn’t sure if he loved him or hated him.

Stiles eventually caught sight of the time and cursed, realizing he’d been about a minute or two over his allotted lunch break. He and Isaac exchanged number before Stiles booked it out of the lunch room, noticing Isaac didn’t seem in any hurry to get back to his own desk. Rushing back up the stairs to the ninth floor, Stiles crammed his cookie into his mouth while walking down the corridor, heart slamming in his chest from his mad dash up the stairs.

When he rounded the corner, he saw Derek at his desk, scowling angrily. Something had probably happened in one of his many meetings, it would probably be best to avoid him.

Stiles started to head for his desk, moving around the cubby when he tensed.

“Stiles.”

Great, he’d probably noticed Stiles was a few minutes later coming back from lunch. It was the first time! And he always came early and stayed late! He knew that wasn’t an excuse, but still. It was like, three minutes, maybe four. Fuck.

Turning, he headed to Derek’s office, standing in the doorway and snapping his fingers together nervously. “Yeah?”

“What is this?” Derek demanded, holding up the stack of papers Stiles had left on his desk. It was his worksheet, the one he’d created to take down Derek’s messages.
“Uh, it’s the phonecalls you missed while you were in your meetings.”

“No, not—I can see that,” Derek said, sounding frustrated. “What’s this?” He motioned the page as a whole and Stiles wondered how Derek could possibly be mad about his layout. Then again, he deserved any kind of anger and animosity from him, but still... Things had seemed to be going well.

“Oh, it’s—I made that on Wednesday night when I got home. I just thought it might be, you know, helpful. To know what requires immediate attention and what doesn’t. I can stop using it if—”

“I like it,” Derek cut him off, though he sounded almost aggressive when he did. Stiles wondered if he didn’t realize how he sounded sometimes. Derek had been a little bit like that in high school too, but it seemed to have gotten a bit harsher with age.

It took a second for Stiles to fully register what he’d said, and he positively beamed when the words clicked. Derek liked his worksheet! Fuck, all those years of being ignored in high school and now he was being praised for something.

God, he was so gone for him, he hated that he worked for him, his life was a disaster. It sucked even more to be completely forgotten, but maybe he could... mend the fence somehow. Slowly ease himself into Derek’s life. And once they were... okay, like, friends or something, he’d ask him if he remembered that dick in high school.

Stiles was a good person, he’d never keep their history a secret from Derek, it wasn’t fair. He just didn’t want to remind him of it right now when they were still kind of shaky.

When Derek turned back to his computer, Stiles hovered for a few seconds longer. It was almost the end of his workday, since he’d gone to lunch so late, but he was sure Derek hadn’t eaten anything. He wanted to ask if he should run out and grab him something, but Derek seemed to be really focussed on what he was doing again so he figured he’d see if Derek ate before three and if not, he’d run out and get him something.

Heading back to his desk, he sat down and pulled open his top drawer, rooting through it for the cheat sheet Erica had given him on his first day. He’d made Derek’s coffee perfectly the past four days since his comment about sugar on Monday, so he felt pretty confident in his coffee-making skills now. But Erica had said she had a list of places he liked to eat, and given what he’d heard from Isaac about Erica being the fiancé of one of Derek’s friends, it stood to reason she’d actually know what he liked to eat.

Browsing the list quickly, he opened Google Chrome to see if he could order online. One of the places was right down the street, and took online orders, so he figured if Derek hadn’t eaten before he left, he’d order in advance, then head down and grab it for him.

The last few minutes of his day were slow, probably because it was Friday. Nobody liked to be all stressed out and starting new things at the end of the day on a Friday, so it made sense.

At ten-to, Derek still hadn’t left to grab a bite, so Stiles ordered two appetizers, an entree and a dessert from the place down the street, which proclaimed a ten minute wait before pick-up, which was perfect. At three on the dot, he stood up while patting his pockets to be sure he had his wallet, then moved out from behind his desk. He started to leave, then realized he didn’t want Derek to think he wasn’t saying bye or being rude or whatever so he just stuck his head into his office.

“I’ll be right back.”
“It’s three, just go home,” Derek grunted without looking up.

Stiles just smiled and then headed out, nodding a greeting to Laura while passing her. She smiled brightly at him, but didn’t stop to make small talk like she usually did. Probably because she could tell he was on a mission.

Laura came to see her brother every day around the end of the day. Stiles didn’t know why, but it was clear they both had a good relationship. He liked that the siblings were so close, mostly because he knew how hard it had been for Derek when Laura had graduated high school. It wasn’t like she was gone, considering she hadn’t gotten into university, but she wasn’t around anymore, and that seemed to weigh heavily on Derek.

Now that he thought about it, he wondered if Derek had started driving again. Pushing through the stairwell door, Stiles’ mind wandered back to the fact that Laura used to pick him up a few times a week in senior year because of the accident he’d been in. He wondered if Derek had ever gotten over his fear of driving, or if maybe Laura showed up all the time because she was his ride home and was checking on how long he’d be.

That made him sad, he really hoped Derek had gotten over his accident by now.

The walk down the street was leisurely, given the hour. A few people were out and heading home from work, either having just finished or ducking out early on a Friday, but it wasn’t overwhelmingly busy. When he entered the small restaurant, there were a few occupied tables, and someone came to greet him to ask how many would be eating. He just told them he had an order to pick up and was pleased to find out it was ready.

Paying for the meal, he thanked them before heading back to the office, hoping Derek was still there otherwise he’d just wasted money for nothing. Well, not nothing, he was sure Jackson would eat it, since none of this was anything Stiles would like.

Maybe the dessert, but he’d have to eat that before he got home, or Jackson would steal it. Greedy son of a bitch.

Climbing the stairs back up to the ninth floor, he pushed the door open and started back through the rows of desks, hearing Laura’s loud voice from Derek’s office. She was laughing about something that had happened at one of the stores, evidently having heard about it from one of the managers, and when Stiles rounded the corner, even Derek was chuckling to himself.

When his eyes caught sight of Stiles, the smile fell off his face and his expression hardened. Laura turned at the abrupt change, but she just beamed at Stiles when he approached the door, moving aside to make room for him.

“I told you to go home,” Derek said. “Go and have a life.”

“I know, but I noticed you hadn’t eaten yet today, so I was just...” He trailed off, not really knowing how to finish that sentence, and put the takeout on the edge of his desk.

Derek stared at it like it was a bomb.

“I know Werewolves need to eat a lot, I live with two of them, so I just thought you should have something if you’re planning on staying late.”

“Wow,” Laura said from the door. “That’s considerate. Wanna come and teach that to my EA? She just lets me starve.”
Derek reached out for the bag, almost looking hesitant, and then tugged it closer to himself, still seeming a bit worried, like he thought it was going to explode on him. Opening the top, he peered inside, and seemed surprised, like he hadn’t thought Stiles would’ve gotten him so much.

“Thank you,” he said, glancing up at Stiles. “I’m—Thanks.”

“No problem!” Stiles was glad he seemed happy about it, and he turned to leave the office, waving at Laura slightly. “I hope you don’t stay too late. Have a good weekend!”

“You too,” Laura said, leaning back against the open door with her arms crossed, sounding amused.

Stiles didn’t let it bother him, gathering up his things and then heading for the stairs again, waving through the glass window. Derek just nodded once curtly, but Laura waved back enthusiastically and Stiles smiled, pleased.

Things were going well so far. He was really happy.

This was actually a great job, and he got to stare at Derek all day so really, win-win.

“I can’t believe I’m only hearing now that Stiles Stilinski resurfaced.” Boyd shook his head with a small laugh, one arm draped across the back of Erica’s chair and the other bringing a beer bottle to his lips by the neck. It was a regular beer, which Derek didn’t understand, but he figured Boyd wanted the taste more than the actual inebriation.

“Did you know this asshole actually made out with him at prom?!” Kira demanded, pointing an accusatory finger at Derek while holding her own beer. Hers was definitely laced with aconite, but she was still only on her first one, so Derek wasn’t too worried about her getting all violent and clingy in intervals like she did when she got drunk.

“Wait, what?” Boyd demanded, beer almost at his lips. He let it fall back down slightly, eyes wide while staring at Derek. “You and Stiles made out at prom?! Why didn’t you tell me?”

“He didn’t even tell me until last week.” Kira punched Derek. “Asshole,” she said heatedly, taking a sip of her drink.

“It was bad timing,” Derek insisted, pulling a nacho free from the mound on the table, watching the cheese stretch before snapping. He shrugged while stuffing it into his mouth, licking his fingers and chewing. “I didn’t think I’d ever see him again.”

“I had no idea you knew Stiles in high school,” Erica said, looking between everyone at the table. She was the only one who hadn’t been around during their high school days, so she wasn’t privy to the history between Derek and Stiles the same way Kira and Boyd were. “How come he hasn’t said anything?”

“Probably because he doesn’t remember me,” Derek muttered, grabbing for another nacho. “Is anyone else gonna eat these, or just me?”

“No, shut up.” Kira shoved her hand into his face to get him to stop talking, turning to Erica. “Stiles was a dick to Derek in high school, but like, the kind of dick where you know he has a crush and is just acting out because he doesn’t know how to deal with it. Derek was adamant I was wrong, and then I find out they made out at prom because apparently Stiles was in love with him.” She turned back to Derek, giving him a look. He just cocked an eyebrow at her while licking grease off his fingers. “He has to remember you. If you remember him, he remembers you.”
“It’s better if he doesn’t remember me,” Derek muttered, grabbing for another chip covered in cheese and beef. “We’re actually getting along. He’s good at his job, his coffee is perfect, and he even went out to buy me lunch out of pocket on Friday because I was in meetings all day.”

“That’s actually adorable,” Erica said with a small grin. Great, she was going to start harassing him as much as Laura did.

“He totally remembers you. And still loves you.” Kira nudged him and Derek elbowed her rather harshly back. She’d made him drop beef off his nacho.

“Don’t tease him,” Boyd insisted with a sigh. “And you, don’t say anything.” He pointed a finger at Erica, who looked remarkably terrifying in that moment. “I know you like playing matchmaker, but there’s... a lot of history.” He cast Derek a glance before continuing. “You might think you’re helping, but you’re not. Just leave it be.”

“Fine, fine.” Erica flapped one hand at him impatiently, then sighed, reaching out for a chip herself and stuffing it into her mouth. “By the way, Isaac says he defended you at lunch on Friday.”

Derek paused in bringing another chip to his mouth, staring at Erica. Being the bitch she was, she pretended not to notice and didn’t elaborate while they all stared at her. Boyd sighed, drinking from his bottle, but Kira was the one to lose patience first.

“And?! Don’t leave us hanging!” Kira leaned over the table to shove at Erica’s shoulder lightly. “What did he say? What happened?”

“People were badmouthing you about how you were getting girls pregnant and your family was paying them to be quiet or something.” Erica shrugged one shoulder while inspecting the nachos for another chip to snatch up. “He snapped at them to shut their mouths and that they shouldn’t talk about you like that. Also said they were wrong and that you were really nice.”

“What?” Derek asked, startled. “I don’t feel like I’ve been nice. Actually, I feel like I’ve been kind of a dick to him because I have no idea how to act around him,” he muttered, about to reach for a chip that Erica snatched up first. She smirked triumphantly while popping it into her mouth. Derek just reached for another one.

Honestly, he kept trying to be nice to Stiles, but he felt so out of his element. It was weird, being above Stiles. Not only as his boss, but financially as well. Stiles had always been the golden boy. Popular, well-liked, smart, talented, athletic, good-looking. He was everything, and that was why Derek loved him so much.

While Stiles was still smart, talented, athletic—those arms—and good-looking, he seemed to be a little lacking in the popularity department for the moment, and he wasn’t making very many friends if the way he was talking to people was anything to go by. Sure, it sounded like he’d only been a dick to the people bad-mouthing Derek, but still. It was weird to realize that Stiles was suddenly not unattainable. Derek might...

He might actually have a chance. If Stiles was honestly still single, if only he could stop freaking out and just speak to him like a normal person instead of snapping at him all the time, maybe they could... be friends? Or something? Anything, really, Derek wasn’t picky.

“Laura says he leaves smiling every day,” Erica informed him, leaning into Boyd.

“Probably happy to be walking out of there,” Derek muttered.

“No, she says he just looks happy in general,” Erica insisted.
“And he bought you lunch,” Kira reminded him, pointing her finger at him with the same hand holding her beer. “That means something. Maybe adult Derek and adult Stiles can put high school Derek and high school Stiles in a corner and get along for once. Use words about their feelings instead of staring longingly at one another across the office.”

“We’re not across the office from each other,” Derek insisted.

“Notice how he commented on the distance and not the longing stares,” Boyd stage-whispered to Kira.

“Clearly still gone for him,” she stage-whispered back.

“All right, enough!” Derek insisted, glaring at the table as a whole. “I get it, Stiles is back, it’s hilarious. But this is really confusing, and honestly frustrating and terrifying, so can we just—” He made a sharp cutting motion. “Let’s move on to something else. Have you guys settled on a venue yet?”

“Nice segue,” Boyd teased, but he was kind enough not to push any more than he had and started talking about plans for his wedding with Erica next year. It was still a long way out, but they both worked long hours, and wanted time to plan everything perfectly, so they’d given themselves as much time as possible to get everything organized.

He listened while Boyd and Erica spoke about the few decisions they’d made so far, Kira jumping in to offer suggestions on things they weren’t sure about. Derek mostly didn’t say anything, he was content to listen, and he loved the way Boyd’s face lit up like it did whenever he and Erica spoke about their impending nuptials.

Honestly, Derek was jealous of Boyd sometimes for having found his mate. The world was a huge place, the chances of finding a mate were always slim, but people seemed to manage it more often than not. So many Werewolves Derek knew had found their mates, even Cora. Sure, hers was in Germany, but she’d still found him. She’d gone on that trip in her third year of university, she’d bumped into Erik, they’d fallen in love, they’d realized they were mates.

Laura worked too much to have found one, but he knew she would. If Peter had found a mate, then Laura definitely would. Boyd had Erica, he knew Kira—despite not being a Werewolf—was going to find someone who loved and respected her, and what did Derek have?

A crush on a human who didn’t even remember him. His life was the worst.

Still, he was happy for Boyd. Happy that things had worked out for him, that he and Erica were so into each other. He liked the way Boyd’s face lit up whenever she spoke about something she was passionate about, and how Erica always gave Boyd her full attention whenever he spoke because he so rarely did.

They were so perfect for each other, and he was glad they’d found one another. Glad he and Erica had become friends, which had led to Derek introducing her to Boyd. Things happened for a reason, so maybe this thing with Stiles was also happening for a reason. Maybe they’d found one another again because they had some unfinished business. It might be positive, it might not. Maybe the business was confirmation that they weren’t meant to be, and Derek should put himself out there and start dating or something.

But maybe it wasn’t. Maybe the universe was telling him, “Hey, we thought you might like a second shot at this, don’t fuck it up this time.”
And if that was true, that was **terrifying**, because he didn’t **want** to fuck anything up with Stiles. God, he didn’t, he just wanted him in his life.

“Seriously though,” Kira said, walking slowly beside Derek with her arms wrapped through one of his and her head on his shoulder, “you’re okay, right? Having him around again.”

“It’s different,” Derek admitted. “He’s the same, but completely different. He treats me now how he treated everyone else back then. Guess he really just had a hate-on for me in high school.”

“Yeah right.” Kira reached up to blindly flick him in the face. She got the edge of his nose, but didn’t try again. “He made out with you in the bathroom at prom. He totally had the hots for you, like I kept telling you.”

“Yeah, yeah, you know everything,” he said, rolling his eyes.

“I do,” she insisted haughtily. “So, now what?”

“Nothing.” Derek sighed. “Just gonna... continue on as we have been. No reason to open that door. Not yet, anyway.”

“Mm.” Kira didn’t seem to like that plan, but she was kind enough not to press the issue. Derek knew this was something he’d have to figure out on his own, how he wanted to proceed, how close he was willing to let Stiles get.

He just hoped he didn’t wait **too** long. He doubted the universe was going to give him a third chance.

“I can’t **believe** you’ve never seen **Star Wars,**” Stiles muttered, tapping his pen against his desk and twisting slightly in his chair, inching it side to side. “One of my best friends hasn’t seen it either, and it pains me. What’s wrong with you people?”

“It’s boring?” Liam offered, arms folded over the top part of Stiles’ cubby and shrugging. “It’s like, cowboys in space. But with swords.”

“**Exactly,**” Stiles insisted, pointing his pen at Liam, a little offended. “**What’s better** than cowboys in space with swords? It’s like, samurai-cowboys! Where else are you gonna get a spaceship chase through an asteroid belt? It’s bomb!”

“If you say so.” Liam shrugged, resting his cheek on one arm and letting out an annoyed sigh.

Their entire building had lost power about twenty minutes ago. Apparently the whole block was down, which was making the financial sector panic like nobody’s business because, oh no the markets! For their industry though, it wasn’t really causing any problems aside from the employees being stuck with nothing to do. Management all had cell phones, so all emergencies were being dealt with as normal, but everyone else was kind of stuck doing nothing.

Honestly, even Derek was stuck doing nothing, because his cell phone had only rung once in the past twenty minutes and it was just his sister checking in on him. He’d spent the rest of the time sitting at his desk reading a book.

Stiles had tried **really hard** not to smile to himself about it because it was so reminiscent of high school, and he loved that. He honestly really liked that Derek hadn’t changed in all those years they’d been apart, because it was why he loved him so much.
Honestly, things had been really good with Derek the past little while. It was now Thursday of Stiles’ third week working for him, and while Derek was still kind of aggressive and abrasive at times, Stiles wasn’t bothered by it like other people seemed to be. That was just how Derek was sometimes, and he was never rude, he just came off as a hardass.

And working for him was surprisingly fun. Stiles enjoyed it, and he got to meet a lot of people. He also learned really quickly who Derek liked talking to and who he didn’t. When he wasn’t on the phone, and it rang, he always checked who it was. Whenever he made a face, Stiles would always pick up the phone first and take a message. Derek had seemed startled the first time he’d done it, but now whenever the phone rang and it was someone he didn’t like, Stiles grabbed it the second he saw the name and Derek always had these private little smiles on his face that he thought Stiles didn’t notice.

He noticed, and he loved it.

And thank God the beard had returned in the past two weeks! Stiles had missed it so much, but it was back in all its glory and really doing things to Stiles’ self-control. So far, he felt like he’d done well with keeping his arousal down around Derek, but he knew it was only a matter of time. Because fucking hell was he good-looking. Like, so good-looking. Stiles wanted to run his hands all over him.

In a way, it would be good when the beard disappeared again, because Derek’s hotness levels would go down by like, maybe three points, so that Stiles’ self-control would increase. Not that Derek wasn’t still attractive without the beard, he was just three percent less attractive, and for someone who’d wanted to jump him his entire high school life, that three percent made huge difference to Stiles.

He figured Derek shaved once a month or something, just to keep things trimmed and neat, but he’d learned from Isaac during one of their lunches together that apparently Derek never shaved so everyone was surprised to see him walk in the other week without a beard. Stiles figured maybe he’d just felt like a fresh start, it happened sometimes.

He was still waiting for the glasses to make a comeback. Those had made him both hot and cute. He had no idea how, but it was what had happened, and he was so looking forward to them coming back. He kind of wanted to ask how it was possible a Werewolf needed them, but it seemed to be a sore subject for him given the one time he’d overheard Laura teasing him about it, Derek had gotten angry.

Stiles figured he’d only gotten so angry because it was his sister, who clearly teased him all the time, but he wasn’t exactly eager to try his luck.

All this wasn’t to say he was only attracted to what Derek looked like, but it was definitely a bonus. Stiles had been in love with him long before he turned into a veritable Greek God, so the looks were just a bonus.

A nice bonus. Like ordering one pizza and getting two instead. Or ordering a piece of cake and getting the whole cake.

Wow, apparently Stiles was hungry, all he could think about was food.

Glancing at his work phone for the time, he remembered as he looked at it that the power was out and checked his cell phone instead. It was nearing two, so well past his lunchtime, but he didn’t really want to head out and get food in case the power came back on.
Then again, Derek hadn’t eaten yet either... Maybe he could grab them both something. There were a ton of places to eat around the area, and while he knew their street was out of power, he was sure walking up a few blocks would solve that problem.

“You eat?” Stiles asked Liam while shoving his phone back into his pocket.

“Yeah, a while back. You?”

Stiles shook his head and stood. “I’m gonna go grab something. Walk a few blocks north, I’m sure the power’s on over that way, everyone says the outage is only affecting this area.”

“Sure, ditch me to boredom because I haven’t seen Star Wars,” Liam teased, but he pulled away from Stiles’ cubby and wandered back towards the rest of his coworkers while Stiles patted his pockets to make sure he had his wallet and keys.

Moving out from around his desk, he went to Derek’s door and knocked lightly against the jamb, receiving a grunt in response. He noticed Derek hadn’t flipped a page in a while, and wondered if maybe his mind had wandered. Maybe he was thinking about work, even while the power was out. Finance never had a spare moment, so while the rest of his department seemed unperturbed by the break, Derek was probably thinking about everything that was coming once the power came back on.

“I’m going to head out and grab some food,” Stiles told him. “A few blocks up should have power, and I know there’s a bunch of places to eat that way. Did you have a preference on anything I can grab for you?”

Derek looked up at him, almost frowning, like he was confused.

“What?”

“I haven’t eaten yet,” Stiles said in way of explanation. “And I haven’t seen you eat. Since I can’t do anything until the power comes back, I figured it was a good time to run out and grab us something. What kind of food do you feel like having? I know there’s a sushi place up on Cordova, and a great falafel place on Kings. What are you feeling?”

Derek was staring at him kind of strangely. Stiles wasn’t sure why, it wasn’t like he hadn’t gone out to grab Derek food before. Maybe it was because Stiles was asking what he wanted. Usually he just picked something from the list Erica had given him, but considering the list was only for places in the immediate area, he didn’t want to just guess.

“Sushi sounds good,” Derek said slowly, almost hesitantly.

Seriously, how anyone was scared of this guy made Stiles want to laugh uncontrollably. He was such an awkward duck. An adorable teddy bear. He loved his stupid face so much.

“Sure, sushi’s delicious.” Stiles pulled his phone up to open a new note for himself. “What kind of things do you like? I’m sure most places have a lot of similar dishes, but just in case, give me a list.”

Derek rattled off a few different things, Stiles typing them all out in his notes. He confirmed he wanted maybe four rolls and a tempura or karrage, depending on what they had available, so Stiles noted that down as well. When he started to turn, Derek called him back. The other man hesitated briefly, then motioned Stiles over, pulling a post-it off his desk and writing something down on it.

“My cell,” he muttered, handing over the post-it. “In case—you know. In case. And here.” Derek
arched his back—Lord have mercy!—and pulled his wallet out of his pocket, grabbing two twenties and folding them together before handing them over. “You can get whatever you want, too. On me.”

“Oh, thank you. That’s okay though, sushi’s expensive so—”

“Stiles.” Derek’s voice hardened, as did his expression. “You’ve been buying me food out of pocket for two weeks. Take the damn money and buy whatever you want for lunch.”

It was hard to argue with that expression directed right at him, so Stiles obediently reached out to take the money. He was very careful not to brush fingers with Derek, because there was only so much Stiles could handle, and touching him was not one of them.

Nodding once, he thanked him awkwardly, then turned to leave the office, heart pounding while heading for the stairs. Liam was beside him instantly, looking concerned.

“Are you okay? Your heart’s beating really fast.”

“I’m fine, just adrenaline from the run to the sushi place I’m about to do,” Stiles lied. Which was a stupid thing to do, because Liam just cocked a knowing eyebrow at him. Stiles waved him away impatiently and hurried for the stairs.

He felt better once he was outside, walking leisurely towards Cordova and the sushi place. He hoped the power outage hadn’t reached that far, but he could see some lights on in buildings as he walked further down the blocks, so he knew it should be fine by the time he got there.

Reaching the applicable sushi place, he saw that they had all the items Derek had asked for. He decided to get him five rolls instead of four, because Derek was a Werewolf and didn’t seem to eat very much. They had a whole bunch of different tempuras though and Derek hadn’t specified which one he liked, so Stiles ended up texting him—which was insane because holy shit, he had Derek’s number!—and was told he favoured yam tempura but was fine with anything they had.

Ordering Derek’s meal, Stiles debated if he could rush to Kings to get some falafels or if that would be a waste of time before deciding to just eat sushi. He ordered himself his own food and then sat at one of the tables to wait on it, texting with Jackson and Ethan when he saw them chatting in their group chat on Whatsapp.

Apparently they were making dinner plans, and while they’d asked for Stiles’ input, his prolonged silence had made them decide his opinion was now null and void and he’d be stuck with whatever they decided on.

[Stiles]
Isn’t it date night?
[Stiles]
Am I suddenly invited to date night?

[Ethan]
Date night was yesterday?

[Whitty]
wtf loser you didn’t notice us gone yesterday?!

[Stiles]
Now that you mention it that explains why I didn’t starve last night
you’re the worst roommate if we ever go missing we’re fucked
screw you Stiles! like you’re not getting a fat ass from all that junk you shove into your body!

You like my fat ass, admit it ;)
You’re an ass guy ;)

While watching you two flirt is cute and all
You okay with going out for dinner tonight?
We were thinking Cinco de Mayo

Yeah, sounds good.
Nice! Yeah, haven’t been in a few weeks!
They’re probably thinking I died...

They asked about you when I went last
She was worried about you and wanted to make sure you were okay

Awwww I love her so much!
So yeah, definitely down for Mexican
I’m only now having lunch though so a later dinner would be preferable.

Why so late?
Is power not out on your floor too?

No it is but I didn’t want to go until it came back on
Then figured it’d be better to grab good before it came back on since having it out right now means I have nothing to do
*food
Power still out then?
[Ethan]
Yeah
[Ethan]
I’ve got things I can do without power
[Ethan]
But it’s still frustrating

[Whitty]
oh whine whine woe is me
[Whitty]
you losers are getting a brain break appreciate it

[Stiles]
You get a brain break all the time

[Ethan]
Don’t get mad because we have brains and thus require brain breaks, it’s not our fault you don’t have one

[Stiles]
What with you not having one
[Stiles]
AHAHAHA YES ETHAN! -high five-

[Whitty]
fuck both of you!!!

[Stiles]
Maybe later gorgeous ;)
[Stiles]
Threesome ;)

[Ethan]
Don’t tempt us

Stiles let out a huge laugh at that, mostly because he liked it when Ethan was the one to make comments like that. They had a good relationship, but it was still nice to know that he was comfortable enough with Stiles to make jokes like that. And also comfortable enough to know where Stiles and Jackson stood with one another. Boyfriends got jealous, but Ethan seemed to really understand how much the two of them cared for each other without it being sexual.

They were like brothers, always had been, always would be.

Stiles looked up when someone approached him and stood, thanking them while taking the takeout bags and setting them on the table so he could type back.

[Stiles]
Food’s done, so gotta head back to feed myself and Derek
[Stiles]
Ethan have fun with no lights. Jackson get back to work.

[Whitty]
whoa whoa whoa
[Whitty]
what?
[Whitty]
food for WHO?

[Ethan]
Wait you said you were grabbing lunch for YOU why do you have food for Derek?

[Stiles]
Oh he hasn’t eaten either
[Stiles]
I was going out anyway so I offered to get him something.

[Whitty]
you are still so gone for that guy

[Ethan]
That was nice of you
[Ethan]
Maybe in a little while you can take him out to dinner? Talk about high school?

Stiles winced at those words. He wanted to talk to Derek about high school but... not right now. They were still in that weird in between phase where Derek didn’t hate him, but he clearly didn’t like him. Or at least didn’t trust him. He always checked the takeout bags Stiles brought him slowly, like he was expecting some kind of mechanism inside that would slap a pie into his face the second he opened it. It was weird.

Deciding not to answer, he shoved his phone back into his pocket and grabbed the food, heading back out towards work. When he passed a certain street, he saw that the lights were all still out, meaning they hadn’t fixed the power outage yet. It had to be going on fifty minutes by now, and he could imagine the financial sector literally foaming at the mouth from not being able to place trades. Then again, he wasn’t sure if the market was still open... What time did the market close? He didn’t have any investments so he wouldn’t know.

When he got back to the building, he couldn’t help but smile slightly as he followed a group up the stairs, all of them bitching and moaning about how hard it was. He did it literally every day in every building he entered, so this was nothing. It was just another day.

They got off at the seventh floor and Stiles continued on to the ninth, walking through the door and noticing Liam playing a paper football game with one of his coworkers. He felt like he’d never seen anyone play that before, but ever since Tony Stark and Nebula played it in Avengers: End Game, more and more people played it when they were bored at work. People at his old job used to play it, too.

Moving to the end of the hall, he found Derek still reading at his desk, though it looked like he’d actually flipped some pages this time.

“Your food, my liege!” Stiles proclaimed dramatically, bringing the bags into his office and setting them on the edge of his desk.

Derek looked up at him, confused. “What?”

“Oh, uh, sorry. I’m—never mind. Um, here.” Stiles opened the bags and started pulling out the
food. He’d only bought two rolls for himself and a miso soup, so it was easy to divvy everything up between the two of them.

Derek tugged at the edge of one of his plastic containers, dragging the sushi closer to himself, but Stiles noticed he was eyeing the amount of food Stiles had bought for himself.

“I told you to get whatever you wanted,” Derek accused, as if he thought two rolls and a miso soup weren’t enough.

Stiles was human, it was plenty. “I did. California roll, Philadelphia roll and a soup. It’s more than enough. Oh, and...” Stiles dug into his pocket for the change, holding it out to Derek. “Your change.”

“Keep it,” Derek said without looking at him, pulling the rest of his food over. “You buy me food all the time, it’s fine.”

“But I don’t—”

“Keep it.” Derek looked up at him, eyes flashing. Stiles only knew they had because of the difference in hue, like he did with Jackson and Ethan.

“Fine.” Stiles sighed and shoved it back into his pocket. “Don’t think this’ll stop me from getting you food next time.” He handed over a pair of chopsticks and a majority of the soya sauce packets, then gathered his own things to head for his desk to eat.

“Thank you,” Derek called after him, almost in afterthought.

“No problem.” Stiles grinned over his shoulder, moving to sit down at his desk. He organized himself so that he could dip his food into the soya sauce and wasabi without making a mess, and once he was done, he figured he might as well make the most of this lunch time.

Pulling his phone out, he checked the time to be sure it wasn’t too early or too late, ignored the messages from Ethan and Jackson, then pulled up his contacts. Putting the phone to his ear, he popped a piece of sushi into his mouth with his fingers, then realized he hadn’t washed his hands and unwrapped the chopsticks.

“Shouldn’t you be working?”

“And hello to you too, father of mine,” he said, rolling his eyes. “Power’s out, so I’m eating lunch.”

“Little late for lunch,” his dad commented, and Stiles could just picture him checking his watch for the time. “Everything okay?”

“Yup,” Stiles said around a mouthful of rice and imitation crab. “Just thinkin’ about my pops, so thought I’d give you a call. How was your shift?”

“Long,” was the response, which could only mean one thing.

“Dad!” Stiles insisted, chopsticks hovering over his food and annoyance in his tone. “You’re still working? You need to take a break sometimes, you’re gonna kill yourself.”

“I know my limits, I’ve been working this job longer than you’ve been alive.”

“Excuse me, I was alive when you became sheriff,” Stiles insisted dryly.
“Smartass,” his dad said, voice fond. “You been doing all right? How's work been?”

“Work’s good,” Stiles admitted, looking down at his food and adding some wasabi directly onto his next piece of sushi. He avoided looking up, since he was sure Derek could hear every word, but at least he'd know Stiles wasn’t lying since he could hear his heartbeat. “It’s been going well.”

“Finally getting the hang of it?”

“Yeah, I think so. I’m not perfect, but I’m doing my best.”

“You always do.” His dad sounded proud now, and Stiles resisted the urge to groan in embarrassed. “Got any time off coming up? Any plans for you to come by and visit?”

“Well, I’m not even a month in, so uh, you know. But I’ll be sure to let you know as soon as I’m heading home.”

“Good. I miss you.”

“I miss you too, dad,” Stiles admitted, poking at some of the cream cheese in one of his rolls.

“I’m getting a call. I gotta go, kiddo. Take care of yourself, okay?”

“You too. Love you dad.”

“Love you too, Stiles.”

Stiles hung up with a sigh, dropping his phone on his desk. He glanced up and found Derek staring right at him through the window of his office. As soon as he saw Stiles looking, Derek lowered his gaze back down to his book. Stiles felt like he seemed a little pleased. Maybe happy? He’d heard from a lot of people, including Erica, Ethan and Isaac, that Derek had a hard time keeping Executive Assistants. They were all scared of him, or thought he was out to get them or something.

Stiles didn’t know how he’d have felt about Derek if he hadn’t grown up with him, but he couldn’t see him as anything other than a huge teddy bear. An attractive teddy bear, but still. He was actually a really great boss. He said things that Stiles supposed could be perceived as mean, but they weren’t.

Like when he bitched at Stiles to go home. He wasn’t being a dick about it, he was legitimately trying to get Stiles to leave so he’d have some semblance of a life. He actually really cared about the people who worked for him.

Hell, one of the jobs Stiles had been tasked with this week was planning a huge pizza lunch for the department for tomorrow, including drinks and dessert. Apparently they were about to move into the busy period of the season for Finance, and Derek was trying to keep morale up. Stiles thought that was really kind of him, considering he knew he was paying out of pocket instead of using company funds.

Sure, Derek had money, but that wasn’t the point. The point was he was using said money for his staff, and that was amazing.

Stiles finished up his lunch and then collected his garbage in one of the bags. He went to grab Derek’s too, since it’d be better to toss it out in the kitchenette instead of their own trash cans to avoid anything spilling through the bags and smelling.
While he headed back to his desk, he heard Derek on his cell phone. He was rubbing at his forehead, sounding exhausted and frustrated at the same time.

“Right. Okay. Thanks Peter.” He pulled the phone away and tossed it onto his desk, sighing deeply while rubbing at his face with both hands.

“Everything okay?” Stiles asked uncertainly.

Derek let his hands drag the rest of the way down his face. “You might as well go home. Power’s not coming back on today. Can you let the floor know?”

“Sure.” Stiles could tell Derek was stressed. He was probably thinking about everything that he’d have to do tomorrow because the rest of his day was shot. “Um, can I do anything else? Do you need anything? Coffee?”

Derek paused, watching Stiles for a moment, then nodded once. “Sure, thanks. Let the floor know they can go home first.”

“Okay.” Stiles patted the jamb lightly, then went to walk around, letting Finance know they could leave, and alerting all the other managers and VPs on the floor that the power was out for the day and everyone was to head home.

Half the floor was empty by the time Stiles headed for the kitchenette to make Derek’s coffee. He felt bad that he was going to be sticking around, but he supposed that was what being the brother of the owner meant. He cared more about the business because he wanted it to succeed.

Bringing the coffee to Derek’s office, he found him typing an email on his phone, squinting at it like the letters were too small. Stiles wondered if he was wearing contacts, or if he needed his glasses right now and didn’t have them.

“Can I do anything else?” Stiles asked, setting the coffee down. “I can stay if you need me to. File paperwork or whatever.”

“It’s fine, you can go,” Derek grumbled.

Stiles nodded once, feeling bad again, and turned to head out.

“Thank you,” Derek said to his back, as if in afterthought. “I appreciate it.”

“No problem.” Stiles offered him a smile over his shoulder. “I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“Yeah.” Derek went back to typing his email on his phone, but Stiles felt at least a little better when he noticed him sipping at his coffee while he was heading out.

Even if it wasn’t much, at least he felt like he’d done something.

Derek rubbed at his forehead, feeling exhausted and grumpy because his eyes were hurting. He hated that he still felt the momentary pain of his eyes stinging before his Werewolf anatomy would kick in and heal the ache. The frustrating thing was the pain kept coming back so he’d had this constant pain-no pain-pain cycle going on and he hated it.

He also hated that it was almost nine on a Tuesday and he was still sitting in his office. He’d known things were going to heat up, but he hadn’t realized how much. He was glad for the pizza lunch he’d done the past Friday, because things were about to get really busy for his team, and he
knew he got grouchy whenever he got stressed.

Great, more rumours to spread about him. Well, whatever. People were assholes, they could think whatever they wanted about him. At least his friends stood up for him.

And Stiles, apparently.

Stiles, who’d gone to HR the day before because someone had started a new rumour about Derek sexually harassing one of the girls in Benefits. Rumours like that could ruin people, and Stiles had been adamant that the times the people were claiming Derek was harassing this girl, he’d been sitting at his desk.

The girl in question even came forward to admit she had no idea how the rumour had started, because all she’d told her friends was that she rode up the elevator with Derek once and he’d said he liked her blouse. They’d chatted about where she’d bought it because Laura’s birthday was coming up and he thought she might like it.

That was it. And the girl was very honest about it, and said she’d mentioned it to some of the others in her team and apparently that had gotten twisted into something more than it truly was.

The rumour had been quelled, and Derek appreciated that Stiles had actually stormed to HR to demand they do something about it. He supposed it was because Stiles himself was usually part of HR, and hearing the rumours being spread about his boss rubbed him the wrong way. Either way, whatever the reason, Derek appreciated it.

He appreciated it more because it was Stiles. Who’d hated him in high school. Except also hadn’t. Their relationship was weird.

Kira kept insisting that they should talk, air everything out, but Derek didn’t know if he wanted to do that yet. Stiles was only just starting his fourth week under him, and he still hadn’t shown any signs of recognition. Derek didn’t want to rock the boat, he liked this weird pseudo understanding they had of one another. It was better this way.

He was halfway through another budget review when he heard a door slam down the corridor and paused. It was late, no one else should’ve been there. He knew security usually did their rounds, but they always took the elevator and he’d already seen the security guard recently.

He listened while footsteps approached, staring towards the corner when it seemed the person was heading his way. Sure enough, a figure rounded the bend, and started violently at the sight of him.

“Christ on a cracker!” Stiles slapped a hand to his chest, sagging against the wall. “Trying to give me a heart attack?”

“What are you doing here?” Derek asked, confused. “And how did you get up the stairs, aren’t they locked at this hour?”

“Oh, I went out with some work people but didn’t want to bring my bag with me, so I left it here.” Stiles went to his desk and pulled his messenger bag out from under it, throwing the strap over his shoulder. “And someone else was just coming out of the stairwell when I showed up, so I got in that way.” He approached the office door, eying Derek slightly. “What are you still doing here?”

“Working,” Derek grunted, turning back to his computer.

“You know it’ll still be there tomorrow, right?” Stiles asked. Derek turned to glare at him and the other man held up both hands in surrender. “Just saying.”
Derek knew he was right. Besides, he was getting cranky, and he was hungry. He wouldn’t get much more done by sticking around in this state out of stubbornness.

“Did you eat, at least? I can run out and grab you something if you want.”

Stiles was always considerate about his food intake. He mentioned he lived with two Werewolves—Derek knew one of them was Erica’s Marketing friend, and the other had to be Jackson—so he was probably really attuned with the needs of Werewolves. Not to mention Scott when they were growing up, so it made sense Stiles’ first concern with him was always food.

“No, you’re right.” Derek dragged one hand down his face again, exhausted. “I shouldn’t stick around. It’s late, and I’m not doing myself any favours.”

Stiles narrowed his eyes suspiciously at him. “Are you just trying to trick me into thinking you’re leaving when you’re not?”

“No.” Derek locked his computer, as if to prove his point, then got to his feet. He started packing away his things, putting them in his briefcase and snapping it shut. Grabbing his suit jacket off the back of his chair, he motioned for Stiles to back up so he could exit his office, shutting and locking the door.

Stiles seemed pleased, like he was glad he’d bullied Derek into going home. He’d have to stop somewhere on the way, he didn’t have any food left in his fridge, though he knew that would change soon since Laura would be moving in the week after next when their parents came to visit. Laura was the worst when it came to buying more food than she could ever possibly eat.

When they reached the end of the corridor, Derek stabbed the down button just as Stiles started to head for the stairs.

“It won’t take long for the elevator at this hour,” Derek informed him.

Stiles paused with his hand on the knob, staring at Derek for a minute.

“Oh. Uh, that’s not, um...”

“Scared to be alone in the elevator with me?” Derek asked, trying to keep some of the bitterness out of his tone. He just couldn’t stop thinking about the rumours that circulated because he’d shared the lift with someone. He tried to remind himself Stiles wasn’t one of those people, considering he’d come to his defence, but it still kind of irked him to realize that Stiles didn’t feel comfortable being alone in an elevator with him.

“What?” Stiles asked, confused. “No, of course not.”

The elevator dinged, Derek turning to it, and when the doors opened, he reached out one hand to keep them in place and turned to look at Stiles.

Every line of his body was rigid while he stared at the elevator, like it was his personal enemy. Slowly, he let his hand drop from the knob and he grabbed the strap of his messenger bag tightly in both hands, moving slowly to the elevator. Derek frowned when he saw him hesitate briefly before stepping foot in it.

He moved in after him, reaching out to stab the ground floor button, and then waited while the doors closed.

He watched Stiles out of the corner of his eye, confused. He was standing perfectly still, hands
gripping the strap of his bag tightly enough that they were turning white, and he was wedged back into the corner like he was trying to make himself small.

Seriously, *was* he scared of Derek? He’d never given any indication of that before, he’d always acted like he enjoyed Derek’s company. The brief interactions they had throughout the day, anyway.

So why was—

Derek dropped his jacket and briefcase, throwing both hands out towards the wall when the elevator jerked violently and the power went out. The emergency lights came on a second later, Derek blinking a few times to try and get his Werewolf vision to regulate with the lower light.

The lift remained perfectly still, which was odd, because normally when the power went out, there was an automatic mechanism for the elevator to go to the closest floor and open the doors.

“That’s weird.” Derek stabbed at the alarm button a few times. The intercom crackled, and he could tell someone was speaking, but it was garbled and he couldn’t make out the words. “Hello? We’re stuck in the elevator, is someone there?”

More garbled nonsense, but Derek wasn’t too concerned. Someone knew they were in there, that was the important thing.

It occurred to him then that Stiles had been suspiciously quiet behind him. Uncharacteristically quiet. Derek frowned and turned to look at him, and felt his stomach bottom out.

Stiles looked like he wasn’t breathing. He was gripping his bag so tightly he *had* to be hurting himself and his eyes were wide while he stared at the elevator doors. His heart was slowly but surely beginning to pick up in speed, and Derek was now pretty sure the hesitance upstairs wasn’t about being in the elevator alone with him.

“Stiles?”

It was like saying his name had snapped him out of whatever trance he’d been in. Stiles’ heartbeat skyrocketed and he immediately started to hyperventilate, reaching up with both hands and clawing at the collar of his button down.

“Stiles, hey!” Derek moved to him instantly, grabbing his shoulders and feeling his own heartbeat begin to increase in speed. Holy shit, Stiles was fucking terrified right now, the scent blasting off him almost overwhelming. “Stiles, it’s okay, you’re okay!”

“I can’t breathe.” Stiles was tugging harshly at the collar of his shirt with one hand, the button snapping off and bouncing off Derek’s chest. Stiles’ other hand had come up to grab at the front of Derek’s, like he could somehow pull oxygen from him to save himself. “I can’t breathe.”

Shit, Derek had no idea what to do! Stiles sounded like every inhale was painful, and his heart sounded like it was a second away from going into cardiac arrest, and his knees were buckling and fuck!

“Stiles, it’s okay, stay with me, you’re okay!” Derek had to grab at Stiles’ elbows when his knees gave out to stop him from hitting the ground hard. He crouched quickly, lowering Stiles down so he was sitting down, but the other man was still clawing at the front of his own shirt, trying to make room for him to breathe even though the shirt had long ago left his skin.

Derek didn’t know what to do! Stiles was going to hyperventilate himself into unconsciousness!
Distract him! his brain shouted, but Derek didn’t know how! He had no idea what he could possibly say to Stiles to distract him right now!

His mind went back to all the conversations he’d overheard in high school, all the conversations he’d overheard since Stiles had started working for him. Stiles liked Star Wars. He’d always liked it, and he remembered him berating Liam about never having seen it the week before during the power outage.


Stiles was still breathing exceptionally fast, one hand tugging at Derek’s shirt and the other at his own. He tried to bow his head, as if that would help him breathe, but Derek wouldn’t let him. He needed to get him to calm down, because he was going to pass out and Derek would lose his fucking mind if he was stuck in an elevator with a passed out Stiles.

He kept trying to get him to talk about his favourite characters, but that didn’t seem to be helping. Stiles was still breathing as hard as ever, and Derek could see the way his eyes were starting to lose focus. He was going to lose him, Stiles was going to pass out.

Fuck!

He’d just inhaled to try again with the character question, since he had no idea what else to do, when a thought occurred to him. It was a conversation from a long, long time ago. One he’d overheard while Stiles and Jackson had been walking past him in the corridor in sophomore year. They’d been arguing about which of the movies was the best, and he distinctly remembered both of them agreeing that the prequels were garbage and that Jar Jar Binks needed to die a hot, fiery death of pain and agony.

Derek immediately changed tactics mid-exhale.

“What one is your favourite?” he blurted out. “I think mine is the first one. Not the first one, but like, Episode I. I loved it so much. The graphics in that? So good.”

He heard Stiles let out a longer, slightly harsher exhale, and for a split second, Stiles’ expression changed to something that looked a bit like confusion.

“Such a good movie. That hovercraft race thing they did? Amazing. And Jar Jar Binks? Literally the best character in the history of Star Wars. I was sad they didn’t keep him around for the next two movies. He was the highlight of Episode I for me.”

Stiles was still breathing relatively quickly, but it was... a little slower now. Derek could see actual emotions in his eyes, a bit on his face. So this was working, at least. Better than asking him over and over who his favourite character was.

Derek tried to think of more things he remembered Stiles hating about the prequels, as well as anything else he remembered Stiles saying recently. He knew he’d been watching The Mandalorian because he and Isaac had been talking about it at lunch one time when Derek had gone down to the lunch room to use the vending machine.

“Episode II was pretty great, too. Loved that they cast Hayden Christiansen as Anakin. He’s so expressive, has such a good range, you know? Amazing acting just, such a good choice.”
“What?” Stiles managed to get out, staring at Derek like he was some kind of hideous alien.

“And have you been watching *The Mandalorian*? I get that everyone was excited about it, but I’m getting kind of bored, to be honest. It’s all about baby Yoda this, and baby Yoda that. I couldn’t care less about baby Yoda, he’s making the whole story boring.”

“Baby Yoda is a *treasure*,” Stiles insisted, his breathing just *that bit* slower than a moment ago.

Derek made a sceptical face. “Is he though? I mean, I didn’t sign up for hours of watching a CGI puppet waddle around. I signed up for hours of watching Pedro Pascal kick ass and so far it’s been the other way around. The show would be better off without baby Yoda.”

Stiles let out an affronted noise, and Derek was positive he was about to get some kind of lecture when the elevator jerked again and the lights flickered back on. Stiles’ hands gripped at Derek’s shirt urgently, and his breathing kicked back up a notch, but Derek kept their eyes locked together, hands still on his face. The elevator was moving down, they were almost out of this, he just needed to keep him together until they hit the ground floor.

“Yeah, baby Yoda sucks. Whoever thought of that idea should get fired. Nobody wants to watch a show about baby Yoda.”

When the doors opened, Stiles tore himself away from Derek and practically stumbled out of the elevator on all fours. The security guard let out a startled shout, because he’d been right outside the lift.

“Uh, are you okay, Mr. Hale?”

“Uh, are you okay?”

“Son? Are you okay?”

“Can you—” Derek held out his briefcase and jacket to the security guard. “I’m gonna get him into your chair, if that’s okay.”

“Of course.” The guard straightened and took Derek’s things.

Once his hands were free, Derek bent down and grabbed Stiles under the arms, hauling him up by the armpits. He wrapped one arm around Stiles’ middle and pulled one of the other man’s over his own shoulders, then helped him walk towards the security desk on shaky legs. Once he got him into the chair, the security guard said he’d grab him some water and set Derek’s things on the desk before hurrying off to do that.
Stiles had bent over slightly so his head was between his knees, and while unsure of his welcome, Derek rubbed gently at his back, hoping he wasn’t overstepping. It was just one of those soothing things his mother always did to him, and he felt like Stiles could use something soothing right then.

He wanted to ask if he was okay, but that felt like a stupid thing to ask. Stiles’ heart was still pounding in his chest, and while his breathing had calmed slightly, it was clear he was far from okay right now.

“Is...?” Stiles said, still trying to calm his breathing.

“Is what?” Derek asked, hand still rubbing up and down his spine.

“Is Jar Jar Binks really your favourite Star Wars character?”

Derek wanted to laugh. Stiles had just had a panic attack in the elevator, his heart was going a mile a minute, he still wasn’t breathing properly, and the most important thing he needed to know right that second was if Derek had shitty taste in characters.

“No, it’s actually Leia,” Derek admitted. “I was just trying to get you to focus on something other than your panic. Anger seemed to work pretty well.”

Stiles let out a small laugh, head still between his knees. “Yeah, I was ready to quit.”

“And baby Yoda is a treasure,” Derek admitted. “The whole relationship between him and the Mandalorian is adorable.”

“Fuck yeah it is,” Stiles agreed as the security guard hurried back towards them with a cup of water.

Stiles managed to sit up, taking it with a nod of thanks and drank it slowly. He seemed to be doing a bit better now that he was out of the elevator and a bit of time had passed, but Derek wasn’t positive he was well and truly all right.

They stayed there at the security desk for ten more minutes, Derek and the guard hovering and Stiles sitting in the chair sipping his water. When Stiles seemed to be a bit better now that he was out of the elevator and a bit of time had passed, but Derek wasn’t positive he was well and truly all right.

They stayed there at the security desk for ten more minutes, Derek and the guard hovering and Stiles sitting in the chair sipping his water. When Stiles seemed to be a bit better, the guard explained to Derek that apparently they were running tests on the transformer that had acted up the week before and must’ve caused the power outage. At least this one had been brief, but Derek was positive Stiles was going to have issues getting into the elevator again. It occurred to him, now that he really thought about it, that Stiles always seemed to take the stairs. He knew they were locked in the early morning and late at night from the outside so that people couldn’t go up, so Stiles probably took the lift up in the morning.

Derek wondered if he gripped his messenger bag for dear life then, too. He would have to talk to Laura, see if maybe they could install a fob on the door instead of having it locked from the outside. He honestly wondered how many of the staff had a fear of elevators and he didn’t know. He never would have about Stiles if this hadn’t happened. He’d assumed Stiles was acting weird because he didn’t want to be alone in the elevator with him. If it hadn’t stalled like that, he never would’ve realized it was the elevator Stiles was scared of.

It was strange to realize that Stiles was more afraid of elevators than of Werewolves. Life was very off sometimes.

“Thanks for the water,” Stiles said after another few minutes, getting to his feet and holding the cup back out. “Sorry for the uh, collapse out of the elevator earlier.”
“Not a problem. You gonna be all right, son?” the guard asked, eying him worriedly while taking the cup.

“Oh yeah, I’ll be good.” Stiles waved one hand absently, glancing at Derek. “Um, sorry.”

“You have nothing to apologize for. I’m the one who’s sorry, I should’ve recognized you didn’t want to get in the elevator for reason.”

“No, no, it’s fine.” Stiles waved his hand again, at him this time. “It’s not a secret or anything, but I also don’t advertise it.” He turned to offer a somewhat muted smile to the guard. “Thanks again. Have a good night.”

“You as well,” he said uncertainly.

Stiles moved out from behind the desk while Derek grabbed his things and followed. Despite the elevator for the underground parking being on the other side of the lobby, Derek followed Stiles to the building’s exit. They made it all the way outside before Derek reached out to touch his shoulder awkwardly with the hand holding his suit jacket.

“I’m honestly not comfortable letting you go home alone right now. You reacted fairly badly, and I’m concerned about your mental well-being.” Derek checked the time. It was late, but he knew the pub two blocks over would be in that in-between stage where the late diners and early drinkers overlapped so they could probably get a table and grab some food. “Have you eaten? Or do you want to just come and nurse a beer for a little bit? I’d feel better knowing you’re well and truly okay.”

Stiles opened his mouth, like he was going to argue, but then seemed to think better of it. Stiles had always been really good about knowing what his limits were, even in high school. If he got knocked down, even if the game was riding on him, if he knew he couldn’t continue, he said so. That part of his personality was coming through now, because Derek could see Stiles doing a mental assessment before he sagged slightly.

“Yeah, okay. Thanks.”

Derek nodded once and waited for Stiles to move up beside him, then they walked slowly down the street towards their destination. Stiles was tightening and loosening his grip on his strap in intervals, like it was helping keep him grounded. Derek didn’t know what to say to him right now, so they just walked in silence until they hit the pub.

It had a few people, but was emptier than Derek had thought it would be, which was good. The music was still at that tolerable level for conversation, and the hostess brought them over to a table near the back where they would be further away from the band when it started playing.

Stiles sat down, pulling his bag over his head and setting it on the floor at his feet. Derek put his jacket on the back on his chair and set his briefcase against the far wall before sitting down himself.

They were both silent once more while perusing the menu. Derek usually came with Kira, and sometimes Boyd, after work on Fridays, so he knew their appetizers pretty well, but he wanted to get a real meal so he eyed all the available options and decided on a burger and fries. Stiles had already put the menu down by the time Derek closed his.

It was awkward for a few moments while they both sat there, Stiles staring down at the cutlery and playing with the edge of his fork. Derek just watched him, trying to figure out what to say.
Thankfully the hostess showed up before long and he ordered his dinner, along with nachos as an appetizer and an aconite-laced beer.

Stiles ordered a lager and a side of fries with some mozzarella sticks. The waitress wrote everything down before disappearing with their menus, leaving them alone again.

“Sorry for freaking out like that,” Stiles said after another two agonizing minutes of silence.

“Why are you apologizing?” Derek demanded, arms crossed over his chest and a slight scowl on his face. He couldn’t help it, he didn’t understand why Stiles thought he had anything to apologize for. “You have nothing to be sorry about. Like I said, I should’ve realized there was a reason you didn’t want to step into the elevator. I’m sorry I bullied you into it.”

“You didn’t really,” Stiles insisted, rubbing awkwardly at one of his arms. “I mean, I don’t like them, but I’m usually okay when someone else is in there with me. This time just—wasn’t great because it stalled. Which is basically my biggest fear.”

Derek opened his mouth to speak, but paused when he caught sight of the waitress heading their way. She stopped beside them to drop off their drinks, then disappeared again.

Stiles picked up his lager and took a sip, licking his lips before lowering it once more, picking at the label on the bottle. Derek just wrapped his hand around his own cool bottle but made no move to take a sip.

“Have you—did you always have trouble? With elevators, I mean?”

Amber eyes glanced up at him before Stiles laughed awkwardly and looked back down at his bottle. “Uh, no.” He raked one hand through his hair, and Derek was going to tell him to forget about it, it wasn’t his business, but Stiles started talking before he could, still staring at his drink. “It—university. That’s when it started.” Stiles let out another small laugh, this one a bit bitter, and took a long swallow of his drink.

“You don’t have to explain yourself,” Derek offered, but Stiles just shrugged while still drinking, then lowered the bottle and licked his lips again. Derek took that as his cue to take his own sip before it got weird.

“It’s fine. Like I said, it’s not a secret or anything. And you got stuck with me in the elevator, so you deserve to know why I freaked out so bad.”

“You didn’t freak out,” Derek argued, but Stiles just shrugged again. “And you don’t owe me any explanations.”

“It’s really not a secret,” Stiles said, and then explained, “When I was in uni, I was living in a high-rise on campus. You know, one of those older, kinda outdated buildings? Super unsafe, to be honest, but whatever. I lived on the twelfth floor, so I always took the elevator because that is a lot of stairs. I wasn’t as fit back then as I am now.”

Derek didn’t know what Stiles meant by that, because he’d been super fit in high school, and had gotten into university on a sports scholarship, so he was obviously fit in university, too. He chose not to mention that though, because it would mean remembering who he was and opening a huge, more awkward can of worms given Stiles clearly didn’t remember him.

“Anyway, during Christmas break, I stayed behind with a few guys. Couldn’t really afford to head home, and my dad was working anyway, so I stayed back at the dorm. Most of the building had cleared out, but there were still some guys here or there, just way less than usual. Anyway, it was
late, I’d just come back from grabbing a late night snack, and I took the elevator back up to my floor.”

Stiles paused, still staring down at his bottle. He was ripping at the label even more now, like even recounting the story was giving him anxiety. Derek wanted to tell him it was fine, he didn’t have to, but he knew Stiles well enough to know that he was going to force the whole story out no matter what.

“There was a, uh, a malfunction. The elevator got stuck.” Stiles licked his lips, took a sip of his drink, licked his lips again. “I wasn’t scared about being trapped in the elevator. Not back then. I just hit the alarm and sat down to wait.” He let out a small, bitter laugh. “Turns out the alarm was busted. I didn’t know. I thought someone was coming, but no one even knew I was in there. When too many hours passed, I figured out something was wrong. Eventually I started banging on the door and screaming to get someone’s attention, but it was Christmas break, most people were gone.”

Derek tried to imagine what that must’ve felt like, being trapped in an elevator, alone, for hours. Nobody knowing he was there, nobody missing him, the building all but empty. How long would Derek have lasted himself before losing his mind. He felt like he’d probably have pried open the doors, but even as he said that, Stiles proved that he himself had tried to do that, and it hadn’t worked out in his favour.

“I tried calling out, tried to reach one of my buddies, but I didn’t have any service. Reception was shit in the building overall because of what it was made out of, so I knew it was pointless to even try, but I did. And of course, the elevator was between floors, so even when I wedged the doors open, I didn’t have enough room to squeeze through onto one of the floors. I actually... you know, I really thought I was going to be stuck there forever. It got to the point where I thought I might die in there.”

Derek twisted the bottle between his hands, thinking on what Stiles had said while said individual drained the rest of his drink, setting the empty bottle down on the table with small click.

His panic made a lot more sense, considering the last time he’d gotten stuck, no one had come for him.

“How long were you stuck in there?” he asked quietly.

“Before one of my friends came looking for me and found me sobbing hysterically and went to get help?” Stiles asked with fake cheer, fingers playing with the lip of his bottle, eyes on what he was doing. “Fourteen hours, twenty-two minutes and thirty-seven seconds.”

“Jesus,” Derek said softly. He’d been expecting six or seven, but fourteen?

“Been scared of elevators ever since.”

“I can understand that,” Derek agreed softly. “What did the school say about it?”

“Oh, my dad was pissed,” Stiles said with a small laugh, seeming to move back into safer territory at the thought of his father after the incident. “Reamed them out good. They spent the rest of the semester fixing up the elevator and knocked off half my boarding fee. Dad thought we could’ve gotten more taken off considering I had to see a counsellor for a few months, but that was included in the agreement, so dad wasn’t paying it. I worried they’d take it back if he pushed too much so we settled for what we got. I really needed the counsellor, and it’d be tight for my dad, so I didn’t want to risk it and he didn’t want me to lose it.”
“I’m really sorry,” Derek said sincerely. He didn’t think he’d ever be able to erase the look of terror on Stiles’ face from his mind, and he couldn’t even imagine how he must’ve felt the second the lift stalled. Derek hadn’t been concerned at all because he’d never gotten stuck in one before. For someone like Stiles, it had probably caused massive amounts of PTSD.

“It’s okay, not your fault. You didn’t know, and it’s not like you planned for the elevator to stall.” Stiles shrugged and reached for his bottle before he seemed to remember it was empty. Derek would’ve offered him his, except it had aconite and that wasn’t really the best thing in the world for humans to have. “Thanks, by the way. You know, for helping.”

“I don’t know that I really helped much.”

“You were trying to distract me, keep me grounded.” Stiles offered him a small smile. “It helped. Thanks.”

Derek smiled back. “Anytime.”

The waitress came by with the nachos and mozzarella sticks. Derek motioned for Stiles to help himself to the chips, so he in turn slid his cheese dish closer to the middle of the table. Derek also motioned for Stiles to get another lager, and he nodded in thanks.

“How did you know, anyway?” Stiles asked.

“Know?” Derek cocked an eyebrow, shoving a beef and cheese-covered chip into his mouth, having scooped some guacamole onto the tip of it. Fucking delicious.

“About Star Wars. Well, about me liking it, I mean.”

“You talk a lot,” Derek informed him matter-of-factly, reaching for another chip. “I heard you talking about it a few times with various people.” It wasn’t even a lie, either. Derek didn’t have to admit when he’d heard him talking about it.

“Oh. I didn’t—I guess I didn’t think you actually listened.”

“Why wouldn’t I listen when you talk?” Derek asked curiously.

Stiles stared at him for a moment, then said, “No reason.” and hastily shoved a mozzarella stick into his mouth. Derek chose not to comment on it and watched the waitress approach with Stiles’ second drink.

Once they moved away from elevators, things got less awkward. Stiles talked a lot, which Derek already knew from high school, but it was weird actually being involved in the conversation. They spoke about various things, mostly movies and television, but eventually moved to books.

Derek was surprised to find out Stiles had read almost all of the same books as he had back in high school. Stiles admitted he didn’t really make time to read much anymore, but that he’d really enjoyed it as a hobby when he was on long bus rides to games or even in study hall sometimes.

Considering they seemed to have similar taste, Derek gave him a few titles and authors he’d enjoyed over the past few years and Stiles eagerly wrote them down in his phone. It was weird, but nice. Being like this with Stiles. Talking like they were old friends and not two people who’d once made out in the bathroom at prom because they were in love with each other and had never done anything about it.

They were just about done dinner when the late night drinkers arrived, so Derek asked for the bill
and resolutely informed Stiles that he was paying since he was the one who’d invited him out and forced him to experience something traumatic. Stiles had fought him on it, but only halfheartedly, like he already knew he’d lose this argument.

When they left the pub, Stiles was smiling, and he smelled a lot better than he had earlier. Well, not exactly better given he smelled like grease and alcohol given where they’d been, but at least he didn’t stink of fear.

“How are you getting home?” Derek asked.

“I was just gonna take the bus,” Stiles said, thumbing over his shoulder.

“I can drive you home, if you want.”

Stiles’ entire face lit up at that. “You drive?!?”

Derek gave him a weird look. What the heck was that supposed to mean? “Yes. I drive. Why, did you think I wouldn’t?”

“Oh—no reason.” Stiles looked like he was vibrating he was so happy, it was weird. “But um, sure. If you don’t mind, it’d be—that’d be great. It’s pretty late, so the bus runs less frequently at this hour, and I’m already going to be later than usual getting to bed at this rate.”

“You can come in an hour later tomorrow, if you want,” Derek offered, motioning them back towards work so they could grab his car.

“No way, I am an adult and I own my decisions. Besides, it was worth it.” Stiles beamed at him. “Thanks boss.”

Derek snorted at that, but just rolled his eyes instead of commenting, getting them back to the office, and making a mental note for them to take the stairs to the underground lot instead of the parking garage elevator.

Things were looking up.

TBC...
Stiles felt like a veritable Disney princess when he woke up the next morning. He wanted to dance around his room like an idiot while he got dressed, because last night had been amazing.

Well, parts of last night, since the whole elevator thing had been the opposite of amazing. But spending the rest of the evening with Derek had been awesome. He felt like they’d broken the ice on this weird pseudo-friendship thing they had going on. Drinks had been kind of fun, and the drive back to Stiles’ place had been comfortable and nice. And Derek was an exceptionally good driver, which made Stiles infinitely happy. He was so glad Derek was driving, he honestly wasn’t sure he would be considering his accident.

So not only were they on okay terms, but Derek was driving, and had driven him home! Stiles was so fucking happy he wanted to shake Jackson awake and insist the world was made of rainbows and unicorns.

He didn’t think Jackson would appreciate that too much though, he’d been really grumpy when Stiles had come home last night because Stiles hadn’t answered any of his increasingly worried texts—whoops...—and had just wanted to make sure he wasn’t dead before going to bed.

Stiles hadn’t wanted to keep him up any later to talk about his evening, even though he knew Jackson would be annoyed when Stiles relayed everything to him a day late. Jackson was funny that way.

Getting ready for work in record time, Stiles actually caught an earlier bus than usual that morning. He figured it was for the best since he wanted to stop and grab breakfast. There was a delicious coffee shop two stops away from his office, so he got off the bus early and headed inside to grab some food and coffee.

While he waited in the relatively short lineup, it occurred to him that he didn’t know if Derek ate breakfast at home, or if he just forgot about food all the time. He was horrible at feeding himself at lunch—and apparently dinner, too—so maybe he just... constantly accidentally starved himself. Maybe he lived off coffee and snacks from the vending machine.

Stiles had seen him grab snacks from the vending machine, but they were definitely not nutritious. Good for a quick fix, like Stiles himself sometimes needed, but not a real meal by any means.

When it was his turn at the till, he decided fuck it and ordered two egg sandwiches, two chocolate chip muffins and a large coffee. Even if Derek had already eaten breakfast, it could be a mid-morning snack for him later.

Once he had his spoils, Stiles sipped at his coffee while heading down the street towards his office, hoping today would be a good day. It was Wednesday, after all. Mid-week, so that was always a good thing. And things were looking up with Derek, so that was nice.

He was almost at the office before he remembered what today also was and stopped in his tracks.

Shit, Liam was on vacation for the rest of the week. Stiles didn’t have his elevator buddy today. After what had happened yesterday, there was no fucking way he could get in the elevator on his own. He wondered if maybe he could wait for someone, but he doubted they would be going to the same floor as him unless he caught one of the people who worked on his floor.

He supposed he could call Erica, he was sure she’d come down and go up with him, but he didn’t
really want to have to explain that to her.

Deciding he’d just wait a few minutes and see if he could grab someone from his floor, he continued on his way up to the building, and paused when he caught sight of who was in the lobby.

Derek was standing a few feet in from the door, briefcase in hand and wearing a really nice dark suit with a light tie and a vest. He was checking the time on his watch, like he was waiting for someone, and when he looked up and saw Stiles, he smiled.

Actually smiled.

Stiles had died and gone to heaven. Maybe he hadn’t actually made it out of that elevator yesterday.

Hurrying forward, he quickly swiped his card and juggled his various items to get the door open, moving to join Derek. “Am I late?”

“No, I’m early.” Derek motioned the elevators awkwardly. “I just thought... Well, after what happened yesterday, I thought it might be best if you had someone to go up with.”

“Oh.” Derek had come early so Stiles had someone to ride up with? Fuck, he wanted to marry him! Not that he hadn’t wanted to marry him before now, but he just wanted to marry him even more!

“Thanks. That’s—yeah, thank you.”

“Sure.” Derek motioned the elevators with a nod of his head and the two of them moved towards them.

Stiles glanced at the guard sitting at the security desk, but it wasn’t the same one from the night before. He figured they’d done a shift change before Stiles had gotten there.

When Derek pressed the button for the elevator, the one on the left dinged immediately and the doors opened. Stiles felt his heart start pounding in his chest, thoughts of university and the night before invading his brain, but Derek moved right up beside him, arm brushing his lightly in a quiet show of support, and he managed to hold it together the whole way up to the ninth floor.

The doors opened, and Derek motioned Stiles out first. He moved quickly, grateful, and slowed so the two of them could walk down the corridor together.

“I left a message with Laura about the stairs,” Derek admitted while they headed to their area of the floor. The few people already there were doing double-takes, probably at the sight of their boss arriving early, since he usually arrived at seven on the dot. “What happened yesterday got me thinking. You’re probably not the only person in the building who doesn’t like elevators, so I want to see if maybe we can install a fob for the stairs. That way, you can use them any time as long as you have access to them, like with the elevator.”

Stiles’ mouth opened. Shut. They’d stopped at Derek’s door, and he just stared at him, speechless, like an idiot.

It took entirely too long for him to blurt out, “That would be amazing! Thank you so much!”

“Not a problem,” Derek said, offering him a small smile.

When he started to turn to head into his office, Stiles remembered what he was holding. “This is for you.”
Derek turned back to him, eyes dropping down to the bag being held out to him. He took it, inhaling deeply, and smiled slightly.

“Eggs, bacon and cheese.”

“Yup.” Stiles grinned. “The best egg sandwich you’ll ever have. There’s a muffin in there, too. You know, in case you need a mid-morning snack. You don’t eat much for a Werewolf, it’s kind of concerning.” Stiles admitted, moving to his desk to drop off his own food and coffee, then pulling his bag strap over his head to kick it under his desk.

“Yeah, it’s a bit of a problem, actually,” Derek admitted. “I’ve always been like that. Get distracted by things and forget to eat.”

Stiles almost said, “Like in high school,” but managed to bite his tongue. Derek often got distracted reading and his lunch went uneaten. He was going to have to keep an eye on adult Derek now, too.

Well, good thing he was his EA.

“I’ll grab your coffee.”

“Thanks Stiles.”

Stiles beamed at him before heading to the kitchenette to get his coffee ready for him. He was an expert coffee-maker now, and he really liked that Derek enjoyed the way he made it so much. And having him pleased to be given breakfast felt good.

And fuck, he’d shown up early just so that Stiles wouldn’t be stuck riding up the elevator alone. He’d actually gone home, thought about everything that had happened, decided to talk to Laura about the stairs, and had set his alarm early so he could show up on time to meet Stiles to ride up with him. It was fucking amazing. His boss was the best.

Derek was the best. God, if Stiles hadn’t already loved him, he would’ve been falling for him so hard right now. Yesterday would’ve been the turning point. Fuck, it was actually kind of bad how much the feelings from high school were surfacing. And worse still because Derek actually paid attention to him now.

He was still in the process of making the coffee when one of the other guys from Finance came into the kitchenette, pausing at the sight of Stiles. He thought his name might be Greg, but honestly hadn’t really spoken to him much. Liam was the one he interacted with the most in the department, everyone else seemed almost scared of him. Like being Derek’s EA made him terrifying somehow.

“Hey,” he offered with a smile, mixing sugar into Derek’s coffee.

“Why is Derek here?” Greg asked, moving wide around Stiles, like he was worried he was wearing a wire or something. “Is he checking in on us? We work, I swear.”

Stiles cocked an eyebrow at him. “If you’re doing your job, I don’t know why you’re worried he’d think you’re not. Unless you’re not doing your job.”

“I am,” Greg said urgently. “It’s just...” He looked around discreetly before leaning in close to Stiles. “I heard he fired the entirety of the Finance department a few years ago because they weren’t hitting their numbers.”

“ Heard from who?” Stiles asked, growing tired of the rumours, still stirring Derek’s clearly perfect
“You know, people. You know what Derek’s like when he’s mad. You should know more than anyone. Surprised you haven’t quit yet, but I guess having a dude as an EA was management’s way of stopping the sexual harassment.”

“Derek has never once sexually harassed someone,” Stiles snapped, dropping the stir-stick and turning to face Greg fully. “I don’t know where all these rumours are coming from, but seriously, they need to fucking stop. Derek didn’t get anyone pregnant in high school, he doesn’t sexually harass anyone, and he’s a good boss! He can’t help that he has resting bitch-face, but he’s a good fucking person!”

It wasn’t that Stiles wanted to tell people about this, but this was one rumour he did want to spread, because maybe people would stop acting like Derek deserved all this badmouthing behind his back.

“I had a panic attack yesterday,” Stiles snapped. “We were trapped in the elevator, and I had a full blown panic attack. I was literally going to pass out, and Derek was in there with me and helped me keep it together. You know how? Because he listens to me when I talk. He knows I like Star Wars, even though he and I have never spoken about it before. He heard that I liked it, and he started sprouting out random things to try and distract me until the doors opened again. And you remember that pizza lunch from last week? The one with the dope pizza and drinks and desserts? Yeah, Derek paid for that out of pocket. That wasn’t company funds, that was his own money. He did it to show his department he appreciates their hard work, and wants to keep morale up given it’s about to get really busy. So how about you have some fucking respect for your boss who treats you guys like you’re fucking priceless and stop helping spread rumours that Betsy heard from Andrew who was told by Sam who overheard from Caitlyn or whatever the fuck.”

Stiles turned back to the coffee, threw out the stir-stick, and then stormed out of the kitchenette to head back to Derek’s office.

He was in such a rush he almost walked right into someone, but managed to come up short, cursing when coffee spilled over and burned his hand. The mug was taken from him, Stiles wincing and shaking it out.

“Thanks,” he muttered.

“Not a problem,” a jovial voice said. “My, my, that was quite the rant.”

It was only then that Stiles realized who was standing in front of him, and he froze.

Peter Hale smiled pleasantly at him, sniffing the coffee before taking a sip, motioning for Stiles to follow along. Stiles opened his mouth to tell him the coffee was supposed to be for Derek, but he didn’t really have the opportunity since Peter was basically herding him along while sipping away at it.

Great, now he’d have to confront Greg in the kitchenette again to make another coffee.

“Good morning nephew,” Peter said from the office doorway, gripping Stiles’ shoulder to keep him in place when he went to try and head for his desk. “You’re early.”

“Peter.” Derek said, eyes on his screen and scowling slightly. “I had some things to—” He cut off, turning to his uncle finally, and blinked. “Is that my coffee?”

“I expect it was, yes. It’s very good.” Peter took another huge sip, as if to drive the point home. “I
see you haven’t bullied your EA enough if he hasn’t started spiking it with poison.”

“Would poison even do anything to you guys?” Stiles asked, more out of curiosity than actual ill intent.

“I just thought you should know,” Peter said, ignoring his question, “that Stiles very vocally informed the entire floor that you helped him through a panic attack yesterday. Maybe some good rumours will begin to circulate for the rest of the day. However did you manage that, nephew?”

Derek suddenly looked uncomfortable. He and his uncle seemed to be having a silent conversation. Derek’s side was almost pleading, and Peter’s was amused while he continued to sip his coffee.

Well, Derek’s coffee.

“Just lucky, I guess,” Derek offered after a brief stare-down. “Don’t you have a meeting?”

“I do, in point of fact.” Peter finally released Stiles’ shoulder so he could check the time on his watch. “It’s with Laura. Something about changing the building’s security measures to allow access to the stairs? Interesting request now that I hear about your EA panicking in an elevator.”

Stiles didn’t know why Derek and Peter looked like they were having some kind of verbal battle. Derek had already admitted he’d spoken to Laura about the stairs, but Peter was acting like it was something worth mocking Derek over. Maybe he thought Derek had a crush on Stiles or something.

Fuck, if only.

“Well, I’m sure I’ll be back up here soon enough. We have our own meetings, after all.” Peter took an obnoxiously loud sip of his coffee, as if he was rubbing it in, then turned to smile at Stiles. “Good coffee. Might have to come steal this more often.”

“You have your own EA,” Derek snapped after him while Peter started for the elevator.

“Yes, and perhaps you should remember why you have one.”

Stiles frowned in confusion at those words, and Derek clammed up instantly, not even having a retort for that.

His uncle waved one hand in farewell, clearly pleased with himself, and continued on his way. Stiles watched him go, then turned to Derek, who suddenly looked exhausted, rubbing at his face with both hands.

“I’ll, uh—go make you another one.”

“Thanks,” Derek muttered from behind his hands.

Stiles nodded, mostly to himself, then turned to head back for the kitchenette to do just that.

This family was super weird.

Derek snarled a yawn while he dug his thumb and forefinger into his eyes, hating the discomfort of his contacts. He felt like the more time passed, the less his eyes tolerated the foreign item. Maybe it was his Werewolf genes. His body recognized something foreign and kept trying to heal or dispel it, and it just made everything uncomfortable for him.
Stupid genetics, making him need glasses. This was the literal worst.

“Aw,” a voice cooed from behind him.

*Scratch that,* he decided silently. *This is the literal worst.*

“Waiting on your boyfriend?” Laura asked, coming up beside him and poking him in the cheek.

“Aren’t you late?” he snapped irately, slapping her hand away. It didn’t do much good, she just brought it right back to his cheek.

“Nope, I scheduled myself to come in an hour late today since I had a work dinner last night. Peter’s not coming in at all.”

“Thank God,” Derek muttered, because he was getting really tired of Peter constantly coming to steal his coffee.

By Tuesday of this week, Stiles had just started making two of them, because Peter had started showing up virtually every day around Derek’s scheduled coffee times and was stealing them right out of Stiles’ hands.

He was also kind of flirting. Derek didn’t know if that was just in an attempt to piss him off, or if he legitimately found Stiles attractive and wanted to bone him. His anxiety went up a bit when he acknowledged that Stiles *was* attractive and Peter probably *did* want to bone him.

He’d have to remind him that Derek had seen him first! Peter could keep his grubby old man hands to himself!

“So,” Laura said, stretching the vowel out much longer than necessary. “How goes things on the wooing of Stiles front?”

“There isn’t any wooing,” Derek insisted, turning to glare at her. “We’re just friends.”

She gave him a look. “Please. You’ve had a hard-on for him since we were teenagers. Are you ever going to tell him?”

“He doesn’t remember me,” Derek snapped, turning back to the door and glaring at it hard enough to possibly break through the glass. “We’ve only just barely become friends, don’t ruin this for me, or you’ll regret it.”

“Baby.” Laura stuck her tongue out at him. “Don’t forget I’m moving in next weekend. Mum and dad’s flight lands the following Monday afternoon, so I’ve got cleaners coming in Saturday to tidy my place up for them. We should do dinner this weekend with Peter, just so we can be honest when mom asks if we spend time together. You should invite Boyd, Erica and Kira.”

“You can invite Erica,” Derek insisted, feeling a small smile form on his face despite his best efforts when he caught sight of Stiles hustling his way up the steps. “I’ll talk to Boyd and Kira.”

“You’re so gone for him, it’s kind of adorable,” Laura said teasingly.

Derek didn’t deem that worthy of a response, and didn’t react since he knew Stiles hadn’t heard. He was juggling his items to get the door open, beaming at Derek and waving with the hand laden with paper bags of pastries. Stiles had started grabbing them both breakfast every morning, but he only ever got a coffee for himself. He knew Derek preferred his coffee, and he did.
It wasn’t just that Stiles was the one making it, it was literally that he seemed to make it differently than anyone else. Derek didn’t know how that was possible since presumably he was using the same coffee, milk and sugar, but somehow it tasted... better.

It always tasted better when Stiles made it.

“Morning,” Stiles said brightly, eyes shifting to Laura briefly to include her in the greeting.

“Good morning, Stiles!” Laura replied, just as energetically. “That smells good, what is it?”

“Oh, the usual.” He waved the paper bags absenty. “Egg sandwich from down the road. Bacon, egg and cheese on a sourdough bun. It’s to die for.”

“And,” Laura sniffed the air and Derek wanted to facepalm at how embarrassing she was, “chocolate? Is it a muffin?”

“Actually, usually it is, but today I got us some Nutella strudels,” Stiles said happily.

“Us?” Laura asked, sounding delighted while turning to Derek. “Oh, I see. You get breakfast delivered? Wish my EA was as thoughtful.”

“Can you just go to work already?” Derek muttered, shoving her away and motioning for Stiles to head for the elevators. Siblings were the fucking worst.

“So tell me, Stiles,” Laura said, appearing beside said individual on his other side at rapid speed. She looped one of her arms through Stiles’, being sure not to jostle it since that hand was holding his coffee. “Do you get breakfast for Derek often?”

“Well I—noticed he seems bad at remembering to eat,” Stiles offered uncertainly, like he worried he was overstepping by admitting that to Laura. As if she didn’t already know.

“I try and get him breakfast and a snack, and if I see he doesn’t have lunch or he sticks around late, I run out to grab that for him, too.”

“Wow,” Laura said, hitting the button for the elevator. “Maybe we should give you a corporate card so you’re not buying all of Derek’s food out of pocket.”

“Maybe,” Derek said coldly.

The elevator arrived and Laura started to walk into it, half-pulling Stiles along. She seemed to notice his hesitance, something Derek had noticed him do every morning, and she instantly released him, raising both hands.

“Sorry. I forgot. Take your time.”

“Sorry,” Stiles said uncomfortably, as if he had something to apologize for.

“No, no, I forgot,” Laura insisted again, holding the door. “It’s okay, take your time.”

Stiles hesitated for another moment before stepping into the lift. Derek followed him, sticking close to his side. He noticed Laura only hit the ninth floor, and then she pressed against Stiles’ other side, as if trying to silently comfort him and let him know he wasn’t alone.

“We’re making headway on the changes, by the way,” Laura said to Derek, but it was obvious she
was including Stiles in the conversation. “Electrician said what we’re trying to do shouldn’t be too much of a problem, he’s just strapped for guys right now since it’s construction season and he’s got a lot of jobs going. But he said by end of next week we should have all the stairs fitted with fobs and they’ll be usable at all hours.”

“Thanks Laura. I appreciate you doing this,” Derek said sincerely.

She just waved the words away. “I’m sure there are others in the office who would rather take the stairs, I’m just sorry I didn’t think of it sooner.”

The elevator jerked when it came to a stop, and Derek felt Stiles tense beside him, grip dangerously tight around his paper cup, but then the door opened and he hurried out, seeming to relax the moment he was on solid ground again.

Derek followed him out, turning to Laura, who was smiling kind of endearingly at them.

“Thank you,” Stiles said once he’d gotten his heartbeat back under control. “I’m sorry to be so troublesome.”

“Oh please, this will force the lazy assholes to take the stairs more often,” Laura insisted with a wink. “Have a good day! Save me some of Derek’s strudel,” she called through the closing elevator doors.

“I hate my family,” Derek said. Stiles just laughed, because he knew he wasn’t serious. After all, there’d been no heat in the statement. “By the way, Peter’s not here, so you don’t have to make an extra coffee.”

“Oh, thanks.” Stiles laughed while they walked to the end of the corridor. “I mean, I feel sort of flattered he likes my coffee so much.”

“Peter’s an asshole, he doesn’t deserve your coffee,” Derek argued as they rounded the corner so Derek could head into his office and Stiles could put his things down. Derek shrugged out of his jacket, resting it on the back of his chair before rubbing at his eyes. He knew from his optometrist that he wasn’t supposed to do that, but it was just so damn uncomfortable!

“For you, sir,” Stiles’ voice said. Derek dropped his hands and saw Stiles setting down his usual egg sandwich breakfast, along with the strudel. “Be right back.”

Derek watched Stiles walk away before glancing down at his food. Maybe he really should give Stiles one of the corporate credit cards. He really did spend a lot of his own money on food for Derek. All the time. Breakfast every day since the elevator incident, and a few lunches and dinners before that, plus some after. Stiles had been desperate for a job when he’d applied at Super Natural Foods, so he obviously wasn’t made of money. And he didn’t used to buy breakfast every day, so Derek felt like it was a recent thing specifically so that he could get something for Derek.

Maybe he should actually do that. He knew Stiles wouldn’t abuse it, and as long as he cleared it with Laura, Stiles would be able to save money on his own food and coffee in the morning. It wasn’t playing favourites when it was obvious the only reason Derek was actually eating lately was because Stiles was basically babysitting him. And Derek had a corporate credit card he could do anything he wanted with, he just—didn’t.

Turning to unlock his computer, he had an email open and was drafting one up to Laura by the time Stiles came in with his coffee, walking slowly while staring intently into the cup.

“I overfilled it,” he said in response to the confused look from Derek. “Got distracted, sorry.”
“Don’t apologize so much,” Derek said, waiting for Stiles to set the coffee down before reaching for it. “Thank you.”

“No problem.”

Derek picked up the mug and took a cautious sip. It was just as perfect as always. He didn’t know how Stiles did it. Did he dump magic dust into it? Seriously.

It took him a few seconds to realize Stiles was still hovering and he lifted his gaze, cup still at his lips and eyebrows rising slightly.

“Uh, so I was talking to my dad yesterday. You know, about a lot of things. Catching up and whatnot. I told him about, you know, the elevator thing from last week. About how you helped. He said I should do something for you, and I figured—did you wanna grab dinner tonight?” Stiles immediately threw out both hands. “Totally cool if not. This isn’t like, an obligation or anything, I just thought I could thank you by forcing you to leave the office as a reasonable hour and I seem to have a theme for forcing you to remember to eat, so I just thought it might be nice.”

It was Friday, which was usually drinks with Kira day. Derek had never cancelled drinks with Kira, she was going to be intolerable with her desire for details.

“That sounds really great,” Derek admitted with a small smile. “Sure. Yeah, if you’re up for it, I’d like that.”

“If I’m up for it,” Stiles said, rolling his eyes. “I’m the one who invited you.”

“True enough.” Derek laughed.

Stiles beamed at him, backing away slowly while pointing both pointer fingers at him. “So—dinner? Say, five? Should give you enough time to get organized so we can leave at four-thirty.”

“Sounds perfect.”

“Cool.” Stiles grinned again, seeming infinitely pleased. He walked into the doorway, flailing slightly before grabbing for it, as if worried he’d been about to knock it over somehow. His cheeks went pink and he laughed awkwardly before motioning the jamb and turning to hurry for his desk.

Derek wasn’t positive, but he felt like Stiles had kind of... maybe sort of been flirting? Little bit? Or maybe it was wishful thinking. Still, today was going to be interesting, and he couldn’t help but get distracted while eating his breakfast thinking about dinner.

He’d never really... had dinner with someone. Sure, he went out with people, and even last week he and Stiles had gone to get some food together, but he’d never had like, dinner. Like in a date setting.

Not that this was a date! He had to be very careful not to set up that expectation in his head, because this was not a date. It was just... Stiles treating him to good food as a thank you for something Derek felt was his own fault anyway. After all, he’d been the one to kind of bully Stiles into the elevator, so this was kind of unnecessary.

Still, he wasn’t going to say no!

He finished up his breakfast, then his email to Laura, and got started with his day. It was a long, relatively uneventful day. He had lots of meetings, as normal. He ate his Nutella strudel between two conference calls and could’ve kissed Stiles when he came in with another coffee.
His eyes burned more and more as the day progressed and he found himself rubbing at them more frequently. He really wanted to take the contacts out, and kept contemplating it before remembering how fucking nerdy he looked. He wasn’t going to do that when he had a not-date with Stiles today so he just tolerated it, nodding a thanks to Stiles when he came in around two with a wrapped gyros from the Greek food truck a block away.

Really, he didn’t know how he’d survived so long before Stiles had started working for him. And his fucking worksheet was fantastic. Like, who’d have thought creating something so simple would go such a long way when it came to prioritizing phonecalls?! On top of that, Stiles always knew the people he didn’t want to talk to and took those calls immediately. Sure, sometimes Derek needed them, but he just had to motion at Stiles and the guy would say something super jovial like, “Oh, looks like his call just ended, one second.”

Really, he was horrendously over-qualified for this job, but Derek loved having him. Being in love with him aside, Stiles was actually a phenomenal EA. All he ever heard from Laura and Peter was that their EAs were kind of lazy and did the bare minimum, and while Derek knew that most of his old EAs only did a stellar job because they were scared of him, it was clear to everyone that Stiles was amazing.

He kind of didn’t want a human job in HR to ever open up, because he knew the second it did, Laura would snatch him up immediately. After all, it was the job he’d originally applied for, so it wouldn’t be a surprise if he jumped at the opportunity.

Derek didn’t want to lose him, for very, very selfish reasons.

He rubbed at his eyes again when a new email came in, wishing—not for the first time—that he wasn’t the fucking anomaly in his family who needed glasses. Seriously, didn’t he have enough to deal with right now?!

When he finally lowered his hands, he saw that the new email was from Laura, in response to his original request from that morning. He hastily clicked on it to read it, and was instantly annoyed because there was a long back and forth chain between her and Peter wherein they made fun of him and his crush on Stiles.

His family were seriously assholes. People without siblings were living the absolute dream.

He only skimmed the parts where they teased him, and when it got to the heart of the actual discussion, he smiled a little before replying back to both of them, thanking them for being so accommodating. Laura replied back instantly with a heart. He rolled his eyes and didn’t bother replying.

Technically, it wasn’t a real corporate credit card in this case, since there were usually dollar amounts that needed to be hit to qualify, but it would be a credit card for Stiles paid for by the company. Laura’s email said she’d have it set up for him by Accounting and sent up probably on Monday, so Stiles would have it ready for Tuesday. That wasn’t bad, it would be quick.

Derek was about to click on another email when his phone rang. He reached for it before glancing at the call display, then frowned and turned to look at Stiles.

He had his phone to his ear, and was smirking cheekily at him. Derek cocked an eyebrow, but obediently answered, putting the phone to his ear.

“Yes?”
“Hello Mr. Hale,” Stiles’ voice said down the line, as well as loud and clear through the open door. “This is just your thirty minute warning for your late afternoon appointment.”

Derek stared at him for a second, then glanced down at the time on his computer. Christ, it was already five minutes to four. The day had felt endless and yet had just flown by.

“Thank you, I’ll be sure I’m ready for the appointment.”

Stiles beamed at him before hanging up and Derek snorted when he did the same. Honestly, Stiles was adorable, it was really bad. And it was clear he enjoyed his job. Really, things were going a little too well, Derek was waiting for the other shoe to drop, at this point.

He kept an eye on the time while he finished up with some emails, rubbing hard at his eyes and occasionally reaching up to move one of the lenses around in an attempt to distribute the discomfort. He made sure not to start a new email when it was almost half-past and while it took some doing, he managed to log off and restart his computer so he could start fresh on Monday.

Standing, he started gathering his items, and figured he’d pop his briefcase in the trunk of his car before they headed out. Or maybe they’d drive to wherever they were going, he had no idea. He knew Stiles didn’t have a car—at least, he didn’t drive it to work—so if they needed to drive somewhere, Derek was fine with doing it.

He idly wondered if Stiles still had his Jeep. He’d have loved to ask, but that would be giving too much away.

“Ready to go?” Stiles’ voice asked from the door, Derek rubbing furiously at his right eye.

“I am,” he agreed, moving forward while still rubbing. He stopped when Stiles didn’t move out of his way, the other man frowning at him.

“You shouldn’t rub your eyes like that, it’s not good for them.”

“I know,” Derek admitted with a small sigh, dropping his hand. “Contacts are driving me nuts though.”

“You should take them out, then. You have glasses, right? Did you bring them?” When Derek nodded, Stiles nodded back. “You should switch out then, put your glasses on. It’ll be better for your eyes, give them a bit of a break. Besides, you look really attractive in the glasses.”

Stiles’ entire face fell the second the words left his lips and he held up both hands instantly.

“Sorry, that’s—wow, I am so—that was really inappropriate, I am so sorry.”

Derek didn’t have time to think about whether or not that was considered inappropriate, because his brain was still reeling over the fact that Stiles thought he looked attractive with his glasses. The thing that other people made him feel self-conscious about, because he was a Werewolf who wore glasses, and Stiles was standing there all embarrassed and horrified because he’d admitted aloud that Derek looked good in them.

“Are you okay if we’re late?” Derek asked, managing to keep his voice even, despite his heart literally pounding in his chest. “I’ll go take the contacts out.”

“I—yes. Sure, no problem. I can...” Stiles motioned awkwardly for Derek’s briefcase, taking it from his hand while moving out of the way.
Derek nodded a thanks while hurrying to the bathroom so he could switch out, trying to avoid looking as eager as he felt. Stiles liked his glasses. Maybe Stiles liked his beard, too? God, if Stiles liked him at his most comfortable, with the beard and glasses, Derek was never shaving or putting contacts on again. That would be fucking amazing!

Really, he only wore the contacts so people wouldn’t snicker about his eyesight, but fuck them if Stiles liked them, because the contacts drove Derek crazy.

Entering the bathroom, he quickly moved to the sink to wash his hands with soap, then reached up to pinch the contacts between his fingers, using both hands to be done faster. Flicking the daily lenses into the garbage, he reached into his pocket to pull out the protective case his glasses were in and then slipped them on.

Staring at himself in the mirror, he couldn’t help but feel like he must look exactly the same in Stiles’ eyes as he had in high school. Sure, he hadn’t had the glasses or the beard back then, but somehow it seemed... revealing, almost. Like his secret was about to come out.

Surprise, he was the same nerdy loser he’d been all along!

He forced himself not to think about it and put his case back, exiting the bathroom once more and heading back to his office. Stiles was still waiting there, holding his briefcase. He smiled almost endearingly when he saw Derek, and when he got closer, he smelled something... he couldn’t place it. It was almost like if nostalgia had a scent. It was buried quickly beneath layers of embarrassment and arousal though, and Derek felt a little smug knowing the great Stiles Stilinski was a little turned on right then.

Well, he’d had a thing for Derek in high school, apparently so—maybe he was into nerds.

“The place I booked for us is a bit out of the way, so we can take the bus unless you’d rather drive,” Stiles said, handing the briefcase over once more.

“I’m okay with driving,” Derek said. “Lead the way.”

Stiles headed down the corridor, then the stairs, Derek following along behind him. It was a habit he’d started picking up from him because they often left around the same time nowadays. Derek didn’t plan it, exactly. It just seemed to sort of happen. Not that he was complaining in the slightest.

When they got to the lobby, Derek moved to lead the way towards the parking lot’s stairs, since Stiles had only been down there the one time. Once they reached the car, Derek tossed his briefcase in the trunk and offered for Stiles to do the same with his bag, which he did. Within seconds they were in the car and driving out onto the street.

“Which way?” Derek asked, pausing at the top of the ramp.

“You like Mexican?”

“I love Mexican,” Derek admitted.

“Oh good, because we’re having Mexican,” Stiles said with a laugh. “Do you know where Cinco de Mayo is on Old Tenth road? Their quesadillas are literally something to murder a man over.”

The second the words left Stiles’ mouth, Derek deflated. He tried not to make it obvious, but Stiles had a keen eye and he noticed, frowning.
“You don’t—I mean, quesadillas are my thing, you don’t have to get one. I wasn’t saying—”

“I know that,” Derek said, rolling his eyes. “It’s just—Cinco de Mayo is uh, not Werewolf friendly. They don’t take my kind.”

Stiles stared at him for a second, seemed to start in realization, and then smiled so widely that Derek was momentarily confused.

“Oh, don’t worry. They take any wolves that walk in with me, they owe me. I helped their son out of a tough spot so they sort of love me. I go there all the time with my roommates and they’re both Werewolves. I think I’m starting to get Mrs. Calavera to let go of her prejudices one Werewolf at a time.” He let out a laugh, shaking his head. “It’s the best Mexican place in town, and I know they don’t like serving Werewolves much, so I figured it would be a good thank you. Let you try it out. And if you behave, Mrs. Calavera will even let you go back without me. She lets Whi—uh, my roommate go alone all the time, it’s close to his office.”

Derek didn’t really know what to say. He’d heard a lot about the restaurant, but had basically given up ever being able to go there because the owners were well-known Werewolf haters. To realize that Stiles had chosen it specifically because Derek wasn’t normally allowed to go there and would be getting a free pass was actually really thoughtful of him.

“Are you sure?” Derek asked, because he felt like he would be extremely disappointed if they arrived and he wasn’t allowed in.

“Promise. I called her last night and everything.” Stiles drummed his hands on the dash, grinning. “I’m actually really stoked now, because you’ve heard of it, so you’re in for the best dinner of your life. And they make bomb margaritas, though I don’t know how much that means to you since they don’t have anything for Werewolves, but I mean, they’re still good even without the ability to get drunk off them.”

Derek offered him a small smile before turning his blinker on and easing out onto the road, heading for the restaurant.

Stiles kept up an easy chatter the whole way, starting out with all the amazing things to eat at the restaurant, which then moved into Mexico as a country and somehow ended up in Greece talking about their military by the time they arrived at the back lot of the restaurant. Derek had no idea how they’d gone from Mexican food to the ancient Grecian army, but that was one of the things he loved about Stiles, honestly.

He just knew so much about so many random things, and it was nice. It was fun listening to him talk and get all passionate and excited about things. Stiles was such an energetic and engaging person, Derek was so glad to have him back in his life.

Exiting the car, Stiles was still talking excitedly about the battle tactics the Greeks had used, specifically the Spartans, while they walked around the large building to the front where the door was. He grinned at Derek before pushing through it, waving enthusiastically.

“Hey Mrs. Calavera!”

“Stiles,” the woman said primly, with all the air of a successful businesswoman. Her eyes shot past him to Derek, who started to follow before coming up short.

He glanced down and saw a line of mountain ash at the door and felt his stomach drop. He should’ve known better than to expect any different, because there was no way this family
would’ve let someone like him into their establishment. A small percentage of his brain wondered if this was all a cruel joke Stiles was playing on him, but the smarter part insisted that was stupid.

Before he could even say anything, or back away, Mrs. Calavera snapped her fingers loudly, shouted something in Spanish, and a man was suddenly in front of Derek at the door. He fully expected to be shoved away roughly, his hackles rising at the realization that someone was now standing between him and Stiles, but before he could get too aggressive about it, the man bent down and broke the line of mountain ash just inside the door.

Once that was done, he stepped aside and though he eyed Derek with distaste, he motioned him in.

Derek hesitated, then stepped over the threshold, feeling the back of his neck itch when the mountain ash was pushed back into place. He tried really hard not to look over his shoulder like he was expecting a knife in his back and moved up to stand behind Stiles, who was hugging Mrs. Calavera tightly.

She was squeezing him back just as fiercely, but her gaze was locked on Derek, like she didn’t trust him not to go feral and start scratching up her walls.

Though honestly, her look was a little more—interested. He could tell that something about him was making her curious, but she didn’t say anything.

“This is Derek.” Stiles said when he’d pulled away, turning to motion him with a soft smile. “He’s my—friend.”

Neither Derek nor Mrs. Calavera missed the slight pause, and the older woman gave him a look before slowly crossing her arms, waiting expectantly for him to be honest.

“Okay so technically he’s my boss, but he’s also a friend. And I have been talking up your quesadillas the whole drive here, so don’t make a liar out of me,” Stiles insisted, pointing a finger at her.

“Mm,” she said, unimpressed. It looked like she was waiting for him to say something further, but when Stiles had nothing more to add, she gave up waiting on him. She shifted her gaze back to Derek, giving him a slow once-over, then motioned one of the tables and said something to Stiles in Spanish, slapping his arm lightly before turning away.

“Okay I’m still—my Spanish is still rusty,” Stiles insisted after her.

“She said she reserved your favourite table for you,” Derek said, Stiles turning to him, startled.

“Wait, you speak Spanish?”

“Sí,” Derek admitted. “Learned a few languages in university. Had to take some art courses to complete my major so I just took a few languages. Spanish was the one that was most interesting.”

“Then you can translate everything Mrs. Calavera says to me tonight because she harps on me to learn Spanish all the time.” He rolled his eyes, then motioned for Derek to follow him to the corner where a table was waiting for them. The place wasn’t particularly busy yet, but it was also only five minutes to five, so not exactly rush hour from a dinner perspective.

They sat down, Derek feeling stiff and uncomfortable since he could practically feel all eyes on him. He wondered how Stiles’ roommates—presumably Jackson being one of them, and Ethan being the other—could stand to be in there with all the judging stares.
Stiles seemed to notice he was feeling uncomfortable because he started talking about random things again as a means to get Derek’s mind off the discomfort. One of the waitresses came over with some plain chips and homemade salsa, and handed over a menu for Derek. Presumably Stiles knew it well enough not to need one.

“Margarita?” she asked Stiles with a small smile.

“Yes please.” Stiles beamed at her, then looked at Derek. “You want one too? I know the alcohol won’t do anything for you, but they’re still good.”

“Sure,” Derek said.

The waitress nodded and headed off, seeming less concerned with having a Werewolf in the restaurant. Either she wasn’t part of the family, or she was young enough that she wasn’t bound by the old prejudices.

Stiles leaned across the table to point out all the things that were good, which was basically the whole menu. Honestly, Derek kind of wanted to over-order so that he could bring leftovers home, share them with Laura. He doubted she’d ever have the opportunity to come here, so it might not be a bad idea.

When the waitress came back with their drinks, he was still debating what he wanted to do. Stiles could tell he wasn’t ready so he told the waitress to give them another minute and she walked away again.

“Are you okay?” Stiles asked, sounding concerned. “I probably should’ve cleared this with you first, but I just thought you’d like to try this place since you normally can’t. I didn’t mean to make you feel so uncomfortable.”

“No, it’s not—” Derek cut off, still looking at the menu. “I just see a lot I’d like to try, and things my sister would probably like, too. I was wondering about ordering a lot and having it packed up to go or something.”

“Oh, you can totally order to go straight up,” Stiles insisted. “Ethan does that a lot, too. He feels uncomfortable eating in here when he’s alone, so he usually just comes in to order and then leaves with it. Just order what you want for dinner, and give Gabriela a rundown of what you want to bring home. She’ll have Severo get it ready for you in time for when we head out.”

Derek stared at him for a long moment. So long, in fact, that Stiles started shifting uncomfortably.

“What?” he asked.

“You really do know them all, don’t you?”

“Oh,” Stiles said, startled, then grinned. “Yeah, we go way back. Like I said, I’m slowly but surely getting them to feel more comfortable with Werewolves. I don’t think they’ll ever honestly be fully open to them, but they let them eat here now if they know and trust them, so it’s a huge improvement, believe me.”

“Thanks,” Derek said, Stiles giving him a questioning look while sipping at his alcoholic frozen beverage. “For caring enough about Werewolves to want them to let even a few of us eat here.”

“Pretty much all of my friends are Supernaturals in some way, shape or form,” Stiles said with a shrug, setting his drink back down. “I just want the world to stop being so damn behind in the times.”
“It’s appreciated,” Derek admitted with a small smile. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.” Stiles clapped his hands together. “So, I was thinking, if you haven’t really settled on anything, we could grab a quesadilla to split, and maybe a few other appetizers and side dishes? That way you can get whatever else you wanted to take home.”

“I leave the food for the night in your capable hands,” Derek said, motioning Stiles with flourish. He laughed at that, but waved for the waitress—Gabriela, apparently—who was back in seconds. Stiles put in their dinner order, then Derek pointed out all the dishes he wanted to take home with him, Gabriela not batting an eye while writing them all down.

They chatted amiably while their dinner was being made, Stiles munching on the tortilla chips on the table before shoving them away and insisting it was Mrs. Calavera’s way of making him too full to eat her more delicious food since it was expensive to buy ingredients. Derek knew that wasn’t true, and Stiles was just exaggerating, but he nodded gravely in agreement anyway.

When their dinner arrived, Stiles was right about the quesadilla. It was delicious, and huge, and he was more than happy to devour all the pieces of it Stiles couldn’t finish. Everything that landed on the table was amazing, and Derek was actually quite sad to know that food this good existed and he wasn’t even allowed to have it.

Mrs. Calavera came by a few times, though Derek suspected she was checking up on Stiles to make sure he was okay and safe more than making sure they were enjoying their food. He didn’t really understand the relationship between the old woman and Stiles, but she always said kind things to him in Spanish despite using a harsh tone, and called him various terms of endearment that sounded like insults.

It was almost like she didn’t want Stiles to know how much she truly did appreciate him. He was like the annoying grandchild she never knew she wanted, according to the things she was saying to him that he didn’t understand.

Derek didn’t translate, because he thought it was much nicer having Stiles flail after her promising he’d do better at learning his Spanish.

All in all, it was a really nice dinner. Comfortable—with Stiles, at any rate—and enjoyable. They spoke a lot about university, courses they’d taken, some hobbies, just... getting to know one another type of questions. It was nice.

Stiles paid for dinner, but Derek insisted very adamantly when Gabriela came back with the machine that he was paying for all the items he’d ordered for takeout. Thankfully he won that battle, because it definitely wouldn’t have been fair to make Stiles pay for literally eleven dishes he wasn’t benefiting from.

Gabriela brought out the first few when they’d paid and were ready to go, but Mrs. Calavera brought out the last bag, placing it on the table in front of Derek.

“How was the food?” she asked him, much less stiffly than he’d expected. She was still looking at him like he was the most interesting thing to walk into her restaurant in a long time.

“Delicious,” Derek said, fixing the collar of his jacket. “Thank you very much. Your restaurant is truly the best Mexican restaurant in the State.”

“He’d know,” Stiles piped in. “He travels.”
“Mm,” Mrs. Calavera said, eying him briefly, still looking like she found him interesting. “I am glad you enjoyed it.”

“Thank you for allowing me to enter.” Derek felt like, despite the clear prejudice, he had to acknowledge that they were kind of letting him in just because Stiles had asked. “It was appreciated, and I enjoyed myself very much.”

“Mm,” Mrs. Calavera said again, then shifted her gaze to Stiles. “He is who again?”

“Derek Hale,” Stiles said cheerfully.

Mrs. Calavera looked back at him, expression calculating. She kept casting glances between Stiles and Derek, then finally settled on Derek once more.

“I like this one,” she finally said. “He can return.”

Derek was startled, but Stiles just beamed at her, stood to give her a huge hug, and let her pat his cheek lightly in endearment before telling him to get out before the dinner rush. Stiles called goodbye to the staff at large while helping Derek with his various bags of takeout, and they left the restaurant, the same guy as before breaking the mountain ash line for Derek.

“That went so well!” Stiles said cheerfully while they walked around the side of the building. “It took her ages to warm up to my best friend, but to be fair, he’s a prickly bastard. But even my non-prickly best friend had to come six or seven times before she let him come alone. The shortest one to date was Ethan at four, so you win the prize for being the only Werewolf ever to visit once and earn her favour.”

Derek was still kind of in shock over it himself. He didn’t know what the woman had seen, or what she was looking at, but evidently she liked something about him. He did notice she’d been watching Stiles a majority of the night, and now that he thought about it, Stiles had been smiling and happy the entire time they’d been eating.

Maybe she saw how happy Stiles was, sitting across from Derek, and had... what? Gotten the wrong idea, clearly. Derek would’ve loved to be the cause of that smile on Stiles’ face, but the lady had it all wrong.

Much as Derek wanted to be able to call Stiles his, he wasn’t.

At least, not yet... but maybe one day.

Derek felt like, if he never found his mate, and had to spend the rest of his life with Stiles, well, he wouldn’t be too upset about it.

Stiles was kind of glad to learn that Derek’s taste in books hadn’t changed over the years, because he could honestly say he hadn’t really had much luck reading since high school. He always got sucked in by the cool covers or the suspenseful summaries, and ended up disappointed.

Honestly, sometimes he wondered if maybe he just had really bad taste in books, and that was why reading the ones Derek had been enthralled with had been the best books ever. Derek was someone who actually seemed to have taste, and Stiles could imagine him as one of those people who researched books thoroughly before committing to reading them.

Explained why the last few books Stiles had been reading on his commute were so damn interesting.
He and Derek had been talking a lot lately. Well, since the elevator incident, really. They hadn’t gone out to dinner again since the Mexican food last Friday, but they always had a brief chat in the mornings, and sometimes Derek actually left on time and they headed out together.

Stiles couldn’t help wishing, not for the first time, that things had been different. If only he hadn’t been a dick in high school. If only Derek remembered him. If only they could just... start everything over. He so badly wished to just start over with him.

Sometimes he thought about telling him. He thought about just blurting out, “Hey, remember that dick from high school you probably never wanted to see again? Surprise!”

They had a good thing going now though, so Stiles definitely didn’t want to jeopardize that. He kept insisting to himself that he would tell Derek eventually. Before things went too far. He would tell him. He knew he was procrastinating, but well, he was worried about losing a good thing.

Besides, he really needed this job. Like, really badly.

And on top of that, he had a corporate credit card! He’d only gotten it that morning, but when the dude from Accounting had handed it over, Stiles honestly hadn’t known what the fuck was going on. Derek had come out to explain the reason behind him getting it, and he didn’t know what to say.

He’d basically been given free reign of the card to buy his own food so long as he was also buying something for Derek. So all his morning breakfasts he’d been buying for the two of them? Covered by work. When he ran out to grab lunch for the two of them? Covered by work. If he headed out late in the afternoon to grab a snack and some dinner for Derek because he was staying late? Covered by work.

On the one hand, it made Stiles uncomfortable, but on the other? His bank account was sobbing with relief. This was going to help him save so much money and he had no idea why it had been decided he warranted this. Sure, he bought Derek food all the time, but they’d also given him a job when they didn’t have to, and on top of that, he was in love with the guy.

Sure, Derek didn’t know that, but still!

And God, Stiles felt like he could die happy sometimes. Ever since Friday, Derek had been coming to work with his glasses on, almost like Stiles embarrassingly telling him he looked attractive in them had made him feel like he could rock them all the time. Which, really, he could. Derek was hot as fuck in those glasses. Cute little nerd boy, Stiles could hardly stand it!

Besides, with the glasses and the beard, he almost looked... softer. Stiles didn’t know how to describe it, but he looked less intimidating somehow, which would probably help with the rumours that still went around sometimes. It was hard to want to spread rumours about someone who looked so damn soft.

He loved him. So fucking much. God how he loved him.

Stiles started when the book he was reading was wrenched out of his grip, Jackson smacking him hard across the head with it.

“Ow! What the fuck, Whitty? Werewolf strength!”

“Are you being purposefully ignorant, or trying to ruin my good mood? Your Skype’s been going off for the past ten minutes.”
“And it took you ten minutes to tell me?” Stiles’ eyebrows shot up. “Your patience is improving.”

“Do you want to still have a computer by nightfall?”

“You would never, the amount of whining that would illicit would kill you,” Stiles argued with a smarmy smirk, getting to his feet and moving towards the stairs. Jackson didn’t respond behind him, but Stiles hoped he didn’t lose the page in his book. Not that it’d be a pain to find it again, but it would still be a little frustrating.

Reaching his bedroom, he pushed open his door and, sure enough, his Skype was open with a call coming in. The volume was low, since Stiles had it that way out of habit because of Jackson and Ethan, but he moved forward to answer the call and raised the volume at the same time.

He couldn’t help the small smile that crossed his features at the sight of his dad. He was sitting in his office at home, still wearing his uniform, and looking fairly well-rested. That was a relief, he’d been working a lot lately, Stiles was glad he was back to taking care of himself.

“About time. Jackson usually gets annoyed long before this.”

“I know, right? Whitty’s clearly annoyed he’s my Skype detector.” Stiles winked and took a seat in his chair, pulling himself closer to his desk. “How’re you doing, pops? Work going okay? Taking care of yourself?”

“You remember I’m the dad here, right?” He gave Stiles a look.

“Those are the questions I ask.”

“I’m always taking care of myself,” Stiles argued. “And work’s going well. I’m actually really enjoying it, and since I’ve gotten better at it, I feel accomplished.” He smiled softly. “Working for Derek is actually really nice. He’s a great boss.”

“Mm hm,” his dad said, eyeing him. Oh no, that was his judgy sheriff look, that didn’t bode well.

“So great you took him out to dinner, as I understand it.”

Really, Stiles couldn’t tell Jackson anything. He literally took pleasure in ruining everything, why were they even friends?!

“I mean—you-you told me to thank him.” Stiles pointed at his screen emphatically. “You told me to do something nice for him!”

“I did, because it was the right thing to do after what he helped you through. But I don’t recall telling you to take him out to dinner like it wasn’t going to mean something different to you than it did to him.” His dad gave him a pointed look. “You still haven’t told him, have you?”

“We—are not there yet. Just—baby steps, dad. Baby steps.”

“If you took him out for food instead of just buying him a gift basket, I don’t know that I consider that to be a baby step, Stiles.” He sighed, dragging a hand across his mouth and Stiles felt his stomach drop. “Stiles, I know you. I know how much he meant to you, and how happy you are to have him back in your life. But this isn’t healthy, and it certainly isn’t fair. The longer you wait, the more of a risk you have of him finding out on his own, and then what?” He pressed his lips together. “I just don’t want you to get hurt. Again.”

Stiles knew that. He did. He was more than aware of his dad’s desire to avoid the end of senior year all over again. It wasn’t like Stiles handled things like this very well, after all. It had taken him such a long time to get over Derek. Hell, the only reason he’d finally managed to relegate Derek to the back of his brain was because he’d stopped updating his Facebook.
Stiles had been stalking his Facebook for months after they’d both split for university, but Derek was horrible at keeping it up to date. After about a year of no updates, he’d finally managed to stop checking it. And eventually, he’d just... stopped thinking about him. It had taken a long time, but he’d managed, which was why it had been horrible when he’d been interviewed by him a few months back.

If Stiles didn’t literally work for him right now, he’d have gotten obsessed again. It was bad, really bad. He had no idea why he was like this, and why it was only with Derek. If he didn’t know better, he’d think some Supernatural Cupid thing had struck him with a love arrow or something.

But he did. He did know better. Because he was an educated person and not a total moron.

“I’ll talk to him,” Stiles insisted, raking a hand through his hair. “I will, just—I need to find the right time.”

“There’s never going to be a right time, Stiles. And the longer you wait, the more it’ll hurt him. And you.”

He was right. As usual. Stiles hated that about his dad.

He muttered that he’d work on it and then moved the conversation in another direction. He and his dad didn’t talk nearly as often as he’d like—his fault, probably—so whenever they had time to chat, he liked doing so. He wished his dad would just get an Iphone so they could do FaceTime, but he was firmly attached to his flip-phone—seriously, who still made those?—so Skype was their only option.

It was nice knowing his dad was doing well, that he was keeping himself happy and healthy. He and Scott’s mother went out for dinner together whenever time permitted, and Stiles teased him about a relationship. He knew it would never happen, his father was still very much devoted to his mother, but he and Scott never missed out on an opportunity to make fun of them.

After a twenty minute conversation, his father bid him farewell and Stiles closed the window, thinking he should find out how vacation time worked. He should go out and visit, it wasn’t like it was a long drive. And Ethan really liked his dad, maybe they could both get time off together, see if Jackson could book the same time, and then head back home. Jackson hadn’t been back for a while anyway, and he hated going back without Stiles, so it would work out.

Heading back downstairs to his book, he could hear Jackson speaking condescendingly to someone, and knew even before he heard the answering voice that it was Scott. The two of them always spoke with animosity dripping from every word, it was a wonder they were even friends. Stiles knew it was for his benefit, but still.

“Speaking of losers, here comes the biggest one,” Jackson said as Stiles walked back into the living room. “The duality of idiocy is complete with your presence.”

“Hilarious you know what the word ‘duality’ means,” Stiles said with a smirk, falling down beside Jackson and leaning into his side so he could be seen on the small screen, waving at Scott. “Hey buddy, how’s Texas?”

“Hot,” was the easy response. “As always, Allison’s resisting sticking her head in the freezer every couple hours, but I think it’s a near thing.”

Stiles just laughed, smiling endearingly at his friend. He looked a bit tanner than the last time they’d spoken, suggesting he’d been spending a lot of time outside tending to his herd. Or whatever
ranchers did, Stiles honestly still wasn’t sure.

He still didn’t even know how Scott had ended up as a rancher, but figured it was more Allison and Scott had followed along.

“McCall and I were just talking about Derek.”

“Really, Whitty?” Stiles demanded, annoyed. “Are you going to talk to everyone about it to guilt me into talking to him? Who’s next, Danny?”

“Funny you should mention that…” Scott said with an awkward laugh. “I might’ve spilled the beans on who your new employer is. Danny’s probably stalking the company’s website as we speak.”

Stiles let out a loud, annoyed groan, throwing his head back. His friends were the worst. Couldn’t they leave well enough alone? Things were good between him and Derek right now, he didn’t want to ruin it by rehashing the past. Derek didn’t remember him, and that was a good thing. Stiles didn’t want to be associated with that asshole back in high school.

Sure, everything he’d done to Derek had been as a kind of roundabout way to move him forward in life, such as not missing class because he was busy reading in the hallway, but he also knew everything he’d done had been childish and mean. He knew for a fact he’d been an asshole, and being in love with Derek hadn’t excused that.

They were doing so well now! They were friends! He didn’t want to admit who he was and have Derek hate him. Besides, all that aside, he really needed this job, and if he admitted who he was, Derek would either fire him on the spot, or he’d make his life miserable. Stiles didn’t want his life to be miserable, and he wanted to stay close to him.

He really liked him. Even ten years apart hadn’t dampened those feelings.

“You need to tell him,” Scott insisted quietly. “Don’t you remember what happened the last time you didn’t tell him?”

“You mean when I got totally trashed and almost missed my own crowning at prom?” Stiles asked dryly. “Yeah, I remember it fairly well, thank you.”

“We’re just saying—”

“I’m saying nothing,” Jackson cut in. Scott just gave him a scathing look and continued.

“We already know bad things happen when you keep things bottled up. You’re both different people now, and who knows, maybe he likes you.”

“I doubt Derek is going to feel any form of romantic adoration for the guy who literally made his entire high school life horrible,” Stiles reminded him with a snort.

“Maybe not, but you know what he’ll definitely think if he finds out on his own?” Scott asked.

Stiles was almost worried to hear the answer. “That even after all these years, you’re still making fun of him. You said he looked good in his glasses, right? He’s going to think you made that up so he would look more nerdy.”

Okay, seriously, he couldn’t tell Jackson anything!

“I can’t believe he needs glasses, what a loser,” Jackson said with a smarmy grin.
Stiles nudged him, annoyed. Derek probably got ragged on for needing glasses all the time. As a Werewolf, things like that were unheard of. Stiles had honestly thought they were a fashion statement at first until he’d caught Derek rubbing at his eyes due to his contacts bugging him that first week of work.

“My point is, you need to talk to him before it’s too late. You know we’re right, you just don’t like it.”

“Of course I don’t like it,” Stiles snapped. “He’s gonna hate me when he finds out!”

“Imagine how he’ll feel if he finds out on his own,” Scott said softly.

Stiles didn’t want to even think about that, but he knew Scott was right. His dad was right, Scott was right, Jackson’s passive-aggressive comments were right. Hell, even Ethan kept suggesting that they should have an honest heart-to-heart, and Ethan didn’t even know the full story more than what Jackson had probably felt inclined to tell him.

He knew they were all right, but he just... didn’t want to lose Derek. He didn’t want things to change.

But if he wasn’t careful, things would change, and definitely not in a way he wanted.

“Are you serious?” Laura asked, wrinkling her nose while walking further into Derek’s apartment, two different duffels and a suitcase following her in. “You knew I was coming today, and you thought it would be the perfect time to jerk off?”

“I was showering,” Derek insisted defensively, shutting his apartment door and locking it, turning to cross his arms and glare at his sister. “And would you rather I jerk off with you in the apartment?”

“Gross, no.” Laura made a face, as if conceding his point.

They were about to be stuck together for a whole month while their parents were in town. Derek wasn’t going to be able to jerk off to Stiles whenever he wanted anymore. Sure, they’d lived together before, but Stiles hadn’t been in the picture since high school, so there had been a lot less jerking off at the time.

Now that he was back in his life, well... Derek wasn’t proud of how often he had ‘special Derek time’ while thinking of his crush. It was just really hard to resist sometimes, because Derek’s sex drive seemed to have skyrocketed since Stiles showed back up. It only proved how gone for him he was, and it kind of sucked, in a way.

He watched Laura drag her things into the guest room, making no move to help her. She was a big girl, she could damn well carry her own things. And he didn’t understand why she’d brought so much, she was only there for a month, and it wasn’t like she couldn’t go home whenever she wanted for more clothes.

Whatever, he didn’t question it, his sister was crazy.

He wandered into his living room to continue reading his latest book, leaving Laura to her unpacking. She’d probably be bitching and moaning about virtually everything for the first twenty-four hours they spent together, but that was normal. It was always weird being in each other’s space again after living alone for so long.
In a way, he was glad she’d agreed to come to his place. Usually he liked going to stay at hers so that his parents stayed at his place and the place smelled like his Alpha and family when they left, but Laura’s home was further than his was from the office. Given her earlier hours, and the fact that Derek himself tended to get there a bit before seven now, it was honestly better for them to stay at his place.

And this way he could jerk off before they bunked together without worrying about his mother walking in on Monday and smelling spunk first thing upon entering. It had been bad enough growing up in a house of Werewolves, he didn’t need that in his life as an adult. At least Laura wasn’t having ‘Laura time’ given she didn’t have anyone to crush on at the moment.

Sometimes, he wondered what that must be like. Sure, he’d had a huge stretch between high school and Stiles showing back up where he’d felt nothing for anyone, but he’d grown up crushing so hard on Stiles and he had him back now, so he kind of forgot what not having a crush on someone even felt like.

Must be nice not having the crushing blow of rejection hanging over her head. Derek kind of envied her for not crushing on anyone. Maybe she’d just find her mate like Cora did and be done with it. Derek was going to be stuck being in love with someone he couldn’t have until he either died or magically found his own mate.

Considering his age, he wasn’t holding out on the latter, so it was more than likely he’d crush on Stiles forever, watch the guy find his own one true love, and then be miserable for the rest of his life having had Stiles so close and yet so far.

Unless he could convince him to give him a shot. They were at least friends now, that had to count for something, right?

Derek forced his attention back to his book, listening to Laura hum to herself while she unpacked. It was going to be really nice having her around. Much as she annoyed him sometimes, they didn’t see each other nearly as often as they should, considering they worked in the same building. She came by before heading home, and they saw one another at meetings, but they usually spoke about work. Having her with him here would mean being able to discuss other things.

Though he was positive all she’d do was tease him about Stiles, because siblings were the worst.

He would know, he had two of them. And an asshole for an uncle. Peter was the worst, truly.

Laura wandered out of her temporary room when she was done squaring everything away, sitting down beside Derek on the couch and leaning heavily into him, cheek on his shoulder while she read his book with him. He knew she was probably bored, and was likely going to turn on the television in a few moments, but he kind of liked that they were both just basking in the silent moment together.

Derek unconsciously rubbed his stubbled cheek against her head, scenting her while his eyes continued to move along the page, his glasses shifting slightly from the action.

“What’s the plan for dinner?” Laura asked after a few seconds of silence, one of her hands sliding absently up and down Derek’s closest forearm, unconsciously scenting him back.

“What? I mean, you forget Stiles is the one who remembers to feed me?”

Laura snorted. “Good thing I’m here now. Means you’ll at least remember to eat on the weekends,
since he’s got you covered for the week.” She tilted her head slightly then. “Hey, what about Mexican? That Cinco de Mayo place you brought food from the other week was to die for, and you said the owner agreed you could drop by whenever.”

Derek glanced at her and shifted uncomfortably on the couch. He hadn’t been back there since he’d been invited by Stiles. While the owner had said he could return, and Stiles had insisted afterwards that it was amazing Derek had won her over so quickly, he wasn’t really comfortable with it. He didn’t know why, maybe because a part of him didn’t believe she would honour that deal without Stiles there. Or maybe she would think he only went with Stiles as a means to gain her favour or something.

He didn’t know, he just—it made him uncomfortable.

But the food was amazing. And Laura wasn’t allowed to go, considering the no-Werewolves rule. It felt kind of like a dick move to say no just because he was scared of getting turned away at the door, but...

“What if she doesn’t let me in?” he asked, hands tightening around the book.

“She said she would,” Laura argued. “But if she doesn’t, well—we can just get something else.” She shrugged. “No harm in trying, right? After all, if I hadn’t tried my own stupid idea, we wouldn’t be here, would we?”

That was true. After all, no one had believed in Laura or Peter when they’d been planning this whole thing—not even Derek, he was ashamed to admit. But now, they were the most successful Werewolf family in the country, and all because she’d tried.

It seemed a little dumb to compare walking into a Werewolf-hating restaurant to his sister’s successful business but on that same vein... if only he’d tried talking to Stiles in high school, maybe they’d have ended up together long before the desperate make-out session at prom. Maybe they wouldn’t have had ten years apart where Stiles forgot about him and Derek just... pined.

Not that he’d ever admit to anyone that he was pining, but he was.

“Okay,” he said after a long while. “Why don’t we invite Erica and Boyd over? They wanted to have some wedding talks with you soon anyway, so this works out.”

“Sure.” Laura grinned, sitting up properly. “I’ll give them a call while you order.

It was going to have to be a lot of food if four Werewolves were eating it, but he figured he could grab a few dishes he hadn’t tried last time, as well as the ones he’d really liked. And he knew certain preferences Boyd and Erica had—and Laura, of course—so he figured it would be a good mix of food.

Laura was already pulling out her phone to excitedly call Erica while Derek set his book aside, arching his back to pull his own phone out of his pocket. He looked up the restaurant’s website to call them, but frowned when he noticed they didn’t have a number. He realized that was probably because they didn’t want people calling to order and then having Werewolves show up to get the food.

When Stiles had said he’d called, he probably had Mrs. Calavera’s actual number.

Realizing he’d have to go to the restaurant made him feel even more anxious, but Laura was already talking to Erica and, really, what did he have to lose? If she turned him away at the door, well... whatever. He’d call Laura and just figure something else out. Maybe they could do Indian or
“They don’t have a number, so I’ll just go,” Derek said, Laura glancing at him and nodding. It was still an hour to their usual dinner time, but it wasn’t like microwaves weren’t a thing. It would be better to go now, outside peak hours, both so they would have time to make all the food without a rush around, and also in case he got turned away at the door.

Derek was in his car and driving to the restaurant before he could chicken out. He realized he hadn’t changed or even put his contacts in, but didn’t worry about it. They wouldn’t turn him away because of how he looked, only because he was a Werewolf.

The closer he got, the more nervous he was. A part of him wanted to text Stiles and ask him to call ahead to make sure it was honestly okay for him to go, but he didn’t really want to do that. For one thing, he was worried texting Stiles about this would make him feel used—he didn’t know why, he just did!—and for another... texting Stiles seemed weird.

He’d love to text him, they were sort of kind of friends, but the most texting they tended to do these days revolved around food Stiles was buying him. Or cat memes, for some reason. Stiles always sent him cat memes. Not that he minded, they were funny, but it was weird.

Parking in the back lot, Derek turned off the engine, and then just sat in the car. He stared at the back of the building with a rising level of apprehension. He couldn’t help but feel like he was about to be made a fool of. He’d walk to the door, knock—since he couldn’t open it—and would just be shooed away. He felt like he might never recover from that level of shame, being shooed away from a restaurant by someone who clearly loved Stiles a great deal. And it also meant he could never go back, even with Stiles, because it would be too uncomfortable. And awkward.

Deciding he wasn’t helping himself by just sitting in the car, he forced himself to climb out and shut the door. He took his time locking it up and making his way around the front to the entrance, ignoring the steady increase of his heartbeat. This was such a bad idea, he was about to get embarrassed in public.

When he walked past the windows, he saw there were only three tables occupied, so at least only a few people would see his embarrassing display, which was comforting. But still, he was not looking forward to this.

Walking up to the door, no one having noticed him yet, he hesitated for a moment, grit his teeth, then knocked on the glass door. He couldn’t push it because the mountain ash was inside the entrance, but he figured knocking should be good enough.

Some of the patrons turned to the door, evidently confused as to why someone was knocking, but Derek saw the same guy as last time glance over at the door. He paused in what he was doing for a moment, and Derek took an unconscious step back, ready to just turn tail and run, but Mrs. Calavera came out from the kitchen at that moment and gave him a calculating look. She turned to the guy who was just standing there and smacked him across the back of the head, telling him in Spanish to hurry up and get the door open for him.

Derek had never felt such intense relief in his life, the man moving to the door and bending down to shift the mountain ash out of the way. He stood and opened the door, motioning Derek in. He nodded uncomfortably in thanks, easing into the restaurant, and felt the same uncomfortable itch at
the realization that the mountain ash was back in place and he was now trapped in there.

“Derek,” Mrs. Calavera said, expression severe while she approached him. “I see you came alone this time,” she said to him in Spanish.

“I did,” he replied, feeling uncomfortable. “I hope—that’s okay. I just wanted to—food. Could I order some? If not, that’s okay, I can—”

Derek started when she smacked him across the back of the head, blinking at her in surprise.

“I said you could come,” she insisted in English. “You can come. Gabriela,” she turned to the same waitress as last time and told her to grab him a menu, then faced him again, switching back to Spanish. “Will you be eating in, or taking out?”

“Taking out, if that’s okay,” he said slowly in English.

“Mm.” She eyed him again, then nodded her head towards an empty table. “Gabriela will take your order. I will bring you some water and chips while you wait.”

“Thank you,” Derek said, moving to take a seat while she turned to head back for the kitchen. The guy from the door gave him an interested look, like Derek was some kind of puzzle he was trying to put together, but didn’t say anything as he went back to work. Gabriela wandered over then with a brilliant smile, handing him a menu.

“She’s happy to see you,” she told him.

“Why?” Derek asked, confused.

“Because you make Stiles happy. She likes knowing the people in his life who make him happy.”

Derek didn’t think that was true, about him making Stiles happy, but he didn’t argue with her. He just perused the menu and asked for her opinion on some of the items. He didn’t know what they all were, and she was very nice and stayed to explain a few things and give him recommendations.

He asked her how many dishes he could order without it being a bad thing, and she just laughed and said to order whatever. Mrs. Calavera liked him, and money was money, so he tried not to feel uncomfortable while placing his rather large order.

Gabriela wrote it all down without a word and left to let the kitchen know as Mrs. Calavera returned with chips and salsa, and a glass of water. He almost worried it might be poisoned, but felt like he couldn’t think such things or else he was being just as prejudiced. When everything was set down in front of him, he thanked her in Spanish, and stiffened when she took a seat across from him, folding her arms across the table and staring at him intently.

She eyed him curiously for a long while, Derek sipping as his water for something to do. He didn’t really know what was going on, but he wasn’t willing to piss her off, so he just stayed silent while she inspected him, reaching for a chip to avoid looking at her.

“Stiles,” she said softly, Derek’s eyes shooting up to hers. When she continued, she did so in Spanish. “He likes you a lot. I could see it on his face. You are important to him.”

Derek chewed slowly in an attempt to stall, but he eventually had no choice but to swallow. “He’s important to me too,” he admitted, finding it to be less scary to say such things in another language. “I care about him. I want him to be happy.”
Mrs. Calavera’s smile was small, but fierce. “I can see that. You look at him like he is everything. Curious for a man who is his boss to have such strong feelings. He has not worked for you for very long.”

He felt like the air was getting thicker around him, making it harder to breathe. He knew it was just his imagination, but her words were kind of terrifying, and he wondered how much she knew.

Was she psychic as well as an amazing cook? Maybe she knew about their past somehow? With her... psychic abilities? He didn’t know!

“We have history,” he admitted softly. “From a long time ago. He doesn’t remember me.”

“Mm,” she said again, still eying him with interest. “Are you having a party?”

It was so out of left field that for a second, Derek had no idea what she was talking about. “Sorry?”

She motioned the kitchen then and he realized she was asking about the amount of food he’d ordered. He shifted uncomfortably.

“My sister and I have friends coming over tonight. She really liked your food when I brought some home last time and asked if I could come back. I told her I’d try.”

Mrs. Calavera smirked slightly at his ‘try’ comment but didn’t say anything further. She just nodded her head once in understanding, and then asked him about his Spanish and where he’d learned it.

Apparently he had a reasonably good accent—not perfect, but nobody who wasn’t a native-speaker had a perfect accent—but they spoke about his classes in university for a little while, and she was impressed he hadn’t lost it despite not using it much. She told him to make sure Stiles got off his ass and learned Spanish himself, because she’d been ragging on him for close to three years to get his ass in gear.

He promised her he’d do what he could and she seemed to have had enough of a chat with him because she stood then to make sure her kitchen wasn’t burning down. Derek just let out a small laugh at that, and found that... she was actually kind of nice.

He didn’t know why she was prejudiced against Werewolves, but considering she seemed to make exceptions for ones she somewhat trusted, he figured it was because something had happened in her past. Maybe as time went on she’d slowly start trusting again and allow any and all Werewolves to come into the shop. That would be really nice, but he wasn’t going to suggest it.

Stiles seemed to be doing what he could, so Derek would leave it in his capable hands.

It took almost twenty minutes for the order to be ready. Laura had texted him a few times, jokingly asking if he was dead, but Derek could tell she was legitimately worried. He promised her he was fine and the food was just taking a little while to be prepared. It made sense considering how much he’d ordered. He was glad he’d come during off-hours.

Gabriela came over with the card machine before the bags came out and Derek paid for it without batting an eye at the price. The girl grinned at him while handing him a copy, and Mrs. Calavera came back to his table when she’d finished.

“You drove?”
“Yeah, my car’s out back.”

She nodded and motioned for him to follow, which he did. She took him out the back door, both she and Gabriela helping with all the takeout bags so that nothing tipped over and spilled. He opened the back door of his car so they could set things down on the floor, and put his own bags in the front. Once everything was put away, Gabriela went back inside, and it occurred to him that the back door didn’t have any mountain ash.

Probably because no one came in that way.

“He cares a lot about you,” Mrs. Calavera said when Derek turned back to her. “I hope you are both happy.”

Derek didn’t really know how to answer that, so he just nodded awkwardly, thanked her for the food, and then climbed into his car once she headed back inside.

He thought about what she said the whole drive home, and wondered what she knew that he didn’t. It wasn’t like they’d been to the restaurant more than that one time together, and he doubted that Stiles was gushing about his boss whenever he went on his own—or with Jackson and Ethan.

Either way, something to think about another time. He called Laura when he was nearing his place and told her to come down and help him with the food. When he showed up, Boyd was the one waiting for him, because Laura was a lazy, useless sister.

Derek wasn’t letting her have any of the quesadillas.

“Are you busy?”

Stiles glanced up at Derek, chewing on the end of a pen while reading something over that he had to send out to the Finance team. Stiles was always in charge of proofing all of Derek’s announcements before they went out because apparently he’d once sent something out with a typo and Laura and Peter had never let him live it down.

He honestly didn’t understand half of the jargon being used since Finance wasn’t exactly his area of expertise, but he could still catch typos and grammar mistakes. Not that Derek made any grammar mistakes, because he was Derek.

“Just proof-reading your announcement,” Stiles said, pulling his pen from between his lips. He saw Derek’s eyes following it and felt that go straight to his groin.

He’d noticed a lot of things about Derek lately. Lingering looks, more visits to his desk, walking up the stairs with him in the morning and back down at night. Since the fob had been installed in the stairwell, Stiles had assumed Derek wouldn’t come early anymore to head up the lift with him, but he still did. Derek just went up the stairs with him now instead of the elevator.

Not that Stiles minded. Sometimes Derek was in front of him and he got a very nice view of his perky butt. Derek had a great butt.

“Can you do me a favour?”

“Always,” Stiles said with a brilliant smile. “What’s up?”

“My parents are coming into town today,” Derek said. He was frowning a little, like this was of concern to him, though Stiles had no idea why. “Laura and I were going to pick them up, but Peter
has a meeting he wanted me to attend from three to five. I told him I couldn’t since meetings with him always run late and my parents land at six, but he said there’s some information that’s pertinent to Finance. Would you mind going and taking notes for me? We’ll pay you for the overtime.”

Stiles just gave him a look for that comment. “Are you kidding? You basically pay for all my food, I can stay late to take meetings notes, not a problem.”

Derek almost smiled at that. “Thanks. I appreciate it. I was planning on taking a half-day, get some groceries and hit the gym before they showed up, but I can stick around until the end of the day since you’re doing me a favour.”

Stiles stared up at him. “Dude, that makes literally no sense, what?” He shooed him away. “If you need to go do stuff before your parents show up, go. I can send this notice out on your behalf once it’s proofed and head down to the meeting at three.”

Derek hesitated, like he really did want to get out of there sooner rather than later. “Well, the gym isn’t really a necessity.”

“Derek.” Stiles gave him a look. “Going to the gym is self-care.” Also definitely appreciated, he thought to himself. Those muscles may have been part-Werewolf anatomy, but he knew from university that it was possible for Werewolves not to have them because Jackson had gotten a little chunky. It had been adorable, but obviously not so much for Jackson. It was just a nice reminder that even Werewolves were human too, just not entirely.

Checking his watch, as if trying to think on whether or not he had time, he nodded once. “I’ll grab the groceries first and clean up a bit. Laura’s got an interview at four, so I have to come back here to pick her up anyway. If I have time to go to the gym down the street, I’ll go.”

Stiles beamed at him, and promised he’d send the announcement out when he was done with it. He had access to send items ‘on behalf of’ Derek so it would be easy to finish up and send it out.

“Thanks Stiles.” Derek’s smile was soft and endearing and Stiles wanted to reach up and kiss his dumb, stupid nerdy face!

“I hope you have a good evening with your parents,” Stiles said sincerely, in an attempt not to kiss his dumb, stupid nerdy face. “Do you have plans?”

“Just dinner.” Derek shrugged. “Laura made a marinaded chicken last night, so we’re going to do a barbecue. Something simple for now, we’ll have a big pack brunch on Saturday.”

“That sounds really fun! Are they staying long?”

“About a month.” Derek seemed really happy about that. “They live in Florida, so we don’t see them often. It’ll be nice having them around. They’re staying at Laura’s, so she’s going to be with me. She moved in this past weekend.”

“Is that why you were so grumpy this morning?” Stiles teased.

He got a look for that, but Derek didn’t deny it, so Stiles just grinned. He didn’t have siblings, but he imagined it was similar to having a Jackson. They’d grown up together, and still lived together, and while Stiles loved it, it was easy for them to tease and get on each other’s nerves. He imagined that must be what having siblings was like.

“Are you sure you’re okay staying late?” Derek asked instead of answering.
“It’s fine.” Stiles waved one hand dismissively. “I have nowhere to be. I’ll just run out closer to two for lunch so I can tide myself over until after the meeting.”

“Thanks Stiles.” Derek checked his watch again. “I’ll head out then. If I have time to come back and go to the gym before Laura’s ready, then I will.”

“I will be in the meeting.” Stiles confirmed.

Slapping the edge of Stiles’ cubby lightly, Derek offered him another small smile, then turned to head back into his office. He gathered his things up and then waved to Stiles on his way out. He waved back enthusiastically, and was struck with a sense of dread. This was... nice. It felt so, so nice. Having Derek here, being all friendly with him, having him trust him.

Trust was hard-earned, and he didn’t know what he’d do if Derek suddenly stopped trusting him. Something he knew would happen in the future if he found out who Stiles really was. The thought hit him hard, and he realized how badly he was fucking this all up. His dad was right, everyone was right. He had to say something, he just... didn’t want to lose this.

But he’d have to say something soon, because Derek’s happiness was going to eat away at him eventually. And the closer they got, the harder the betrayal would hit when Stiles admitted the truth.

Not that he’d once lied this entire time, but still. Omission was a form of lying, wasn’t it? Or so people said.

Stiles slapped himself once in the face, reasonably hard, trying to get his head back on straight. He had to finish the announcement and send it out, and would have to get everything squared away for Derek for tomorrow before the meeting. He didn’t have time for an existential crisis.

It didn’t take him long to finish up with the announcement, which he sent out as soon as he was finished. He got a thank you response from Derek a while later, the man obviously checking his phone for any urgent email. Stiles just sent him back a smiley face.

Work seemed to drag when Derek wasn’t around for him to oogle. He got a few phonecalls, and various emails, but for the most part he got his job done relatively quickly and had everything ready for Derek for the morning.

He went to lunch at two, using his own card to buy it since he wasn’t getting anything for Derek today, and watched the clock crawl towards three. At ten-to, he grabbed his notebook and two pens —could never be too careful!—then headed for the stairs. He only had to go down two floors to reach Peter’s office, but the meeting was happening in the large boardroom on the north side of the building.

Stiles was the first to arrive, but that was fine. Technically speaking his day was over anyway, so he just put his notebook and pens down in front of a random seat. Before sitting, he figured if the meeting ran long, he should probably use the bathroom, so he went to do that, and passed one of the vending machines in the nearby kitchenette. Every floor had one, with the lunch room boasting the best snacks—chips, cookies, candy bars—but the other floors had smaller things like peanuts and trail mix.

He hesitated for a moment, then walked into the kitchenette and bought four packs of peanuts. Grabbing two small ramekins, he returned to the meeting room and set the two bowls down equidistant from one another, then dumped two packets into each one. He went back to the kitchenette to grab eight glasses, and then filled one of the pitchers they had in the board room with
He didn’t have to do all of this, but people tended to be more chipper with food in their stomachs and water available. At least it reminded them to take short breaks from speaking.

Finishing up with setting the pitcher in the middle of the table on top of a small, square glass plate, Stiles took his seat and opened his notebook, getting ready for the meeting.

Peter was the first person to arrive after him, and he paused when he walked in, eying the glasses set out on the table, the peanuts, and pitcher of water. His gaze shot up to Stiles, and he actually looked a little pleased.

“Perhaps I should schedule all my meetings at this time,” he said easily while taking a seat at the head of the table. “If it means I get you instead of my surly nephew, this is quite the upgrade.” He reached out for the closest ramekin, grabbing a few peanuts and popping them into his mouth one at a time. “Where are these from?”

“The vending machine.” Stiles shrugged. “People are happier when they’ve got food in their stomach.”

“Out of pocket again,” Peter commented, eying him. “I made a good choice when I told Laura we should hire you. Tell me, would you ever consider changing your role to something more challenging? I’m sure I could keep you far more entertained than my nephew.”

Stiles let out a small laugh, shaking his head. “Thanks, but I’m actually pretty happy where I am right now.”

“Is that so?” Peter seemed to find this amusing. “Derek’s had problems holding onto his assistants for as long as he’s been working here. I’m rather curious as to why you might be different.”

The look he was getting made him feel a little uncomfortable. Like he was being put under a microscope and examined down to his very core. He didn’t want Peter of all people to find out who Stiles was to Derek before Derek did.

Everyone was right, he really needed to talk to him. Soon. He didn’t want to, but... fuck.

Fuck.

Before he could decide on what to say, someone else walked in and Peter turned to them, smiling brightly and offering some form of passive-aggressive greeting. Peter was a bit of an odd duck, Stiles had noticed. He liked him well enough, but he always hid his true intentions behind creepy smiles and cutting words.

The room slowly began to fill, everyone murmuring greetings to one another. Stiles had planned for eight, but it only ended up being five people, including him. Apparently it wasn’t a meeting that required all the big wigs, it was mostly just the people involved in the firm’s capital. Accounting, Finance, Marketing—well, no Derek, but he wasn’t needed so much as he had to be informed.

They didn’t delay the start of the meeting, jumping right into it as soon as everyone was present. Stiles took detailed notes on what they spoke about, mostly because he didn’t know what Derek would need to be aware of and what didn’t pertain to him.

It was actually a pretty good meeting. There were some jokes in there along with the serious talk, which helped make it less dry, and it was clear the peanuts were appreciated because people kept
picking away at them.

Halfway through the first hour, one of the people present mentioned something and then lost their train of thought, and Stiles helpfully brought up what they’d said twenty minutes prior. They’d been startled, as if forgetting Stiles was sitting there taking notes, and Peter had looked impressed.

Stiles was starting to worry he was about to get a new boss, but he didn’t dwell on it and just kept writing furiously. His hand was beginning to ache a little bit, but it wasn’t too bad. No different than when he was in school, really, so he just powered through it.

At the hour mark, Peter said something, then paused and glanced at Stiles.

“Derek was supposed to bring the numbers for last month,” he said. “I don’t suppose he mentioned that?”

“Oh.” Stiles started slightly. “No, he didn’t. I know where they are though.” Stiles was the one who filed them, so he knew exactly where they were. “Did you want me to grab them?”

“Could you?” One of the other VPs asked. “If it’s not too much trouble?”

“No, no. It’s totally fine.” Stiles pushed his chair out, getting to his feet. “Just don’t talk about anything Derek will need to know until I get back.”

“Yes,” the other VP said. “Of course.”

Stiles hurried out of the room and headed quickly for the stairs. It took him no time to reach the ninth floor and he moved quickly through the empty space towards Derek’s office. With it being four, the whole floor had cleared out since it was well past the end of the day for everyone on this floor. Stiles found it kind of funny how they all had staggered start times throughout the office, but it was good from a security perspective. There were people who came in as early as six in the morning, and people who finished their days as late as six in the evening.

While seven was early for Stiles, he also kind of liked being done at three. Today was an anomaly, but he didn’t mind. He figured he’d grab a bite on his way home and just chill on the couch with Ethan and Jackson.

Rounding the corner quickly, Stiles walked right into Derek’s office to head for the filing cabinet, and froze four steps past the door.

Derek was in his office.

He was currently standing in his office wearing nothing but extremely tight boxer-briefs.

He was holding a shirt in one hand, and had the other buried in a gym bag, like he was rooting around for his shorts.

The two of them stood frozen staring at each other, and Stiles willed every divine entity that existed to just not pop a boner. Please God, let him not pop a boner right now.

Half the blood in his body rushed south, and the other half went straight to his face. Fuck, Derek looked amazing. He was like a God damn statue, all chiselled muscles and defined abs and fucking flawless skin and fuck, he was going to have a problem down south real soon!

“Sorry!” Stiles blurted out and hastily turned around, feeling his face warm even more. It was so fucking weird seeing a practically naked Derek. If anyone else had been his boss, he’d have
laughed it off and turned around as a courtesy. As it stood, he had to turn around for his own good because he was very quickly going to have an issue downstairs.

And fuck, Derek could probably smell the arousal! This was awful!

“I didn’t—I thought I was alone,” Derek said, voice somehow lower than usual. Jesus, was he aware of what he was doing to Stiles? This was cruel! “I should’ve changed in the bathroom. I was just in a hurry to get to the gym. I thought everyone was gone.”

“They—numbers. Papers. I was... Peter needed numbers.”

“Right.” There was rustling behind him, Derek getting into his clothes presumably, and then he heard a file cabinet drawer open. Papers shuffled and then a folder appeared at Stiles’ elbow out of his periphery.

He nodded a thanks, grabbing at it, clenching it tightly in both hands.

“Sorry,” he said again, not sure what else to say.

“Me too,” Derek said softly.

He sounded like he was right behind him. Like if Stiles leaned back he’d be pressed right into him. It was so, so tempting, and for a moment, he closed his eyes and imagined what it’d be like. To press back against Derek, to return to that day in the bathroom at prom, with Stiles pushing into him, line of his body flat against Derek’s while they made out against the door.

Fuck, he wanted him so bad, this was terrible.

Derek’s breath was ghosting along the back of Stiles’ neck, proving just how close he was standing to him. He hadn’t moved back after holding out the file, and Stiles felt like he was going to lose his fucking mind.

“Sti—”

“Well!” he said, overly loud. “They’re uh, they’re waiting for me. Downstairs. For the-the numbers. I have numbers for them. Have fun with your parents tonight!”

He booked it out of there as fast as he could sprinting down the long hallway with his heart pounding in his chest and his face probably as red as a fucking fire engine.

Racing down the stairs so fast he almost fell and killed himself, Stiles stopped on the seventh floor and sat on the bottom step beside the door, file in his lap and face buried in his hands. He clenched his eyes shut, but that only made things worse, because all he could picture was Derek in his damn underwear.

There was no fucking way he could go back to the meeting right now, not with four other Werewolves who were going to wonder what the fuck had happened when he’d gone upstairs. But he couldn’t very well sit in the stairwell forever, either!

Forcing himself to calm down, Stiles dragged his hands down his face and managed to slow his racing heart. He tried to think of unpleasant things, like sewage—gross—and kicked puppies—no, the puppies!—and any other innumerable things he could to stop thinking about Derek in his fucking underwear. With those strong thighs, and those muscled arms, and those washboard abs, and that fucking gorgeous skin.
He was screwed. He was so fucking screwed.

Stiles sat there for an additional two minutes before conceding defeat and heading back to the meeting. He didn’t look at anyone when he walked in, handing over the numbers, and didn’t miss the pause in conversation. He just took his seat, grabbed his pen, and resolutely stared only at his notebook for the remainder of the meeting, pointedly ignoring the gaze he could feel burning into him from Peter across the table.

“Are you really not gonna tell me why you’re so tense?” Laura demanded, for most likely the thirtieth time since they’d left the office together.

“Nope,” he replied, staring resolutely out the window and doing his best to ignore that she was beside him at all.

He couldn’t stop thinking about what had just happened at the office. Stiles showing up while he’d been changing to go to the gym. Honestly, this wasn’t the first time he’d changed in his office. Yes, there was a bathroom on the other side of the floor, but it was after hours, and security wouldn’t start patrolling until closer to six. No one had been there, and he hadn’t wanted to go all the way to the other side of the floor, so he’d changed in his office.

As he had done many times!

Stiles was meant to be in a fucking meeting! And while yes, he had been, Derek hadn’t considered the fact that he might need to come back up at all. He’d just been happily changing, only to look up and find Stiles right there! He didn’t know how he’d missed him coming, probably just overly distracted from the excitement of his parents coming to town, but now he felt... he didn’t know.

It was clear, even to someone who wasn’t a Werewolf, that Stiles was interested. Like, really interested. The arousal that had slammed into him may as well have knocked him over. And he’d been so embarrassed and turned on, and when Derek had stood behind him...

He’d almost said something. He’d almost asked him if he remembered the guy from prom. A part of Derek felt... almost territorial. Having Stiles be interested in someone else. It seemed so fucking stupid and weird because Stiles was interested in him, so it wasn’t someone else! But Stiles didn’t know that! And it bothered Derek that he didn’t know it, because a part of him felt like Stiles should still be in love with the guy he’d made out with in high school.

Which, again, was Derek, but still!

And this complicated things a lot. If Stiles actually started showing interest in him, how was Derek supposed to handle that? He was his boss, that wasn’t appropriate at all. Stiles knew that, too. If he used to be in HR, then he definitely knew an EA and their boss having a relationship was a bad idea.

But at the same time... some companies had people hiring their wives as assistants. He knew the law firm they sometimes outsourced to did that. One of the partners of the firm had an assistant, and it was his wife. One of the other partners had their son as his assistant. It wasn’t disallowed, it was just... it was a power imbalance.

If things went wrong, Derek being in a position of power meant he could fire Stiles without cause, or he could force him to continue in the relationship or else he would fire him. Not that Derek would ever be that kind of person, but it was why office relationships were discouraged. The imbalance of power meant one person could always coerce another into a situation they might not
want to be in.

This was very confusing and frustrating. It was days like this where he wished Stiles had never shown back up at all!

“Are you gonna be okay by the time they get here?” Laura asked, sounding somewhat concerned.

Derek turned to look at her, the two of them waiting in arrivals for their parents now, and scowled before shrugging. “I’ll be fine.”

“Seriously.” Laura put her hand on his arm. “What the hell happened today?”

“Just leave it,” he insisted, seeing people beginning to exit and craning his neck.

Laura kept her mouth shut for once, but probably only because she knew things would escalate if she didn’t and their parents were coming. They weren’t going to start the evening with a fight after months of not seeing their mother and father.

Derek felt a smile tugging at his lips when he finally caught sight of his mother and Laura let out a squeal and raced around Derek so she could run into the crowd of people attempting to come out. She threw her arms around Talia, hugging her tightly while their Alpha scented her, eyes closed and sighing almost in relief.

Derek was slower to follow, moving up to his dad with a small shake of his head and a laugh. He held his arms open and moved right into his dad’s personal space, hugging him tightly. Michael patted him on the back a few times before they broke apart, one hand on his shoulder and squeezing tightly.

“How’ve you been? It’s been a long time.”

“It has,” Derek agreed, turning to his mother now that Laura had released her death grip on her.

He and Laura switched places so she could crush their father to death and Derek folded himself into his mother’s embrace, closing his eyes and sighing at having her in his immediate space once more. She scented him the same way she had Laura, and he held onto her for a moment longer.

It always struck him how much he missed his parents whenever they visited. Of course he missed them, and he knew he missed them, but somehow it wasn’t until they visited that he seemed to remember just how much he missed them.

“You look healthy,” Talia said when they pulled apart, cradling his face with both hands. “You’ve been remembering to eat.”

“His new EA is a Godsend,” Laura piped in and Derek turned to her sharply.

He hadn’t said anything yet. About Stiles. He wanted to wait. He’d wanted to talk to his mom about it in person, and he definitely didn’t want to talk about it while at the fucking airport. The look he cut Laura made that explicitly clear and she held both hands up in surrender.

Evidently, Talia picked up on that silent exchange, but she said nothing. She just wrapped one arm around Derek’s shoulders and tugged him around. He grabbed at one of her suitcases while she rolled the other along behind herself and they headed for the exit. Laura and Michael were trailing along behind them, excitedly discussing how the flight had been and what they were going to be doing for dinner.
“You and Laura been getting along?” Talia asked while they walked.

“Sure. We haven’t killed each other yet, but the night’s still young,” he teased.

Talia just laughed and Derek felt himself relaxing. It felt so good having his family with him. He wished Cora would come back so they could all be together, but it wouldn’t be fair to have her leave her mate behind in Germany. He belonged to a rather large pack, and while his Alpha wasn’t his biological family the way Talia was theirs, the pack was still family. It would be mean to ask them to come back, even if Derek wanted to be selfish about it.

He expected his mother to immediately start grilling him about his new EA, but he should’ve known better than that. She wasn’t going to press the issue when it was so clear he didn’t want to talk about it yet. He would, of course he would, but maybe at dinner. Not now.

So instead she asked him about work, and how Kira was doing, and if Boyd and Erica had officially decided on a venue yet. They kept up an easy chatter the entire walk to the car in the lot, and then continued it once they were back on the road. Laura took over most of the conversation then, having always been far chattier than Derek, but it felt really nice being with them all.

The car smelled overwhelmingly of pack, because his Alpha was there, and his parents were visiting, and he had his sister and he just... things were good. They were so fucking good right now.

So good he actually managed to stop thinking about the disaster with Stiles, and how he was going to struggle to face him come morning.

His parents teased him about not being bothered to put on his contacts or shave, and they made comments about Laura’s apartment being a pigsty, but it was all in good fun. And really, Derek missed this. Living alone got a little lonely sometimes, though he was sure he’d re-think that once the month was up given he was stuck with Laura for the next thirty days.

Laura and Talia went to get everything unpacked while Derek and Michael headed out to the barbecue on Laura’s terrace, getting started on dinner. It was late for them to be eating, but in Derek’s defence, he usually forgot to unless Stiles brought him food.

He and his dad had a nice catchup while outside, his dad tending to the meat while holding a beer in one hand, and Derek leaning against the railing holding his own aconite-laced one. It was nice being able to talk about things other than work, and he found out how his dad’s hobby of building a sailboat was going.

Not well, apparently, since he was not at all gifted in that sort of thing, but he was enjoying himself, and that was the important thing. Ten years ago, nobody had thought the Hales would ever be able to retire, and now they lived in a huge house in Florida and had absolutely no money woes.

And to think, Derek used to make fun of Laura and Peter for their ideas. He was just lucky they hadn’t let his comments deter them.

“It’s so nice to see the two of you again,” Talia said while they all took their seats at the table. She pulled Derek’s face closer with one hand and kissed his cheek. He made a face about it, but they both knew he was happy.

“You could visit more, you know,” Laura insisted, grabbing at some of the potato salad on the table and spooning it onto her place while Derek served up the chicken.

“You could also come see us in Florida a bit more often,” Michael countered.
“I have a job,” Laura argued. “Derek and I are contributing members of society!”

“Oh yes, and we’ve never worked a day in our lives.” Talia turned to wink at her husband, who just let out a small laugh while reaching for his beer bottle.

They bantered and bickered for the first few minutes of dinner, and Derek forgot what it was like being together like this. Teasing each other, making fun of each other, but still honestly caring about how everyone was doing and what the future held for them all.

Overall, they were doing a lot better than most Werewolves were, and definitely better than they’d ever thought they would. Derek was so glad to be able to enjoy the next few weeks with his parents that he actually almost forgot the looming conversation that was sure to come crashing back down over his head.

Which it did, halfway through dessert.

“So work’s been good, then?” Talia asked, spoon digging into the mousse in front of her and bringing it to her mouth, letting out a happy little sigh. “Laura, you’ve really outdone yourself.”

“Thanks. Derek helped. He got the groceries, that counts.” She nudged him and he rolled his eyes. “But yeah, work’s been really good. Still doing well, still can’t believe it. We’re actually having discussions with a distributor in Canada next week, and there’s also been some interest from Mexico, too. Might be expanding, which would be crazy, but awesome.”

“That’s great news,” Talia said sincerely, smiling at her before shifting her gaze to Derek. “And you? How’s work been?”

“Good,” he admitted. “Really good. Peter’s still a pain in the ass, and Laura takes every opportunity she can to make my life miserable, but I like it a lot.”

“Rumours still spreading?” Michael asked, wiping his mouth with his napkin.

“You know, less than they used to,” Laura admitted. “Erica and Isaac have been on the ball about it, and Derek’s new EA has been really vocal about what a good person he is. Whenever anyone badmouths him, his EA is all over them. He used to work in HR, but we couldn’t give him a position there because of our ratio, so he ended up as Derek’s EA instead.”

“That’s very nice to hear,” Talia said with a smile. “I’m glad he’s been keeping you fed and watching your back. He must really like working for you.”

Laura was staring at him, and Derek knew his parents were, too. They knew something was coming, that he had to talk to them about this new secret EA he’d purposefully neglected to mention whenever they spoke on the phone. He also knew that if Peter and Laura had been polite enough not to bring it up, his parents were well aware that something was going on.

He had no idea how to even broach the topic, so he ended up just giving up and blurtling out, “It’s Stiles.”

That was met with a long silence.

“I’m sorry, sweetie,” Talia said slowly, sounding confused. “What does Stiles have to do with any of this?”

Because of course his mother remembered Stiles. The loudmouth jock who was always an asshole to him, but that Derek had somehow still magically fallen in love with. The guy he’d been crushing
on for years just waiting for a sign that maybe they could work, maybe they could be something, only to find out right at the end of senior year.

Of course his parents remembered Stiles. Derek had never loved anyone else in his entire fucking life.

“My EA,” Derek said, poking at his mousse and feeling like he’d lost his appetite. “It’s Stiles.”

Another silence, this one more weighted.

“I see,” Talia said eventually. “And how are things—”

“He doesn’t remember me,” Derek cut off, not wanting her to ask if they were getting along, being friendly, involved in some way. Fuck, how he wished. “He applied for a job with us through a friend, because nobody else would hire him.”

“He called the Workplace Injustice Institute on his old employer,” Laura explained. “So he’s kind of got a black mark on his CV over it.”

“That must’ve been a very hard decision for him to make,” Talia said kindly. “Risking his future to do the right thing.”

“It’s why Peter wanted to hire him,” Laura agreed. “He cared more about other people than himself. And he interviewed really well, apparently, but we didn’t have a place for him in HR. Derek’s EA quit just before he showed up, so we thought maybe... well, jog a few memories. But so far...”

Derek hated that Laura was admitting she’d done it on purpose, in an attempt to have Stiles remember him. If he hadn’t by now, he was never going to.

“Stiles has actually been really good for him,” Laura continued when it became clear Derek wouldn’t. “He’s—I mean, he’s actually awesome. I’m kind of jealous. He makes sure Derek eats, he’s always helping him out with things outside work, and he doesn’t let people badmouth him when he hears them spreading rumours. It’s really nice, seeing them like this. Complete one-eighty from high school.”

“And how do you feel about having him back in your life?” Michael asked. Derek glanced up, knowing the question was directed at him, and saw his father smiling encouragingly.

“Confused,” he admitted. And just like that, the floodgates opened and he raked one hand through his hair. “I’m so confused! I thought it was over! We went our separate ways, we grew up, we moved on! But then he shows back up in my life, and he looks so good and I can’t stop thinking about him, and every time I think about losing him again I feel like I can’t breathe, and I worry someone else is going to snatch him up before I can. And I want to talk to him about the past, I do, I want to know if he— if he remembers me, and just hasn’t put two and two together that we’re the same person. But I’m worried because what if things have changed too much? I’m his boss now, and he’s so perfect, and if I say something maybe he’ll quit and I’ll lose him all over again! But every time I look at him, I just think about prom, and how desperate he was and how he said he loved me and I—”

“Whoa, whoa, what?!” Laura demanded, slapping the back of her hand against his chest and staring at him wide-eyed. “What happened at prom? He told you he loved you? What the fuck, when?!”

He saw his mother give Laura a disapproving look, probably about the swearing, but she didn’t say
anything. She likely didn’t want to interrupt. And Derek kept forgetting he hadn’t told anyone about prom. It had just—it was so weird! And surreal! A part of him kept wondering if maybe he’d just made it all up in his head.

“We made out at prom,” he admitted softly, rubbing his face with both hands and digging his fingers into his eyes beneath his glasses. “He got drunk, he told me he loved me, we made out, and then never spoke about it again.”

“And you’re telling me this now?!” Laura demanded. “Derek, he’s been working for you for weeks now! How could you not think to tell me this?! I had no idea! Now I feel like a jerk.” She groaned and fell back into her seat. “Now I can’t tease you anymore or else I’m an asshole. I can’t believe...” She trailed off, shaking her head, then slanted a look his way again. “But he said he loved you?”

“Yeah.” Derek sighed, letting his hand drop back into his lap. “We never really—we didn’t talk about it after. We were about to graduate, so we kind of just avoided each other the last few days of school and then... he was gone.”

“But now he’s back,” Talia said, unnecessarily. “And you don’t know how to feel about it.”

“I’m pretty sure I’m still in love with him,” Derek admitted, muttering the words to such a degree that his father had to lean forward. The two Werewolves in the room heard him just fine, but his dad didn’t have enhanced hearing.

“As an outside party, I can tell you that you look like you’re still in love with him,” Laura informed him. “I mean, I don’t think you ever actually stopped, considering your love life. I think you’re always going to want Stiles, and no one else is going to be good enough.”

“Great,” Derek muttered. “So it’s die alone or find my mate to stop thinking about Stiles. I’m screwed.”

“Derek,” Talia said slowly, almost cautiously. She folded over her napkin, smoothed it flat on the table, and then placed her hands on top of it while leaning forward. “Honey, have you considered the possibility, given everything you’ve said, and have often said in the past, that perhaps this crush from high school who happened to cross paths with you again all these years later is your mate?”

Derek felt like his brain had just shut down. Like when a computer screen popped at the end of the shutdown sequence, that was what his brain felt like. Stiles as his mate? Stiles? That was... But it couldn’t... What she was suggesting was...

“That’s impossible,” Derek insisted, Laura having gone perfectly still beside him, like her brain had gotten just as fried as his at the words. “Stiles is human, he can’t be my mate.” Much as Derek would love for him to be, he was a Werewolf and Stiles was human. It wasn’t possible.

“Hello.” Derek’s eyes shifted to his father, who was smiling a little sadly at him. “Hi there, son. Thanks for forgetting I exist.”

Derek opened his mouth, about to ask what he was talking about, when his brain short-circuited a second time. That couldn’t be good in such a short space of time, but he honestly felt like he was about to lose his God damn mind.

His dad was human! His own father was one-hundred percent human, not a drop of Supernatural blood in him. And he was his mother’s mate! Her! An Alpha Werewolf! His Werewolf mother had
found her mate, and her mate was fucking human!

“Wolves have mates,” Talia said softly, Derek’s eyes snapping to her. She was smiling gently, like she understood this was a huge bomb to drop on him, even though he clearly should’ve considered this himself given his very human father! “Humans might not have mates the same way Werewolves do, not in the same sense, but what they do have is soulmates. Granted, they’re rare, and it is much harder for them to find each other on the human spectrum since not many of them even know what they’re searching for, but they do exist.” She reached out one hand, touching his softly and rubbing her thumb against his skin. “The universe brought you both together again. After all this time, after all these years. He hasn’t moved on, based on what you’ve said. And neither have you. I think it’s pretty clear that the universe is trying to tell you something. Perhaps this time around, you should listen.”

Derek had abso-fucking-lutely no idea what to say to that.

Laura was just as frozen beside him before she finally shifted to pull her phone out. Derek heard her scrolling through her contacts before stopping and putting the phone to her ear.

“Hey Laura, what’s up?”

“Kira. You are going to lose your fucking mind!”

“Language,” Talia sighed.

TBC...
Stiles could feel his heart pounding in his chest. He felt the same way he usually did right before a panic attack hit, but was trying his best to stay in control. He just... he had to do this. He couldn’t let this go on anymore. Things had changed, they were different, and it wasn’t fair.

It wasn’t fair to Derek.

He could tell their relationship was changing. Could see Derek casting him looks out of the corner of his eye. It was obvious Derek might be starting to develop feelings for him the same way Stiles had developed feelings back in high school.

Ever since the horrendously awkward and boner-inducing incident of Stiles walking in on him changing on Monday, Derek always looked at Stiles a little bit too long, and he’d brush his hand along his back when they were walking together sometimes, and he’d started finding reasons to scent him. Jackson was getting both territorial about it and also smug. Like he was glad Derek was showing an interest in Stiles, but also pissed because Stiles had always belonged to him and he didn’t know how to handle sharing.

Jackson had always been like that, even with Scott, so it wasn’t anything new. But still, it was obvious things were changing, and it wasn’t right.

Stiles couldn’t let them change too much without...

Without being honest.

Without admitting everything.

He’d put it off, and off, and off. Ethan was giving him judgy looks. His dad was starting to use his disappointed-sheriff-voice. Scott was starting to press.

Jackson pretended not to care either way, because he just wanted Stiles happy, but overall there was still a risk. If they moved forward and the truth came out after...

Like everyone kept saying, that would be bad.

So on this very dreary Friday afternoon before a long-weekend, Stiles had packed away as many of his things as he could, trying to make everything organized so that when he was fired in about half an hour, Erica or Ethan could just come up, grab his box of items easily, and bring them down to him.

Derek had been casting him worried looks during his conference call, like he could tell Stiles was doing something but unsure what it was with the cubby partition in the way. When he was off the phone, Stiles thought he might come over to check, but Derek just sat at his desk and didn’t say anything. He scowled at his computer like it had pissed him off. Stiles figured something had gone wrong during the conference call, and not that this had anything to do with him. Probably a good thing, since if he knew what Stiles was doing, he’d probably have assumed it was his fault and would spend the rest of the night trying to determine what he’d done to make Stiles want to quit. He definitely didn’t want to quit, but was pretty sure he was about to get fired.
When the end of the day officially hit, Stiles stood up with his messenger bag across his chest, gripping the strap tightly in both hands, and moved to stand at the threshold of Derek’s office. It was clear he knew he was there, but Derek didn’t look away from him computer screen. Stiles ended up knocking lightly on the jamb, just to get the ball rolling.

“What?” Derek asked, voice hard. Stiles recognized it as his attempt to hide his emotions. It always came out sounding angry when he did that, but he knew him better. It had been like that in high school, too.

“I was hoping—I know you’re probably really busy, but I wanted to have a chat with you. I was thinking we could grab a coffee, just for a little bit.”

“If you’re going to quit, don’t waste my time with coffee and just do it,” Derek said, voice colder than fucking Antarctica.

“I’m not—Derek, I’m not quitting,” Stiles insisted.

“The packed up belongings on your desk suggest otherwise.”

Right, so Stiles was really bad at being subtle with that. His bad. But still, he hadn’t done it because he had any intentions of quitting. “I didn’t pack because I’m quitting, I packed so it would be easier for HR to bring me my belongings when you fire me.”

Finally, Derek reacted. His brow furrowed, his shoulders relaxed, and he turned to give Stiles a confused look, finally looking at him.

“Why would I fire you?”

Stiles released the strap of his bag with one hand, motioning down the corridor. “Coffee? We—I need to talk to you about something. I’ve... kind of been putting it off.”

Derek stared at him for entirely too long, gaze calculating, like he was trying to figure out how worried he needed to be about the situation. Eventually, he got to his feet and grabbed his suit jacket, pulling it on while nodding his head towards Stiles’ desk.

“Leave your bag.”

Stiles frowned. “It has my stuff in it.”

“Leave your bag, or we’re not going.”

It was obvious Derek was trying to make absolutely sure this wasn’t the last time he’d see Stiles. He honestly thought Stiles was about to quit, and he was trying to avoid that actually happening.

Sighing, Stiles turned to put his bag back at his desk. He opened it to get his wallet and keys out, then patted his pocket to be sure his phone was in there. Tossing his bag under his desk where it always went, he moved back around his cubby as Derek exited his office, fixing the collar of his jacket. He motioned for Stiles to lead the way, and he did so, walking down the corridor with Derek trailing behind him.

A majority of the people were already gone, having wanted to get out immediately to enjoy their long-weekend, but there were still a few stragglers leaning over each other’s desks and chatting. A few people glanced over when they saw Derek and Stiles leaving together, but didn’t say anything. This had kind of become the new normal for them since the elevator incident.
Stiles honestly wondered if there were any new rumours circulating about them. Not like people hadn’t noticed them getting closer lately. He hoped not, Derek had enough problems and Stiles didn’t want to be another one.

Then again, might not be a problem soon.

Derek followed Stiles down the stairs without complaint, having long ago accommodated his fear of elevators. It was nice, but kind of daunting right in this moment.

When they reached the ground floor, Stiles led the way out to the sidewalk and Derek fell into step beside him as they headed out towards the coffee shop Stiles frequented in the morning. Derek was silent beside him, face set in a hard expression. Stiles could see claws beginning to grow and recede, grow and recede. He was struggling to control his shift, which meant he was really upset.

Stiles was sure things would only get worse as the conversation actually started, but he hoped not to get eviscerated once it was over. He’d probably deserve it, but was hoping not to die at the hands of the love of his life. That would kind of suck.

When they walked in, Stiles asked Derek what he wanted, then motioned for him to grab a table. Derek obeyed, albeit stiffly, grabbing the furthest table from the door, like he was hoping to block all of Stiles’ escape routes. It was weird, seeing Derek worried that Stiles was trying to escape him when it was actually the complete opposite.

He was honestly terrified of losing him. He’d never had Derek, not really, but this was the closest he’d ever come, and he was sad to see it coming to an end. All he’d ever wanted in high school was for Derek to notice him, to look at him. And now he finally had, and Stiles was about to ruin it all because he had to be honest.

Stupid morals. Stupid dad, bringing him up right. Anyone else wouldn’t feel guilty about this at all, would’ve continued to hide it indefinitely. But no, Stiles had to be a good person! Stiles had to quit his old job for doing the right thing, and was now going to get fired from this job for doing the right thing.

Why did he always have to do the right thing? Couldn’t he be selfish every now and again?

When the coffees were ready, Stiles shoved the brownie he’d also ordered into his pocket before grabbing them. The brownie was his comfort food for when Derek told him he never wanted to see him again.

Walking slowly to the table so as not to spill anything, he noticed that Derek had taken the outside seat, forcing Stiles to sit against the wall and thus further limiting his ability to escape. Derek was seriously paranoid right now. Stiles figured he made really good coffee and Derek didn’t want to lose that.

Setting both drinks down on the table, Stiles squeezed through the space to his seat and sat down, pulling his coffee closer and cradling it between his hands. He stared down into the black liquid, avoiding looking at Derek, even as he heard him sipping as his drink, like he needed something to do before he started snapping.

It didn’t last long. Eventually, Derek set his mug down and crossed his arms. “Well?” he asked grumpily. “You wanted to talk. You dragged me out here. I have plans tonight, and a lot of work to do before the weekend, so what is it?”

Stiles let out a small laugh, still staring down into his drink. “You never change, do you?” he asked
softly. “You’ve always been like that, even back then. Your automatic reaction to feeling defensive is to get mad about it. To hide your fear behind anger.”

Derek said nothing to that, but Stiles could tell he’d gone perfectly still. He could see just enough of Derek’s arms out of his periphery to notice how tense he suddenly was.

“I wanted to talk to you today because something’s been eating away at me. I’ve always been an honest person, some would say to a fault, but ever since day one with you, I’ve kind of... omitted. Not lied, because I don’t think I’d ever have been able to hold out this long, but I haven’t been entirely honest.”

Derek didn’t say anything, and Stiles figured it was best to just get it all out now while he could. Rip off the bandaid, so to speak. He just had to say it all out loud, get it out there, and Derek could...

Well, Derek could decide what he wanted to do and say when it was over.

“When you were in high school, there was a guy,” Stiles said into his coffee, scratching at a chip in the mug near the lip. “He was marginally popular, played a lot of sports, pretty smart. Not like, amazingly smart, but he got good grades and all that. He was usually third in his class. And he was—he was kind of a dick to you. Especially in senior year. He was always slapping books out of your hand like a child and being a bit of an ass to you whenever you guys were near each other.”

Stiles winced, Derek still saying nothing across from him. It was starting to get nerve-wracking, and he wanted to look up, but similarly he was scared to look up because he wasn’t sure he’d like what he saw. It was safer to finish the story first.

“In senior year, at prom, he uh, he got drunk. Like, really drunk. Because he didn’t have the balls to ask you to go with him, and when you showed up, it was with this stunning, gorgeous girl he’d never seen before. So he kind of... well, his buddy had some vodka and he drank away his anger and pain. And then he went to the bathroom, and you showed up, and you wouldn’t let him leave because you were worried about him, and he-he kissed you. He admitted he was in love with you and he kissed you, and then you never spoke about it again. You both graduated and went your separate ways, and even though you guys never kept in touch, the uh, the guy, he still thought about you sometimes. About Derek Hale, who smiled down at the books he read. Who was so smart. Just—so smart. Who played chess, and was in mathletes, and on the debate team. He thought about him, because... well, because nobody’s ever really caught his attention since then.”

Stiles scratched harder at the chip in his mug, chewing on the inside of his cheek and still too scared to look up at Derek.

“That um, the guy. The asshole from high school that you made out with, that you probably blocked from your memory because he was such a colossal douche to you... That was, uh, you know, that was-was me. I was that guy. It was me. So... yeah.”

He finally picked up his mug and took a huge swallow of coffee. It wasn’t as scalding hot as it had been when he’d first gotten it. It was still warm, but not nearly as much as he’d been expecting. He did everything he could to avoid looking at Derek, not wanting to see the expression on his face.

Confusion? Anger? Hurt? Shock? Hatred? Stiles didn’t know what he’d look like, and he didn’t want to know. He just hoped Derek let him go back for his bag, he’d wanted to bring it, and it’d be kind of shitty of him if he didn’t let him go back for it.

After a minute, an hour, a day, Derek sighed and un-crossed his arms. Stiles winced, waiting for the
verbal blow. Prepared for it, even.

“I know.”

That—surprisingly wasn’t as much of a blow as he’d been expecting. His brain had come up with many other things, and because none of those words had come out of Derek’s mouth, it took a good five seconds for what he’d said to register, and Stiles’ gaze shot up unintentionally. Derek was staring back at him with a kind of... almost apologetic look on his face.

“What?” Stiles asked, voice small. “What do you...? You know?”

Derek’s apologetic expression shifted into something a bit more unimpressed, Derek crossing his arms again and leaning back in his seat. “You really think I was going to forget a name like Mieczyslaw Stilinski? That I would forget the guy who’d given his best friend the nickname ‘Whitty’ as a joke, hoping it’d stick, and whose friend retaliated by calling him ‘Stiles,’ only for that to stick instead? The guy who’d always made me feel like I was insignificant and small and worthless? The guy who tried to shove his tongue down my throat in desperation at prom after admitting he was in love with me?” Derek raised his eyebrows at him. “How bad do you think my memory is?”

Stiles opened his mouth. Closed it. Opened it again.

He didn’t know what to say. He knew he had to say something, but somehow all that came out was, “I thought I was about to impart some big secret on you à la ‘Luke I am your father.’ Instead, it’s like if Luke knew from the beginning that Vader was his father.” He frowned. “So—you knew? From the beginning? Even when—at the interview?”

Derek nodded slowly, eyes shunting to the side. “I knew the second I opened your resume and saw the name at the top.”

“But you didn’t—you gave me a job,” Stiles insisted. “After-after everything I did to you in high school, you still gave me a job!”

“My stunning, gorgeous friend from high school,” Derek said, lips quirking slightly like he found that comment amusing. “kept saying that the guy who was a dick to me was ‘pulling my pigtails,’ so to speak. Didn’t know how to act around me and turned into a dick because of it. It didn’t excuse your behaviour, but over the years I kind of... thought back on everything. On what you did. You always seemed to have a reason for it. Like at lunch, when you were a dick, it was close to the second bell. And in class when you kicked my chair or acted like an annoying brat, it was always on days after the full moon when I was exhausted and risked passing out in class. Every time you did something that looked dickish on the outside, I realized there was an underlying reason behind it. I guess once you admitted you were in love with me, it put a few things into perspective.” He shrugged, like this was no big deal. “I didn’t appreciate it at the time, and you were a dick, but I guess as I grew up, I started to understand you a bit more.”

Stiles was stunned. He hadn’t thought Derek would ever figure out everything he’d done had been with a purpose. He was too chickenshit to talk to him, so he’d found other ways to interact with him.

“When you came to the interview, and I walked into the room, you didn’t act like you’d recognized me. You reacted at the sight of me, but not in a way I’d have expected the guy from high school to react after reuniting all these years later. So I shut down my expression and I decided to just—conduct the interview as if you were any other candidate. Our history aside, you’re a good person. You did right by your old coworkers, and we wanted to hire you, but HR had too many humans
already. Last I heard, you weren’t going to be getting the job, and I was—honestly, I was kind of sad about it, but it wasn’t my call. So when I found out you were going to be my new EA, I didn’t know if I was being punished or...” he trailed off for a few seconds, then added, very quietly, “You know, getting another chance.”

Stiles felt like his heart was going to beat itself right out of his chest. “You never said anything.”

“We’re different people now,” Derek insisted, uncrossing his arms and reaching forward for his coffee. He took a sip before continuing, eyes on the drink while he set it back down. “Like I said, I didn’t think you remembered me. You never gave any indication that you did. I thought maybe it would be better this way. Wipe the slate clean and start fresh. I didn’t want us to hash through everything that had happened if you didn’t even remember me, so I just decided it wasn’t worth bringing up.”

Honestly, this was not how Stiles had expected this conversation to go. It was taking his brain a little bit to catch up and figure out what was going on. Derek remembered him. He’d remembered him the second he’d seen his resume, had known who he was when he’d walked into the interview, had still agreed to allow him to be his EA despite everything!

“I don’t... understand,” Stiles admitted, reaching up to rub at his face with both hands. “You—I don’t understand. Just... Why?”

“Why?” Derek asked.

“Why don’t you hate me? Even if you know now that I loved you, and that I was a dick to you to cover up that I loved you, I kind of just... threw myself at you at prom. Like, just dove right in and everything.”

“You asked first,” Derek reminded him.

“Yeah, but you didn’t have to say yes! Like, was I bullying you then, too? Jesus.” Stiles rubbed at his face even harder. “Fuck, I’m the worst!”

“I wanted to.”

Stiles split his fingers to peek through them, staring at Derek. “Come again?”

“Did you miss the part at prom where I was just as into it as you were?” Derek looked surprised. “Stiles, I’ve been in love with you for years. I had a crush on you since before high school.”

It felt like the world had just tipped sideways. “What?”

“Did you—” Derek cut himself off, staring at Stiles almost incredulously. “Did you honestly think I’d have just let your drunk ass—”

“Tipsy,” Stiles pointed a finger at him. “I was tipsy!”

Derek bulled on like he hadn’t said anything, “—make out with me in a gross bathroom if I didn’t want it? Stiles, I’ve had a crush on you for longer than I can even remember at this point.”

“But-but you never said anything!” Stiles insisted again, letting his hands drop. “Why didn’t you say anything?!”

Derek gave him a look. “You were the popular guy. The golden child. In what universe would a nerd like me stand a chance with a jock like you?”
“This one!” Stiles insisted, slamming both hands on the table loudly. A few people turned, but he ignored them. “In this universe! You stood so many of the chances!”

“I didn’t know that,” Derek snapped, raking a frustrated hand through his hair. “And you never said anything, either!”

“I wanted to,” Stiles said desperately. “Derek, I did! I wanted to tell you! But I—Scott kept saying you’d think I was making fun of you. That it was a prank or a dare and I just... I got scared. I wanted to invite you to prom.” He said the last sentence very, very quietly, almost like he was telling an embarrassing secret. “I kept trying to think of how to ask you without you thinking it was all a huge prank, but every time I thought of it, I chickened out. I figured—maybe it was better. That we just parted ways without me ever admitting anything. But then-then prom happened, and it was the best, and also the worst, because we were graduating, and you were leaving and I didn’t know what to do so I just... buried it. I just pretended it didn’t happen, even though I knew it did, and the feelings never really went away.” Stiles let out a semi-hysterical laugh, covering his face again. “Fuck, are you serious? You acted like I didn’t exist. I spent all that time being a dick because it was the only way I ever managed to get you to look at me.”

Derek was quiet for a long while, but Stiles kept his face covered, because he didn’t know how this conversation had gone so off the rails.

“I guess I was always looking at you when you weren’t looking at me,” Derek said softly. Stiles had to stifle another hysterical laugh, dragging both hands down his face and clearing his throat. Derek still looked a little unsure, a lot more like the guy Stiles had known all those years ago. He didn’t like Derek being so unsure of himself, he was so great. So smart, and kind, and forgiving, and just—such a great guy.

Letting out a soft chuckle—thankfully not a hysterical laugh, so points for him—Stiles reached into his pocket to pull out the paper bag with his brownie. Derek watched him while he tore the bag apart and laid it out on the table, breaking off a corner before shoving it a bit closer to Derek in silent offering.

“I bought this as a post-conversation comfort, but apparently I don’t need it.”

“Did you really think I was going to fire you?” Derek asked, but he did reach out to break off a small piece, popping it into his mouth and licking his fingers.

Stiles stared at those fingers for much too long before snapping himself out of it. “I mean, yeah. I thought you didn’t remember me. I figured once you realized your EA was that dick from high school, you’d get rid of me.” He shrugged. “You’re not the kind of person who’d keep me around and purposefully make me suffer, so I figured being fired was the only outcome possible.”

“You’re literally the best EA I’ve ever had,” Derek admitted. “You are way overqualified for this job, but it was the only opening you could feasibly get and I think... I mean, I actually know, because Laura admitted it to me, but she and Peter wanted us to reconnect. They knew what you meant to me, and I think they saw this as...” he trailed off again, then let out a small laugh before saying, “the universe’s way of giving us a second try at this.”

Those words were definitely not what Stiles had been expecting, and it was exceptionally clear because his heart started beating double-time at that, Derek giving him a somewhat concerned look.

As if he thought Stiles didn’t want a second try.
As if he thought Stiles didn’t still want him!

“You—” Stiles cleared his throat, trying not to sound like a total love-sick idiot. “You want to-to
give this another try?”

Derek watched him cautiously, looking hesitant when he said, “I would be interested, if you are.”

“So interested,” Stiles blurted out. “Yes. So very interested. I am-more than okay with starting
fresh on this and just, doing it properly. Without the pigtail pulling.” Stiles winced. “Sorry about
that, by the way. I wasn’t—I’m not really good with things like this.”

“I hadn’t noticed,” Derek said teasingly.

Stiles stuck his tongue out at him and grabbed another bite of brownie, chewing thoughtfully while
Derek sipped his coffee.

“I am sorry, you know,” Stiles admitted softly. “For how I behaved. And for prom, too. I wasn’t...
it was immature of me to react how I did.”

“We were teenagers,” Derek said, leaning forward to pick at a piece of the brownie for himself.
“We grew up. Things are different now.”

“Yeah,” Stiles said with a laugh. “You’re a successful businessman and I make you coffee because
I’m a whistleblower and no one will hire me.”

“It’s good coffee,” Derek argued with a soft smile.

“Well, at least I can make up for years of being a dick by being your personal coffee-maker,” Stiles
offered with a smile. “So... not fired?”

“Definitely not fired,” Derek promised.

Stiles smiled and offered Derek the last of the brownie. He didn’t know where things would go
from here, but it felt like a huge weight had been lifted off his chest, and with this barrier down
between them, they could finally move forward.

Where ‘forward’ led them, well, Stiles was willing to wait and find out.

After all, he’d waited this long.

“Finally! Do you know how late you are? Where the hell are you?”

“Stiles remembers me.”

Silence.

“I’m sorry, what?”

“Stiles!” Derek raked a hand through his hair, grin so huge it threatened to break his fucking face.
“He remembers me! He—we went for coffee! He asked me to coffee because he felt bad not
admitting our history because he thought I didn’t remember him!”

“Wait. Wait, hold on a second, hold on.” He could just imagine Kira pinching the bridge of her
nose, eyes closed while she tried to get the words to sink in. “Let me get this straight. You both
remember each other, and just spent the last however many weeks working together pretending not
to remember each other?"

“Apparently!” Derek was still too thrilled to know Stiles remembered him. And not only remembered him, but was still interested in him! Enthusiastically interested, if the way he’d been nodding like crazy during their discussion about second chances was anything to go by.

“What the hell is wrong with you two?! Are you kidding me right now? Why can’t you stupid bros just talk about your dumb feelings!?” Kira let out a loud sound of aggravation, and Derek was positive she was re-thinking their entire friendship. “I need a drink. Oh, conveniently, I’m in a pub. Alone. Waiting on my best friend who still isn’t here.”

“I’m coming. I’m on my way, I’ll be right there.”

“You better be. I’m gonna need a ride home after all the alcohol I drink over your sheer stupidity. See you soon.”

Kira hung up and Derek laughed while doing the same, pulling at his tie to loosen it while hurrying down the street. He and Stiles had spent a long time in the coffee shop together. Not really hashing things out, but more just... getting to know each other all over again. Now that neither of them felt like they needed to tiptoe around the other, it gave them the opportunity to talk about things they’d been working hard to avoid bringing up.

Stiles did, in fact, live with Jackson, just as Derek had assumed. He and Ethan were mates, and Stiles was the perpetual third wheel. Ethan didn’t mind so much, because Jackson was extremely protective and territorial, and it was clear to him that the two of them were brothers more than anything else.

It was weird for Derek to imagine that they were still attached at the hip after all these years. Not surprising, but he didn’t really know many people who’d stayed friends after high school. Then again, he and Boyd were still as close as ever, not to mention Kira. He supposed he was just surprised that someone like Jackson had honestly admitted he couldn’t survive without Stiles around.

Apparently Scott was a rancher in Texas? Which was crazy. And married to the same girlfriend from high school, so that was surprising.

His dad was still sheriff, Stiles visited him every now and then, but not as often as he should. Which just reminded Derek that his own parents were in town, but Laura had plans to take them out to a show tonight so he was being bailed on anyway. It was why he’d planned on working until his usual drinks with Kira, but Stiles’ impromptu confession had kind of derailed his plans a little bit.

Not that he was complaining because—Stiles still loved him. After all this time, all these years. And the things he’d said, the way he’d felt! He’d admitted to being a dick, and to hating himself for it. He’d apologized multiple times throughout the evening, and it was so clear that he wanted to put all that behind them.

He wanted to start fresh, same as Derek. Which they’d essentially done. Their history aside, Stiles was literally the best EA Derek had ever had in his life. He was smart, and funny, and efficient, and thoughtful. He was just so, so good at his job, and Derek kept worrying Peter was going to try and poach him because apparently he’d killed the meeting on Monday. Derek didn’t even know how he’d done that! Stiles was literally just there to take notes, but all the people in the meeting had commented on how nice it was having him around when Derek had gone to the next one on Wednesday.
Stiles was honestly the best thing to ever happen to him, and to find out he had a *chance*, a second chance, it was just...

Scary. But exciting!

But so, so scary.

Hurrying into the pub, Derek looked around briefly before spotting Kira and hurried over to her, shrugging out of his suit jacket before sitting down across from her. She was slowly lowering a beer bottle from her lips, leaning back in her seat and giving him a worried look.

“Who *are* you?” she demanded. “What’s that thing your face is doing? It’s scary, I don’t like it.”

“Hilarious,” Derek said, rolling his eyes while pulling the drink menu closer. He didn’t know why he was bothering, he always got the same drink, but it never hurt to check for anything new. “I’m just happy.”

“No,” Kira said dramatically, voice dripping with sarcasm. “Is that what that smile means? I thought it meant anguish and self-loathing.”

“How much have you had to drink, you’re turning into *Bira*. You know, the bitchy version of you?”

Kira just arched an eyebrow and brought her beer bottle back to her lips, watching him expectantly. Derek waited for one of the waitresses to come around so he could order his drink before turning back to Kira.

“What if mom’s right?”

“She usually is, but about what, in this particular instance?” Kira asked.

“What if Stiles is my mate?”

“You haven’t told him any of that yet, right?” Kira leaned back when someone came by with a plate of food for her. Derek wasn’t mad she’d ordered, he was an hour late, and he’d done the same thing the last time she’d been late. “I mean, it’s cool you guys are on good terms, and it’s definitely encouraging that you both remember each other, but—that might be a bit much. Telling him you guys are mates.”

“I still don’t really know it’s true, so I’m not about to shout it from the rooftops,” Derek insisted.

It was something he’d been thinking about *constantly* since Monday though. Ever since his mother had mentioned it, he couldn’t stop thinking about it. He and Stiles had never been intimate barring that one very brief make-out session in high school, so there hadn’t really been an opportunity for his wolf to latch onto whether or not this was his mate.

He knew it was easier for Werewolves in general. Cora and her mate had known basically the moment they’d laid eyes on each other. But with a human? Well, it was different. His mother had explained it to him a little bit over the course of the week, but it was more a feeling of *rightness* that his wolf would alert him to once they got a bit more intimate.

Apparently it had been a bit of a shock for his mother at the time, because she—like him and Laura—had assumed she would never find her mate. She’d thought his dad was cute, and been really interested in him without moving forward because she was still holding out for her mate, but once she determined it was never going to happen, they started dating. All super romantic, like a
veritable romance movie.

As their relationship progressed, she started noticing things her wolf was doing. She would get territorial, and hated when other people’s scent were on him, and heaven forbid someone should stand between the two of them at any point.

Eventually, as they got more intimate—thankfully she hadn’t gone into details, Derek was scarred enough—her wolf had basically told her that this was the one. She’d found him. And the moment she’d made that discovery, apparently his dad had frozen beneath her—still too much information for him, but he’d tolerated it—because he’d felt something.

When he’d spoken to his dad about it, he hadn’t really been able to explain it. He just said that he knew, down to his very core, that this was the person he was meant to be with. This was the one he was going to spend the rest of his life with.

Well, Derek already knew he was territorial of Stiles. He was scenting him a lot, even before today, just because it drove him crazy that he smelled like Jackson and Ethan. And whenever people stood between them, he got... well, antsy. And protective. Like when they’d first gone to Cinco de Mayo together, and Stiles had walked into the restaurant. One of the guys had come over to break the line of mountain ash at the door, and that brief separation between him and Stiles had somehow felt like a threat.

So while he wasn’t one-hundred percent sure Stiles was his mate, it was looking pretty likely. And really, what were the odds that after all these years, and all their own travels, the two of them would end up in the exact same city, at the exact same time, with Stiles just happening to walk into Derek’s sister’s company looking for a job on a day she just happened not to be available for an interview?

Like his mother had said, the universe was telling him something, and he was definitely going to listen this time. He’d lost Stiles once, no way was he losing him a second time.

“So what’s the plan?”

“Plan?” Derek asked, arching an eyebrow.

Kira rolled her eyes, still holding her bottle near her lips but making no move to drink from it again. “The plan? The wooing? You’re never gonna find out if he’s your mate or not if you just sit on your butt and wait for him to do all the work. We both know how well that worked out for you the last time.”

“Low blow,” Derek muttered with a scowl, but Kira just gave him a pointed look.

And she wasn’t wrong. Derek hadn’t done anything about his attraction in high school, and now he couldn’t help but wonder how much time they’d lost. If Stiles had been in love with him back then, just as Derek had been with him, they could’ve been dating years ago. Maybe they would’ve been like Scott and his now-wife, meeting in high school, staying together, doing the long-distance thing, and finally moving in together. What if he and Stiles could’ve been married by now?!

He shook the thought off, because he was getting ahead of himself, but he couldn’t help think about all the time he wasted. And on top of that, what if Stiles hadn’t said anything today? Why hadn’t Derek thought to tell him himself that they had history? Why was it always Stiles who was coming out with admissions?

Because Derek was scared. He hated admitting it, but it was true. He was scared of Stiles, because
he knew how thoroughly he could be destroyed by him. Even now, what if Stiles was Derek’s mate, but what if Derek wasn’t Stiles’? Was that even possible? Was it possible for someone to belong to one person, but for that person to belong to someone else?

Well, if it was possible, it would happen to Derek. After all, he was a Werewolf with glasses so, why the hell not? Why not make him a Werewolf with a mate who was soulmates with someone else?

Derek jerked, knees banging hard against the underside of the table when Kira flicked him in the forehead. It hadn’t hurt, he’d just been startled, and he rubbed at the spot unnecessarily, more to show his displeasure than because it had hurt.

“You’re over-thinking,” she accused. “Remember in high school? Remember when I said he liked you and was pulling your pigtails? You were over-thinking and insisted I was wrong. Well, I wasn’t, was I? So I’m telling you this now, and remember who was right all those years ago.” She pointed a finger at him. “Stop over-thinking this. Hang out with him, go for coffee, get to know him.” She frowned. “Again. Get to know him again. And then, then you can move into the dating phase of your relationship. And once you’re there, see how it goes. If he’s your mate, awesome. If he’s not, well, at least you’ll know, right?”

“You make it sound so easy,” he muttered.

“That’s because I’ve never been in love.” She gave him a pointed look. “It’s easier to just tell you what to do when I don’t have experience with how scary it can be.” She finished the rest of her bottle and set it down on the table before grabbing a fry. Popping it into her mouth and chewing slowly, she pointed a salt-covered finger at him. “You should invite him out with us next Friday. He knows Isaac and Erica from work, right? And he kind of knows Boyd because of high school. Invite him to come out with the usual group. It’d be nice to actually meet the guy, and I’m sure Boyd’s interested to see what he’s like now.”

“Maybe,” Derek admitted, rubbing absently at his beard. “Could be fun. And he could always bring Ethan and Jackson if he wants more of a buffer. It’ll be interesting to see what Jackson’s like with him now that we’re all older and he has a mate.”

“Just make sure you don’t neglect your parents,” Kira warned. “They didn’t fly out all this way for you to ignore them because of Stiles Stilinski.”

Derek rolled his eyes and reached across the table to shove at her shoulder. Kira was impossible sometimes, but that was why he loved her so much.

Really, it was like he’d grown up with three sisters instead of two.

If he and Stiles got together, Kira and Laura were going to be intolerable.

Stiles hovered awkwardly at the edge of the building, holding his usual morning coffee in one hand, and his and Derek’s breakfasts in the other. It hadn’t been as hard as he’d expected, waking up that morning after a relaxing long weekend of not being fired, feeling good about Derek remembering him and wanting to have a second go around at this whole friendship/relationship thing they had going on.

Really, it hadn’t hit him until he was at the coffee shop ordering their usual breakfast. He didn’t know why that was the catalyst, but it was, and as he took the breakfast sandwiches from the barista, it occurred to him that things had changed.
Derek remembered him, and he knew that Stiles also remembered him. And somehow, that seemed... scary.

So now Stiles was standing at the edge of the building, freaking out that maybe Derek wasn’t there waiting for him today. What if Derek waiting for him was something he’d done before because he and Stiles weren’t—but that made no sense, because if Derek had always known who Stiles was, then there was no reason to change the routine now!

But—he didn’t know. A part of him was worried things were too different now, and he would walk up those steps and find the lobby empty and he honestly felt like a piece of him might die. Their chat over coffee had gone well, but that didn’t mean Derek honestly forgave him for everything. And what if he’d lied about remembering who Stiles was, and had just said that so Stiles wouldn’t think he was an idiot?!

No, that was stupid. Derek was smart, and Stiles’ name was unique, of course he’d remembered him! Stiles was the moron for not thinking Derek was pretending the same as him.

“What are you doing?”

Stiles let out a shout, coffee spilling from the opening in the lid and burning his hand. “What? Nothing. What are you doing?” he demanded, rounding on Liam.

“Going to work,” Liam said slowly, motioning the building. “Are you okay?”


“Whoa.” Liam held a hand up and took a step back when Stiles advanced, giving him a weird look. “What is going on? Did you take something before coming to work?”

Oh God, did it look like he did?! This was terrible! What even was he doing, just standing out there like a loser? And so what if Derek wasn’t waiting for him? It wasn’t like he had to wait for him every morning. It wasn’t like it was a requirement or anything. The stairs had fobs now, Derek could go to his office and Stiles would be just fine.

“Sorry. I’m fine. It’s fine. We’re fine. Everything’s fine.” Stiles exhaled slowly, puffing his cheeks out. “You can—I’ll see you up there.”

“Okay,” Liam said uncertainly, giving him a weird look. He walked wide around Stiles, like he thought he might attack him, and then headed quickly up the stairs and into the building.

Stiles stared at the doors he could just barely see from where he was standing, shaking his head slightly and tapping one foot. “This is stupid. I’m stupid. This is totally ridiculous. So what if he’s not there? Not like it’ll crush my soul. He’s allowed to not be there, no big deal. Not like I’m going to feel like shit the rest of the day. No big deal. It’s all good. Cool. Cool, cool, cool.”

Letting out a sharp exhale, he gave himself a mental shake and then walked towards the stairs, feeling his heart beginning to pound even as he did so. This was ridiculous, so what if Derek wasn’t there?

Honestly, Stiles should’ve been more concerned about if he was there, but that thought didn’t occur to him until he finally climbed enough steps to see through the doors and saw Derek waiting for him in the lobby, like he always was. Derek offered him a small smile, like he did every morning, and Stiles felt such intense relief he almost missed a step before catching himself.
Smiling brilliantly at Derek while moving to the door, using his coffee hand to pull his fob free and tapping the black box, he pushed his way into the building just as it hit him.

Derek was waiting for him.

Despite everything. Despite the revelation, and the awkwardness, and all the admissions, Derek was still standing exactly where he always was every single morning, waiting for Stiles.

It felt surreal.

“Morning,” Stiles said, feeling a little out of sorts. It was one thing back when he thought Derek didn’t remember him, but entirely different now that he knew better.

“Morning,” Derek said, still smiling slightly. “Have a good weekend?”

“Mmhm. It uh, it was good. And you?”

“Spent time with my parents, so it was nice.”

“Cool.” Stiles rocked slightly on his feet, unsure of what else to say. Neither of them made a move to head for the stairs. “Um, they were out of chocolate chip muffins, so I got us some raspberry strudels today.”

“I should probably eat more fruits and vegetables anyway. My mom said I looked healthy when she saw me, which means I’ve gained weight.”

“Where?” Stiles demanded with a snort. “But noted. I’ll try for something healthier for lunch today.”

“Not too healthy,” Derek insisted. “If you come back with a salad, you’re fired.”

“Who do you think I am?” Stiles rolled his eyes. “Have you ever seen me eat a salad ever in my life?”

Derek let out a small laugh at that, as if conceding his point, and then they stood there. It was weird. Not necessarily uncomfortable, but just... they hadn’t made any move to go for the stairs. Stiles didn’t know what to do.

“Um. So—work? Is a-a thing?”

“Right.” Derek seemed to start slightly, like he’d honestly forgotten why they were both there. “Work.”

Turning on his heel, Stiles watched Derek head for the stairs and let out a slow breath, trying to calm his beating heart. Okay, so far so good. They were—maybe a little stilted, trying to reacquaint themselves with each other while also maintaining their newer relationship. It would take a bit of time, but they’d manage, he was sure.

Following after Derek a bit more slowly than normal, Stiles tried to remind himself that he’d known this entire time who his new boss was. He had no reason to act weird just because Derek remembered him. That should’ve been irrelevant, he needed to just act normal.

When they reached the stairwell door, Derek shifted his briefcase to his other hand so he could swipe his fob, the door clicking loudly. He pulled it open and motioned for Stiles to go on ahead. He offered a small smile and nodded in thanks before walking through the door and starting up the
stairs. He heard it bang shut behind him, Derek’s footsteps following him up.

“So you said you hung out with your parents this weekend?” Stiles asked, needing to make conversation because he was positive silence would kill him. “What did you guys do? Anything fun?”

“Mostly just caught up, spent some quality time together,” Derek said while they rounded the first bend and kept climbing. “Laura took them to a show on Friday since I had plans. My uh, ‘stunning, gorgeous’ friend from high school and I tend to meet up basically every Friday.”

“Oh, you guys are still friends? That’s cool.” Stiles wasn’t jealous, of course not. Why would he be jealous? Nothing at all to be jealous of, just Derek hanging out with a drop dead gorgeous woman every week, no big deal.

“We are still friends,” Derek confirmed, sounding amused. “She came by for brunch on Sunday with the rest of the pack. Laura and mum spent a lot of Saturday shopping and talking about the next big family trip we’re all going to take this fall, so dad and I spent the day on the couch talking about work and his projects and just catching up on some things.”

“That sounds really fun,” Stiles admitted, hearing the shortness of his breath. He may take the stairs every day, but it was still a bit of a workout. “I should probably visit dad soon, too. Haven’t seen him in a long time, but I wasn’t sure how vacation time works here and I was too nervous to ask.”

“You don’t get vacation time, who’d make my coffee?” Derek asked, voice teasing.

Stiles snorted at that, rounding the next bend and half-turning to snap back a witty retort that didn’t make it past his lips.

Derek’s eyes had shot up from somewhere considerably lower to focus on Stiles’ face and he paused in the middle of the way, staring at him.

“Were you just checking out my butt?” Stiles asked, almost incredulously.

“No,” Derek replied, raising both eyebrows slightly.

He was going for innocent, but Stiles was pretty sure Derek was anything but. He wasn’t a Werewolf though, so he couldn’t know for sure if Derek had just lied or not.

Eying him suspiciously, not that he was opposed to the love of his life ogling his butt, Stiles turned back to the stairs to finish their ascent.

“Anyway,” he said, no longer remembering his very witty retort, “do I have any time off accumulated, or would I need to work a bit more?”

“How many days were you thinking of taking?”

“Maybe three? A Friday and then Monday, Tuesday. Go up for an extra long weekend. I thought about it this past weekend, but dad always works doubles when there’s parties and whatnot so I wouldn’t have seen him much. And it’d have been last minute, so I figure planning in advance is better so he can schedule time off for himself.”

“I suppose I can survive a few days without you,” Derek said, sounding very inconvenienced, but Stiles could tell he was smiling.
When they finally reached the ninth floor, Stiles swiped his fob and Derek very kindly opened the door for him since his hands were full. They walked out of the stairwell together, like they did every morning, and Stiles saw Liam giving him a wary look. He felt a brief stab of embarrassment at remembering he’d asked him to sniff him—seriously, who said that?!—and figured he could try and come up with a half-assed explanation at lunch.

“Ah, Stiles. I was beginning to worry.”

He faced forward and saw Peter waiting at the end of the hall, right at the corner where Derek’s office was, along with Stiles’s cubby.

“I was thinking I’d have to get my own coffee. Wouldn’t have been nearly as satisfying without being made by you.”

“He’s not your EA, remember?” Derek said sourly, moving past Peter to head into his office.

Stiles just offered Peter a polite smile while passing him, the man smiling back before moving to Derek’s door, evidently intent on making his life miserable first thing.

Peter was really good at pushing all the right buttons, Stiles had discovered.

“You know, sharing him would be very nice of you nephew, considering he wouldn’t be here at all if not for me. You recall, yes? I’m the one who hired him. And if I hadn’t piqued your curiosity with his resume, you wouldn’t have gone to the interview, so a little courtesy wouldn’t be amiss.”

“Oh.” Stiles had his strap halfway over his head when he realized what Peter was saying. “So... you told your family. About uh, our conversation.”

Peter turned back to Stiles, looking positively delighted. Derek visibly groaned in the background, like he was regretting showing up for work that day.

“What’s this? Have the two of you finally had a little heart to heart about your time together in high school?”

Apparently Derek hadn’t said anything. To Peter, at least. Stiles was sure Derek had told Laura, and possibly his parents. He and Peter had a weird relationship though. It was clear they cared about each other a great deal, but they mostly acted like they hated each other. Peter did everything in his power to antagonize Derek, and Derek always snarled at Peter to fuck off. It was a weird relationship, but Stiles acknowledged that his own with Jackson probably looked fairly similar on the outside.

“Don’t you have work to do?” Derek snapped, clearly frustrated at having his uncle around.

“I’m waiting for my coffee,” Peter insisted, pretending to be offended. “You can’t expect me to be productive without caffeine, nephew. And nobody makes coffee like Stiles does.”

“It’s really just the machine that makes it, I put it in the mug.” Stiles argued, but he obediently moved out from behind his cubby, leaving their breakfasts on his desk, and headed for the kitchenette. He could hear Peter and Derek continuing to speak in low tones, but as he wasn’t a werewolf, he couldn’t discern what they were saying.

He got the two coffees ready on auto-pilot, brain slowly thinking on what Peter had said. The way he’d spoken about sending Derek Stiles’ resume seemed to suggest that he’d known exactly who he was. That meant Derek had probably spoken about Stiles—at length, even—while they’d still been in high school.
That also meant what Derek had said on Friday was true. He’d had a crush on Stiles just as much as Stiles had had a crush on him. He’d spoken about him at home so much, even just as Stiles and not Mieczyslaw, that by the time Peter had opened that resume ten years later, he actually recognized the name enough to know who he was and had sent it to Derek.

It explained why Stiles had nearly had an aneurism at the sight of Derek walking into the office, whereas the Werewolf had looked completely unaffected. He’d had enough time to school his features and calm down before stepping foot in the room.

Stiles wondered what this all meant for their future. He wasn’t so delusional and optimistic to believe that Derek would immediately want to jump in the sack together, but the fact that Derek had been just as single as Stiles all these years had to mean something, didn’t it?

“Hey.”

Stiles almost dropped the milk he was holding, completely lost in thought, and hadn’t realized someone had come up behind him. It was one of the guys in their Corporate Compliance team. He didn’t really know him, but was at least aware enough to recognize his name was Brady. Or Bradley? It had a “Brad” in it somewhere. Bradford? Bradbury? Who knew? Didn’t matter.

“Hey, sorry. Am I in your way?” Stiles hastily shuffled to the side, putting the milk back in the still-open fridge and shutting the door. The Brad-dude had moved much closer while Stiles had been doing so, lowering his voice when he spoke.

“I overheard Liam talking earlier. About how you were acting outside. About how you were clearly uncomfortable going to work because of Derek.”

Stiles stared at him, resisting the urge to shove a hand in his face to get him to back off. He was way too close.

“What?”

“Is he sexually harassing you? I’ve seen him do it before, you know. He’s a real dog. Thinks his pretty face and money can let him get away with anything. I’m actually building a case against him to get him fired for sexually assaulting so many of his assistants, I’d love some time with you to talk about it.”

Stiles honestly wondered if he’d entered an alternate dimension. Why was everyone out to get Derek? A part of him felt like they were pissed about the nepotism of it all. Some guy who happened to be related to the two owners got to come in and be VP of Finance? But it wasn’t even like he’d strong-armed his way in!

Laura was someone Stiles remembered vividly from high school. Even if Derek had demanded a position, she wouldn’t have given it to him. He would’ve had to earn it, same as everyone else. Sure, being her brother and Peter’s nephew had given him a foot in the door, but Stiles was positive he hadn’t been hired directly as a VP. For one thing, they likely hadn’t been big enough back then for VPs to be a thing. For another, just because someone could do a job didn’t mean they were good at it.

Derek was good at his job. He cared about the company, he cared about his work, he cared about his people. He was a good boss, and an all-around kind individual. So all Stiles could really think was that people saw his grumpy yet adorable face, and got stupid ideas in their heads that he was an asshole, or they wanted him and knew they could never have him, so tearing him down was the only comfort they could find.
Hell, maybe they thought if they dragged him down into the dirt enough, they could be there to help pick up the pieces and have a shot at being with him.

Stiles didn’t know, but he was very tired of hearing rumours like this, and was literally going to make a fucking billboard for the entrance of the building.

“I’ll let you know when I’m free,” Stiles said in the most even tone he could.

Brad smiled and nodded enthusiastically as Stiles picked up both coffees and headed back for Derek’s office. He and Peter were still chatting—bantering, mostly—when he walked in. He set down Derek’s coffee without a word, then handed Peter his when he passed him to head back out of the office.

Both men had stopped speaking the moment he walked in, clearly able to tell there was something wrong.

Stiles went back to his desk to grab Derek’s breakfast sandwich and strudel, and headed back into the office to hand them over. Derek took them with a small frown, eying him with concern.

“Stiles?”

“I’m very sorry, I know the work day’s just started, but can I take my lunch break now? I need to do something extremely important.”

“Sure,” Derek said uncertainly. “Is everything okay?”

“It’s fine.” Stiles offered him a small smile. “I’ll be back as soon as I can.” He turned then, looking at Peter. “Would you mind coming with me? I think you should be present.”

Peter arched an eyebrow while sipping at his coffee, but shrugged indifferently. Clearly Stiles had piqued his interest, and he motioned for him to lead the way.

Exiting the office once more, Stiles saw Derek watching him with both concern and confusion while he walked past the large windowed wall of his office. Peter was following along behind him, seeming somewhat amused, but mostly just interested.

Reaching the stairs, Stiles started down them to the third floor, the CEO right on his ass without saying a word. Once he swiped his fob and pushed through the door, Peter made a small humming noise, like he realized where they were going and was a little interested to know why.

Walking into HR, Stiles looked around and found Erica. She was the only one he really knew, but she wasn’t who he needed to speak to about this. Or—maybe she was? Maybe she should be present, at least. An outside party.

Heading over to her, she arched an eyebrow at his approach, chin tilted up like she was scenting the air. “What’s up, buttercup? You smell enraged.”

“Are you free right now?”

“Sure, why?” Her eyes skirted to Peter.

“Is Laura free?”

“Laura’s never free, but I’m sure she’ll make time for you.” Erica eyed him for a few seconds, then stood up, motioning for him to wait. She headed to the office in the corner, stopping to speak
quietly to the girl sitting right outside it in the closest cubby. She was likely Laura’s EA.

A few seconds passed, Peter still silent beside him, but then the girl had her phone to her ear and a moment later, Laura stood from her desk and moved to open her door, looking out across the floor at Stiles.

“Everything okay?”

“We need to talk.”

“Sure.” She motioned him in, glancing at Erica, who just shrugged expansively. 

Stiles approached the office, touching Erica’s shoulder lightly to make sure she’d follow. He wanted Peter and Laura involved because they were the owners, and Laura was also the VP of HR. But the problem was, they were also related to Derek, which was why he needed someone like Erica in the room. While friends with him, she could probably separate her work and her personal life far better than the other two would be able to.

Stiles himself was fucking livid at what he’d heard. Building a case? Building a fucking case? Against Derek? For what?!

Erica shut the door when she followed them all in, Laura taking a seat and motioning for Stiles to sit across from her, eyes skirt ing to her uncle.

“Is everything okay?” she asked uncertainly.

“No,” he admitted. “It’s not okay. And we really need to talk about it.”

Laura frowned at those words, Peter leaning back against one of her cabinets and crossing his arms. He looked a little defensive all of a sudden, like he wasn’t sure what was about to come out of Stiles’ mouth, but attentive. Erica took the empty seat beside Stiles, waiting for him to continue.

“All right,” Laura said softly, eyes shooting to her uncle before returning to Stiles. “I’m all ears.”

“First off,” Stiles thumbed over his shoulder, “is this office soundproof?”

“It is,” she confirmed. “All of the offices in HR are soundproof, as is Peter’s and the large boardroom on the seventh floor.”

“Good.” Stiles dropped his hand back down. “Because there’s this guy named Brad or something on the ninth floor, and we really need to talk about the conversation he and I just had.”

Derek was seriously beginning to wonder if his mother might not have been right about him and Stiles, because ever since they’d been open with one another about their history, things were... weird.

Not bad weird, just weird.

Derek had always assumed that being territorial was a purely wolf thing, which it was, for the most part. Except Stiles had started getting a little territorial about Derek. Not in the same way as Derek would him, but more in an emotional way. Anything that risked causing Derek any form of emotional harm was immediately squashed by Stiles.

He hadn’t even known anything about Brandon doing something malicious until he’d been called
down to HR and then two associates had walked him back to his desk to gather a few of his things. Apparently he was being suspended—not fired, suspended—and had to take some kind of course being offered by the nearby university about bullying and inappropriate behaviour in the workplace. Derek knew this was something that happened every now and then in their office, an initiative Laura had started to avoid having to fire people who might just need a little help, but he’d always thought Brandon was a good guy.

It wasn’t until dinner two days after the incident that he’d found out why Brandon was suspended, and to realize it was the day Stiles had been acting weird after getting his coffee was a bit of a shock. At least it explained why he’d wanted Peter to go with him, and why Kira had shown up an hour later to take him out for coffee. Evidently Laura had called her and said she needed to make sure Derek was okay.

Which he was, because he hadn’t even known anything was happening.

And Stiles was just... overly protective. Any time anyone said anything bad about Derek that wasn’t true—even if it was as small as that rumour about how he hadn’t paid off a parking ticket, which he definitely had—Stiles jumped on them to set them straight.

Isaac found it hilarious. He likened Stiles to a rabid ferret, because he was so tiny and cute, but could sink his teeth into people rather violently when provoked.

Derek would be lying if he said he didn’t love it. Because he definitely, completely, one-hundred and ten thousand percent loved it.

And the more Stiles defended him, the closer they got. It was strange, but it was like every time Stiles heard something bad about Derek, he was reminded of how he’d treated him in high school or something and was suddenly determined to brighten his day. He’d ask Derek to go out for a walk just to get some air when Derek started getting overly stressed. Or he’d run down to the bakery a few blocks over to grab something sweet for Derek to munch on when he was having a bad day.

Once he’d even agreed to go to all of Derek’s meetings to take notes because Derek was behind on his work and would have to spend the weekend catching up. Having Stiles in his life right now was the only reason Derek felt happy when he woke up in the morning. Stiles was literally the highlight of his days, which was what made weekends almost intolerable, because he wanted to see him, and didn’t know how.

It wasn’t like he could just invite Stiles out to dinner. Or for a movie. Or like, a walk or something. Despite how much had changed between them in the past ten years, Derek always felt like he’d forever be that nerd in high school who had a crush on the popular jock. And while Stiles had made it explicitly clear multiple times that he was very much still interested, Derek couldn’t help but pull back from making the first move.

He’d never made any of the first moves when it came to him and Stiles. He didn’t think he’d suddenly grow a spine now and drag him into his office for a heavy make out session.

Not that he’d want to make out with Stiles in the office. Then he’d never be able to work again, he’d always be obsessing about what they’d done and that would help no one. Least of all him.

Derek had just come back from his last meeting of the day, tugging at his tie when he felt constricted by it, and grunted to Stiles when he asked if he was done with the most horrible part of his day. Moving back into his office, he paused when he saw one of Stiles’ worksheets on his desk. It was one of the first times it showed a personal call, and he frowned when he saw who it was
from.

Apparently Kira had called while he’d been in his meeting to say Laura and Talia had invited her out for the evening, so their usual Friday plans were cancelled. When he checked his cell phone, he saw her giving him the same message, as if worried he wouldn’t receive the one from Stiles, but also saw another text from his mother telling him that his father was going to a movie with Boyd and Erica because he wanted to get to know Boyd’s mate a bit more.

That meant Derek was alone tonight. Not necessarily a bad thing, but he was starting to feel bad about how often he missed out on seeing his parents because he seemed too busy for them. He’d have to make it clear to them that their time in San Francisco was quickly running out and he wanted to have the chance to spend some with them, too.

Maybe he’d take a few days off. They only had a few days left before heading back to Florida, so if he took three days off, he could have the weekend plus half of next week before they headed out to spend the whole day with them.

He’d have to check the calendar, since they were in their busy period right now, but as long as the supervisor was okay with him being gone, he was sure anything urgent Stiles could touch base with him on.

And Stiles was a favourite at meetings anyway, so it wasn’t like Derek was worried he’d have nothing to do. Even while gone, Stiles would still be bombarded with emails and phone calls, as well as meeting requests. The only fear Derek had was leaving him alone with Peter circling. He was desperately trying to poach Stiles as his own EA, and Derek was willing to commit avunculicide if he had to. Killing his uncle for stealing his potential mate, who was also a phenomenal EA, seemed like a fair outcome.

Derek glanced up when he heard a tentative knock at his door, Stiles standing in the doorway and rocking back and forth on his feet, shoving his hands in his pockets.

“So. Kira. That’s uh, your friend, right? From high school, I mean?”

It was actually kind of funny how often Stiles smelled faintly of jealousy whenever Kira came up. Derek knew he should tell him she was asexual, but he kind of enjoyed that Stiles felt like she was competition. It was probably mean, but Derek couldn’t help it. Stiles wanting him felt really good.

“Yeah. She’s my usual Friday night dinner date, but looks like she’s ditching me for my sister and my mom.” Derek put his phone away, leaning back in his seat and crossing his arms. “I can understand ditching me for my mom, but for my sister? That’s just making me question her taste in friends.”

Derek felt like his heart was about to pound itself right out of his chest, but before he could say anything, Stiles shot both hands out in a motion for him to stop.

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Stiles let out a small laugh, sounding nervous more than anything, but he just rocked some more on the balls of his feet. “I guess that means you’re uh, free then? Tonight?”

Derek almost snapped straight at the question. “I’m free,” he confirmed, trying to keep his expression neutral.

“Cool. Um, one of Whitty’s friends has a thing tonight, so he and Ethan are going out. Last minute to make plans with my other friends, since people are almost always busy on Friday nights. But if you’re free, I was thinking maybe we could go out tonight. For dinner.”

Derek felt like his heart was about to pound itself right out of his chest, but before he could say anything, Stiles shot both hands out in a motion for him to stop.
“Not a date!” he clarified, like he thought Derek would reject him if he thought it was a date. Evidently disappointment showed on his face, because Stiles’ own shifted into one of slight panic and he added, “Unless you-you want it to be a date?” Then he shook his head and said resolutely, “No, that’s too—not a date! Just... dinner. That I can pay for. Or-or you can pay for.” He motioned Derek briefly. “Or we can just pay for each other! Ourselves!” Stiles pressed his lips together, closing his eyes, and Derek could tell he was wishing he could just stop talking. “Pay-pay for ourselves. After we eat dinner. Together. I’m gonna go back to my desk now.”

Stiles thumbed over his shoulder and turned to do just that.

“Stiles.”

He turned back to Derek so quickly he almost tripped over his own feet. Derek couldn’t help the small laugh that escaped him and he nodded.

“Dinner would be great. We haven’t really—since coffee last week, we haven’t actually caught up. It’d be nice to have the opportunity to do that.”

“Cool. Great, yes. Awesome. Excellent. We’ll—let’s.” Stiles walked backwards into his cubby, started like he’d forgotten it existed, and then slowly moved around it to his seat, nodding enthusiastically. “I chose dinner last time, so your turn.”

“Sounds good.”

Stiles beamed at him, but Derek still heard the quiet ‘thump’ of his head against his desk when he turned back to his computer, clearly embarrassed at how poorly he felt that had gone. Derek disagreed, personally. At least one of them had the balls to ask, and Derek had always been expecting it to be Stiles.

Pulling his phone back out, he texted Kira to thank her for cancelling by calling his office, because he now had a not-date with Stiles. She just replied back that her payment should be an introduction, since... she’d never actually met him. It was weird, when Derek thought about it, but it was true that Kira had never actually met Stiles before. He figured maybe they could go for coffee one day, the three of them. Or maybe Jackson could come too, just so that Stiles didn’t feel interrogated.

The rest of the workday seemed to drag even though it was only two hours since Stiles’ invitation and the end of the day. It just felt like it was taking forever to end, probably because this would be the first outing they had together where they both knew the other remembered high school. Sure their coffee had been good, but Stiles had started that entire outing paranoid about getting fired, and Derek had been so stressed at the idea of Stiles quitting that he’d been kind of a dick.

When Derek looked at the time and saw it was five to three, he ended up just sitting there staring as the minutes ticked on until it was three and he immediately started closing out of his programs. He realized he might seem a bit over-eager, but Stiles was already on his feet with his bag thrown over his shoulder, so at least he wasn’t the only one.

Grabbing his suit jacket and briefcase, he turned in time to find Stiles hovering by the door, looking excited and happy. Derek was really glad that he seemed so interested in this outing.

“So it’s kind of early for dinner,” Stiles said as he and Derek headed down the corridor together. They were literally so on the dot that half of Derek’s department was still packing up to leave, giving them weird looks as they passed.

“We can always go somewhere and order a couple of drinks,” Derek offered, pushing open the
stairwell door so Stiles could precede him. “Happy hour should’ve just started at most places, so we could always drink for a bit, order some appetizers, and chat. If we’re not hungry for dinner, it’s not like we can’t still stick around and continue chatting.”

“True,” Stiles agreed, bouncing slightly while descending the stairs. “You decide on somewhere to go?”

“We could always go to Dream Catcher,” Derek offered. “It’s close to here and they have great prices for happy hour.”

“Sounds good.” Stiles turned briefly to beam at him and Derek couldn’t help the smile he offered in return.

They made it outside relatively quickly, bypassing the garage since Derek figured it would be safest to leave his car in the underground lot versus street parking if he ended up overindulging. He wasn’t planning on it, but it depended on how much they talked about. If things went in a weird direction, Derek might feel inclined to nurse a few extra drinks, but was hoping he wouldn’t.

The walk to the restaurant was conducted in easy chatter about work, mostly. Derek hadn’t checked the calendar for who was off, but when he spoke about time off the following week to spend time with his parents, Stiles confirmed who was off and when, because he’d been looking at it earlier in the day for a good time to take off and see his dad. He’d somehow memorized it and confirmed the supervisor was around the following week—which made sense, given the time of year—so Derek figured he could chat with him on Monday and see about taking Friday off, then the following Monday and Tuesday since his parents were heading out Wednesday morning first thing.

When they got to the restaurant, it was reasonably empty, which made sense considering the early hour. They were seated right away in a booth near the middle, Stiles grinning and bouncing slightly in his seat while sliding in. Derek just rolled his eyes and sat down across from him, putting his briefcase and suit jacket on the seat beside him on the side with a partition so no one could rush by and grab his case.

“Thanks for coming out with me.”

“Why wouldn’t I?” Derek asked, arching an eyebrow.

“I don’t know, I guess I’m still a bit surprised you don’t thoroughly hate me.” Stiles shrugged. “Not complaining, but it’s not what I expected. I was a dick to you.”

“Like I said, we were teenagers. We’re different people now. We grew up, and you’ve already apologized a million times over, so we should just let it stay in the past where it belongs.”

Stiles nodded, offering him a small smile of thanks, and pulled the happy hour menu over. He let out exclamations every few seconds, like literally everything was of interest to him. Derek pulled another one over to check what was available for drinks.

There were far more human drinks on happy hour than Werewolf ones, but there were two wines—one red, one white—and a beer laced withaconite, so he figured he’d grab a beer. Stiles was ho-humming on his side of the table, like he couldn’t decide.

“We should order an appetizer now,” Stiles said. “You like calamari?”

Derek shrugged. “Sure.”
“Cool.” Stiles drummed both hands on the table once he’d put his menu down, and they waited for their server to arrive.

Once he did, bringing waters with him, they both ordered their drinks—beer for Derek, and some atrocious frozen rosé drink for Stiles that he insisted he just wanted to try because it sounded atrocious—and the calamari. They confirmed they’d want the dinner menu later, but definitely not right now. It was still the early half of three in the afternoon, so they had time to nurse their drinks and talk for a while before dinner was even a thought.

“I was thinking,” Derek said, moving his water over to his other side, more for something to do with his hands than anything else. “Next Friday I’m going to be busy, what with my parents and all, but I was thinking maybe the Friday after, you and Jackson could come out to the pub, hang out with Kira and I. She’s been wanting to meet you for years anyway, and it’ll be interesting to catch up with Jackson.”

Honestly, Derek was sometimes wondering if Jackson hadn’t been slowly pulling Stiles further in so he and Ethan could have a third partner. Stiles and Jackson had always had an interesting relationship so it wouldn’t surprise him.

Wasn’t like he hadn’t noticed how much Jackson scented his friend, much to Derek’s annoyance. He wanted to scent him back, and he tried, subtly, sometimes. But it wasn’t like he could just scent him without his permission, that was rude. He just... really hated how much he smelled like Jackson.

“Sure,” Stiles said, looking excited at the prospect. “Can Ethan come, too? Whitty will probably spontaneously combust if he has to leave him home alone. They’re really co-dependent.” He rolled his eyes.

Derek just snorted. “I don’t think you’re one to talk about dependency. I always wondered how you and Jackson would handle being apart, but I guess the answer was you wouldn’t.”

Stiles shrugged, playing with the paper straw in his water absently. “Whitty and I... I don’t know, we’ve been through a lot together. He’s always been there, you know? When my mom died, it was just him and Scott holding me together. As we grew up, Scott got more interested in girls, and Whitty didn’t know at the time that he was gay, so he kind of used my crush on you as an excuse to stick around and not go out looking for a girlfriend. He’s like my brother, you know. He’s always been there, so when we went off to university... it was hard. Like, really hard. I mean, not at first, obviously. We were together at school, we just didn’t have the same courses, but that wasn’t a problem. It was more later that it got hard.”

Still playing with his paper straw, Stiles ended up pushing his glass away from himself and leaning back in the booth. “Whitty actually graduated before I did, because of the program he was in. He ended up going to law school afterwards, so we were split up for a couple years. It—honestly, it was way harder than I’d ever thought it’d be, and we called each other constantly. The second I graduated, he’d basically already rented a two-bedroom apartment close to his law school and we moved in together. I don’t know, I guess I’ve never really had anyone else like him in my life barring my dad. It was comforting living with someone I knew so well, and we just kind of... never stopped depending on each other.”

“I think it’s nice,” Derek admitted. “That you have someone you’re so close to. Jackson’s always had your back, so I’m glad you’ve always had him around to keep an eye on it.”

“Hey, my back can take care of itself,” Stiles insisted with a half smile, glancing over with his eyes when the waiter returned with their drinks. The calamari would take a bit longer so he just made
sure they didn’t need anything else while they waited and headed off when they confirmed they were okay.

They sipped at their drinks while continuing to talk about their childhood friends. Boyd, of course, had come along to San Francisco mostly to be with pack rather than any particular attachment to Derek. They were still close, but he’d have been just as happy staying in Beacon Hills as moving to San Francisco. The problem was the whole pack had upped and left, and after his grandmother had passed, he’d been alone. It was better for him to move out to be with Derek, Laura, Kira and Peter than to stay behind all alone.

Kira, of course, was Derek’s own Jackson. He explained the background of their relationship to Stiles, and while he could tell he was still a little threatened by her, he at least seemed to think she sounded really cool. Honestly, Derek knew the second they met that they’d hit it off like crazy, so he really wasn’t worried.

They bounced around to a few topics as the minutes ticked by, their calamari arriving, being decimated, and being taken away. They were well on their way to ordering dinner by the time Stiles asked him a question he’d been expecting for a while now.

“So tell me something,” Stiles said, having switched from his frozen monstrosity to a beer after suffering through its disgusting flavours—apparently it was as bad as it sounded—holding the bottle in one hand and pointing his index finger of that same one at Derek. “Werewolves have super-healing and all that, right? Like, you guys are unfairly built to just be awesome and can get stabbed and heal up in minutes, right?”

“Yeah,” Derek said uncertainly, eying him with concern. “You planning on stabbing me?”

“Only if you try to steal my dessert,” Stiles informed him with a smirk, taking a sip of his beer. He licked his lips and looked down at the table as he set it back on the coaster, then raised his gaze to Derek once more. “But seriously, you guys can heal, so technically you shouldn’t have any problems, right? So how come you wear glasses?”

Before Derek could deflate, Stiles held out both hands urgently.

“Not a slam! I’m not—it’s just a legitimate question. You already know I think the glasses are hot, so I am not complaining about the need for them but... Like, at first I thought you were being a hipster or something. Wearing them as a fashion sense. But then when you came in wearing the contacts, I realized you actually needed them. So... how can you need them when you’re a Werewolf?”

“Well,” Derek said, playing with his beer bottle absently, “I think the difference between an injury and glasses is that the necessity for glasses isn’t so much a wound. It’s the eye shifting, the lens being too long or too short, or just having an eyeball that’s the wrong size. It’s not so much an injury as it is just your eye being a different shape or size than it should be, so it’s not necessarily something that our powers can heal.”

Stiles stared at him in silence for a long while. “You have no idea why you need glasses, do you?”

“Not a clue,” Derek said with a sigh. “It’s rare, but it does happen. Mum knows a Werewolf who was born blind. Just... weird human/Werewolf DNA mix, I guess.”

“Well again, not complaining.” Stiles offered him a wink with a grin, taking a sip of his beer. “Besides, this way I don’t feel left out.”
Derek frowned. “Do you wear glasses?” He’d never seen Stiles in glasses, and he hadn’t thought he wore contacts. He certainly didn’t look like he wore contacts, at any rate.

“Hm? Oh, no. I have 20/20 vision.” Stiles waved one hand absently. “I’m talking about my achromatopsia.”

“I know you think I’m super smart and all-knowing from high school, but there are still some words I’m unfamiliar with. What’s achromatopsia?”

“Oh.” Stiles seemed startled. “Did you not—I guess you wouldn’t have any reason to know.” He let out a small laugh, shrugging one shoulder. “I’m colour blind. Like, fully colour blind. I can only see what people have told me are white, black and shades of grey.”

Derek stared at him for a long while, completely floored. Stiles was what? He’d... never known. He’d had no idea! But that... it explained a lot, actually. Why he never reacted any differently when Werewolves flashed their eyes at him. Why he’d never asked Derek why his eyes were blue. Did he even know Derek’s eyes were blue? Did he know his non-wolf eyes were green?

Shit, did Stiles even know how gorgeous his own amber eyes were?

“I didn’t—I’m sorry, I didn’t know.”

Stiles snorted and rolled his eyes. “Everyone’s immediate reaction is to apologize to me, but it’s nothing to be sorry about. I can’t miss colour, I’ve never seen it. Scott used to try and describe it to me, but it’s like trying to taste sound. You can’t describe colour. The closest he can get is things like, yellow is very warm, and blue is cold and wet, and things like that. But even then, Whitty said he’s just describing things like the sun and water or whatever.”

A lot about Stiles suddenly made sense. Derek hadn’t ever considered he might be colour blind. Even if he had, he definitely wouldn’t have assumed he was black-and-white colour blind. He couldn’t imagine how that must feel, but then again, as Stiles had said, he couldn’t miss what he’d never known.

“Is that why you were wearing a pink shirt to your interview?”

Stiles’ face fell slightly. “I’m never forgiving Whitty for that. He said it was supposed to be a joke, but of course the one day I needed to not look like an idiot, I happen to choose a stupid shirt.” He shook his head. “Do you know he told me my dad made me wear a canary yellow shirt to graduation? That’s got to be some form of child abuse.”

Derek let out a small laugh. “It wasn’t that bad. A little jarring when you took off your graduation gown, but it made you easy to find in a crowd.”

Stiles gave him an unimpressed look for that, and they started chatting about how Stiles knew or understood good versus bad colours. Apparently he had some kind friends, so while he didn’t necessarily understand colours, he knew that some were deemed acceptable and some weren’t. Apparently lime green was a bad colour, and baby pink, and canary yellow. So he knew about colours, he just didn’t know what they looked like.

Derek found that to be really sad, but Stiles kept insisting he didn’t care. The only things he wished he could see were things like sunsets or sunrises, and forests, and fireworks. Things Derek felt like he took for granted because he could see them.

When it was clear Derek was getting emotional about it, Stiles quipped back that at least he wasn’t a Werewolf who needed glasses, and Derek managed to get them back into a more normal
“Can I ask you something?” Derek asked, halfway through his steak dinner. Stiles was eating some kind of shrimp pasta that he was thoroughly enjoying, if the enthusiastic slurping was anything to go by.

“Well.”

“I know you said you like the glasses.” Derek had to force himself not to reach up and push them further up the bridge of his nose, but he somehow managed to refrain. “But just out of curiosity, what’re your thoughts on beards?”

Stiles’ enthusiastic chewing slowed, eying Derek briefly. When he began to smirk, Derek realized he probably shouldn’t have asked.

“Derek Hale,” Stiles said in a falsetto voice that had Derek groaning instantly. “Did you shave and wear contacts that first little while just for little ol’ me?”

“Nevermind, I don’t actually care, I take it back.”

“My heart feels all a-flutter,” Stiles insisted, pretending to fan himself with one hand.

“What are you, a Southern Belle?” Derek asked dryly.

Stiles laughed, returning to his normal tone of voice while picking his fork back up. “Normally I have no opinion on beards. They’re fine, for the most part. But on you?” He smirked almost wickedly. “Oh, on you, I definitely much prefer the beard.”

Derek was never shaving again.

To find out Laura and Kira were right was kind of annoying, but at the same time, he loved that his most comfortable look—glasses and a beard—was attractive to Stiles. He didn’t know why he’d thought to change himself for him, Stiles had already made it clear in high school that he liked Derek exactly as he was. Sour expressions and all.

They finished up their dinner in companionable chatter, occasionally teasing one another over various items. When dessert came, Stiles was serious about stabbing someone trying to steal his food, because he threatened to stab Derek twice when he made a move to scoop some ice cream from his plate. Eventually he very kindly allowed Derek a bite, but it was clear it was a huge privilege that not everyone was entitled to.

Derek felt special.

All in all, by the time they left, Derek was surprised they hadn’t gotten kicked out. They’d paid for their own meals, as Stiles had said back at the office, and Derek made sure to tip generously since they’d literally been sitting in that same booth from a little past three until well after seven. With appetizers, their meals, their desserts and coffee, it was a long evening, but a thoroughly enjoyable one.

They headed back to the office, and since neither of them had actually had too much to drink, Derek offered Stiles a ride home. They were still chatting while heading for his place, and Stiles confirmed he did have the Jeep, but that it was definitely on its last leg, so he tried not to use it as much as possible.

Derek stopped at the curb outside the nice apartment building, a stab of jealousy zinging through
him once more at the realization that Stiles co-owned it with Jackson. They really were like a couple, and if he hadn’t honestly known Jackson was mated to Ethan, and that Stiles was most probably his own mate, he’d definitely be a bit more vocal about his jealousy.

“Thanks for the ride,” Stiles said, unbuckling his seatbelt. “I had a lot of fun tonight.”

“Me too. It was nice catching up.”

“Yeah.” Stiles beamed at him. “You know—I’m really glad we bumped into each other again. I don’t really believe in fate or anything, but I feel like us meeting up again means something, you know? So—thanks. For giving me another chance at this.”

Derek hadn’t exactly meant to do it. They were still in the whole friend zone thing, and Stiles seemed determined to take things slow, one step at a time. Really, it was better that way. The two of them getting to know one another again, slowly, without the prejudices of the past.

He knew they should stay the course, do it at the right pace, and he himself acknowledged that he’d been too chickenshit to ask Stiles out to dinner. But somehow, hearing him say those words, agreeing that this was the universe giving them a second shot, he couldn’t help it.

Reaching over, Derek grabbed Stiles by the back of the neck and yanked him forward so hard he actually flailed and almost hit Derek in the face with one wayward hand. Their lips met and it was like everything Derek remembered, but completely different at the same time. Stiles’ lips tasted like a mix of coffee and the sugary dessert he’d had at the end of their meal. They were soft, and perfect, and felt right against his own and he was so fucking gone for him, just as much as he had been back in high school.

He hadn’t intended for it to be a long kiss. Just a desperate attempt to have a tiny taste of Stiles, to remember what it had felt like all those years ago, to just—have something. He’d intended to kiss him like this just once for a few seconds, but when he tried to pull away, Stiles’ hands were fisting the front of his shirt.

It was like high school all over again, with Stiles practically crawling into Derek’s lap, but not quite managing it because the space was so tight. His tongue was in Derek’s mouth, kissing him almost desperately, and still trying to get over the partition and into his lap.

Derek’s free hand slid up Stiles’ back, the other still pressing against the back of his neck. He kind of wanted to see if he could push the seat back, to give Stiles the space he needed to crawl into his lap. He sucked lewdly on Stiles’ tongue, and could feel how hard his heart was pounding. Could hear it, too.

Maybe this hadn’t started as a date, but they could turn it into one, right? Maybe he could take Stiles home instead. It was Friday, it was the weekend, he could totally just—

Stiles bit down on his tongue and Derek jumped when there was a loud bang against the passenger-side window. They broke apart instantly and Stiles whipped around to look at what had happened.

Derek’s jaw clenched and his expression hardened at who he found outside the window.

Jackson Whittemore was standing right outside the car, Ethan a few feet back closer to the door to their building. They’d evidently just gotten home from their own outing and had spotted the car. Or maybe Jackson could smell Stiles even through the closed doors.

His eyes were electric blue and he looked like he was seconds away from wolfing out. He still had one fist against the window, having banged on it hard enough to have shattered it given his
strength. He’d probably only refrained because of Ethan, since Derek was the brother of the owner of the company both he and Stiles worked for.

Also, breaking the window meant he might have hurt Stiles.

“Whitty,” Stiles said, sounding breathless and looking flushed and fucking gorgeous.

“This is a PG-13 neighbourhood, Stiles,” he said, voice low and hinting at a growl. “Get out of the car.”

“Right.” Stiles cleared his throat, pulling away from Derek with a small wince. “Sorry I just, uh... fuck. It’s like high school all over again. Sorry.”

“Don’t be sorry,” Derek insisted, eyes still on Jackson and slowly bleeding blue. That seemed to make him bristle and he looked a literal second away from wrenching the door clear off the car. “I started it.”

“I guess you did.” Stiles laughed, reaching out to open the door. “I’ll text you later. See you Monday.”

“See you Monday,” Derek confirmed.

Stiles beamed at him and stepped out of the car. “Calm down, you territorial asshole, put the claws away, Jesus.” He slammed the door before saying anything else, but Derek saw Jackson immediately fall into step beside Stiles, one hand moving up to grip the back of his neck hard. He turned to glare at Derek, who just glared right back.

Not exactly the reunion with Jackson he’d been hoping for, but at least he was right about him being territorial.

This was going to get interesting...

Stiles felt stressed basically all weekend, and it was entirely, one-hundred and twenty percent Jackson’s fault. Though in his defence, Stiles kind of understood why he’d reacted how he had upon arriving home to see Stiles and Derek trying to undress each other in the fucking car.

It had just been... surprising. Derek wasn’t usually one to make moves, so for him to go for it had been a shock. A good shock, but still. And Stiles acknowledged he’d kind of gotten a bit carried away.

A lot carried away.

He’d literally been trying to climb Derek like a tree. He’d have succeeded, too! If only the damn car wasn’t so fucking cramped!

And then—Jackson. Angry, territorial Jackson. Except... that wasn’t the only reason he’d reacted the way he had. He’d been territorial, of course he had, he was Jackson, but his interruption had been for more than just how he felt personally.

Jackson knew Stiles loved Derek. If he had a chance, he’d never stop him or jeopardize his ability to be with him. But that wasn’t what he was doing by banging on the window.

Being territorial of his friend aside, he’d also done it because he was scared at the speed with which they were moving. They’d only just really reconnected, and Jackson had been the one stuck
with Stiles picking up the pieces after high school. He probably wasn’t eager for a repeat, which was why he’d been the first to insist to Stiles that they needed to go slowly.

Second, and probably most importantly, as soon as they’d gotten into the apartment, he’d gotten thoroughly lectured on the fact that Stiles should know better, because he used to work for HR, and he was just publicly making out with his boss!

Cue an anxiety-filled weekend, because—Jackson was right. Derek was his boss. The fact that he knew him from before and had been in love with him in high school didn’t change the fact that there was a seriously skewed power dynamics here.

Not that Stiles worried Derek was going to get all dominant on him and demand sexual favours or he’d fire him, but he was still his boss. And any sort of promotions Stiles ever got would always be questioned. Basically anything Stiles said or did would be questioned if it came out that he was dating the boss, not to mention the rumours.

Honestly, Stiles didn’t care. If things went well with Derek, he did not care. He had to stay his EA indefinitely to avoid any rumours about favouritism? He didn’t care, he’d manage. Sure, his wheelhouse was HR, but if he was stuck being Derek’s EA for the rest of time, well, he could think of worse things.

The real problem was if they broke up, but after everything he’d done in high school, if Derek hadn’t immediately hated him upon seeing him again, Stiles figured he’d find a way to just get him put elsewhere. Maybe he’d actually swap him out for Peter’s EA. A depressing thought, but it wasn’t like he and Derek were even a thing yet, so he shouldn’t be panicking about it!

But still...

Stiles woke up early on Monday. He needed to talk to someone in HR about this, and he knew they started at six. He could probably make it to work, see Erica, and then get back to the lobby in time for Derek to show up. He didn’t have to know why Stiles had beaten him to work. As long as nothing changed in their routine, it would be fine.

Getting ready at breakneck speed, he made it out the door in time to catch the bus that came twenty minutes earlier than his normal one, and was thus at the coffee shop twenty minutes early. The usual barista looked startled, and worried, like she thought she was running behind, but he reassured her that he was early.

Heading to the office, he was relieved to find the lobby empty, and quickly entered the building and hustled up to the ninth floor with everything. He figured he could always tell Derek he’d woken up early and shown up early, not like it was a lie.

Dropping the food and his coffee off, he kept his bag on while racing back across the empty floor to the stairs. He went down them two at a time, almost tripping and braining himself before managing to catch hold of the railing. He made it to the third floor as quickly as he could, checking the time, and saw he was still well within his time frame for this meeting. Derek wouldn’t be showing up for at least another twenty minutes, so he had enough time to have this conversation and make it downstairs.

Moving through into HR, he got a few confused looks for being there, but no one stopped him or said anything. The people in HR knew him, or at least knew he worked there, so they didn’t really pay any attention to him.

Erica glanced up when he approached, as if sensing him—or smelling him—and she grinned,
clearly pleased for an excuse to take a break from work. He didn’t know how she could wake up early enough to show up for work at six, and still look flawless, with her hair neatly curled and flowing over her shoulders, striking make-up, and just dressed to the nines. Stiles could barely comb his hair when he woke up, and he got in an hour later than her.

“Morning,” she said with a brilliant smile. “Have a good weekend?”

“Yeah, it was okay, you?” Stiles asked, stopping beside her desk.

She shrugged. “Went shopping for a wedding dress for the millionth time. I swear, Boyd’s gonna have to cave and let me custom order one, or I’ll show up to the wedding in my underwear.”

“He probably wouldn’t mind that,” Stiles said honestly, still kind of amazed at the fact that Erica was marrying Boyd. Like, from high school Boyd. He’d always been so quiet and soft-spoken. Erica was a spitfire, but he supposed opposites attracted. He liked that Erica seemed happy with Boyd, the guy deserved a good thing after his grandmother’s passing.

Stiles remembered his dad telling him about it a few years back. She’d been a lovely woman, it had really hit the community hard.

“So, what brings you to my humble abode?”

Right. He was there for a reason, and the clock was ticking. “Do you have a second for me? Kind of work-related?”

“I suppose,” she said with an over-exaggerated sigh, like he was an inconvenience. She motioned for him to pull up a chair. There was an empty desk beside her, presumably the position they still hadn’t filled, and Stiles hesitated before grabbing it, rolling the chair over. “What can I do for you, Mr. Stilinski?”

“This is—I’m kind of looking for some guidance, I guess. Or another opinion?” Stiles sat down, half-on top of his bag, but didn’t move it out from under him. “I mean, I know HR policy like the back of my hand, but I’m a little, you know... involved? In this particular situation? And every company has a different ‘relationships in the workplace’ policy, so I thought—”

Both of them jumped when a loud bang emanated from the office across the small HR area, the occupant having practically thrown themselves out of their chair to get to their open doorway. Stiles was gratified to see they weren’t the only ones, virtually everyone in HR jumping out of their seats in fright at the abrupt action.

Stiles felt his stomach drop, because in his stupidity, he’d forgotten that Laura Hale, Derek’s sister Laura Hale, actual owner of the company Laura Hale... was the HR VP.

And she was grinning at him manically from her office doorway.

That didn’t bode well.

“Stiles! Morning! My office. Now.”

Oh God.

“Wait, that’s not fair!” Erica insisted, shaking a fist at her boss as Stiles bowed his head in defeat and got to his feet once more. “I was going to be his confidant!”

“Fuck you Erica,” Laura insisted, pointing at her while Stiles made his way slowly to her office. “I
have been waiting almost fifteen years for this day, you do not get to steal it from me!”

Stiles could tell the rest of their team was extremely curious, and was very glad he’d already asked if Laura’s office was soundproof because this was not a conversation he wanted overheard.

Once he was through the door, Laura shut it and then quite literally squealed, clapping her hands together before ushering Stiles rather violently towards a chair and moving around her desk to sit down, folding her hands on the wooden surface in front of her.

She literally looked like a maniacal serial killer, Stiles was quite scared.

“Hello Stiles. Good morning. How are you? You doing well? Excellent. I’m glad to hear it. So, as I understand it, you need some HR guidance. I am always happy to help with any kind of HR guidance needed. Lay it on me. Hit me. What can I do for you?”

This was a thousand times more awkward with Derek’s sister than it would’ve been with Erica.

“Well... I don’t—know if Derek told you about Friday—”

“What about Friday?” Laura leaned closer to him across the desk. “What happened Friday?”

Right. So. Not telling her about Friday. Well, he’d have to tell her a bit about Friday, but not all of it. “We, uh, went to dinner together. You know, as friends. To catch up.”

“Mn hm, and?”

“And—we caught up?”

“Anything interesting happen at dinner?”

“No?” Stiles frowned. “Why are you acting weird?”

“I’m not acting weird. Am I not allowed to be excited that my brother’s crush is asking HR for advice?” She was still grinning like a lunatic.

“I mean, that’s kind of the problem, though. I work for him. He’s my boss.”

Laura’s smile faded slightly and her gaze lowered to her desk, as if just now cluing in to why, exactly, Stiles was sitting in HR. “Oh. Right. That.”

“Oh. Right. That.”

“Yeah.” Stiles rubbed awkwardly at his arm. “I mean, I don’t know that we’re going in that direction, exactly.” He didn’t miss the way Laura’s eyes shot to his chest, clearly denoting she’d caught the partial lie, but she didn’t call him on it. “But I was just thinking that if we do, and we get together, what does that mean, you know, for me working here? Would I—have to quit?”

Laura looked startled. “What? No. Stiles, no.” She offered him a kind smile, looking a little less manic than she had before. “God, no. Relationships in the workplace happen, they’re never planned, and it would be stupid to lose good employees just because they happened to get along well with another employee. I guess the main concern here is that Derek is your boss, like you said.”

“I was thinking about it a lot over the weekend,” he admitted. That seemed to make Laura happy, but she’d definitely realized Stiles had a legitimate HR concern and was trying to stop being so overly thrilled about the potential for her brother and Stiles to become a thing. “Derek isn’t the kind of person who would treat me differently at work just because we were dating. Similarly, I
don’t think he’d treat me poorly if we were to date and break up. Considering our history, if he hasn’t treated me poorly yet, then he clearly won’t even if we were to date and break up.”

It was obvious Laura had been confided in regarding Stiles’ admission, because unlike Peter, she hadn’t jumped on that comment about history. Stiles was kind of glad, he didn’t want to have to hash that out, too. He was running out of time.

“I don’t know if—I mean, I really like working for him. Sure, it’s not my usual domain, but I wouldn’t hate being stuck as his EA forever if that’s the only win here. I just know that pay raises and promotions are going to be heavily scrutinized as soon as it comes out we’re dating, if we end up going down that road. He has enough problems with the rumours, I don’t want to be another problem.”

“Honestly, you’d be the opposite of a problem in that regard,” Laura insisted, leaning back in her seat and frowning slightly. “Realistically, having Derek be in a relationship would mean people would have to stop calling him a womanizer and insisting he’s sleeping with everyone he crosses paths with. Sure, some people will still try, but if Derek is dating you, while he’ll be professional at work, the second you’re both off the clock, he’s going to be disgusting with you.” She half-smiled at him. “Spoiler alert, he used to make you mix-tapes in high school.”

“Shut up, he did not,” Stiles insisted.

“He did. He’s that sappy. People will see how he looks at you, how he is around you, and they’ll know he is one-hundred percent devoted. That’ll be even more evident to the wolves, because we understand what it’s like to—” She cut off abruptly, looking horrified with herself. Stiles frowned, but before he could ask her what was going on, she continued quickly. “In any case, I wouldn’t want your relationship with Derek to mean you can’t advance in the company if you decided to come to HR, for example. I think we’ll just have to... maybe Peter and I can talk, and we can restructure the chain of command for Finance. People who start relationships aren’t usually in the same situation as you, where there’s a bit of a power imbalance, but I think overall as long as we play it smart and figure out the best way to do this, you shouldn’t have to sacrifice your career or...” She offered him another small smile. “He’s been waiting for you for a long time, Stiles. I’m definitely not going to punish you for wanting to be with him. And, even if you decide you don’t want to be with him, that’s okay too. Bec—”

“I do,” he said, because he needed her to know. This wasn’t one-sided. This had never been one-sided. They just hadn’t known that back in high school.

Probably would’ve saved them both a lot of heartache if they’d just spoken to each other.

“Well then, I think you should talk to Derek about it, and we can figure out the rest as we go.” She smiled at him, more genuine and pleased than before. “You have a place here no matter what, Stiles. Honestly, I don’t think Peter will ever let me fire you, he says you make meetings tolerable.”

He let out a small laugh and shook his head, then nodded once and licked his lip. “Thanks Laura. I know this—it must be hard for you. Having me back in his life, knowing what we were in high school.”

“I like to think the universe brought you back to him for a reason.” She winked. “Make sure you don’t blow it this time.”

“I’ll do my best.” He slapped the armrests of his seat and stood. “I should go, he’s probably here by now. I don’t want to keep him waiting.”
“Nice chat, Stiles.” She winked at him and turned back to her computer as he headed for the door. He reached for the handle, then paused and looked at her again.

“I do like working for him, you know,” he admitted, Laura turning back to him. “He’s a really good boss. He cares about his employees. There are worse things in life than being stuck as the EA of someone who values the people who work for him.”

Laura smiled at that, giving him a grateful nod, as if not often hearing about how well her brother did. He wished he could’ve told her this before admitting he was in love with him, but it didn’t make his words any less true.

Exiting her office, he saw Erica perk up, eyes following him like a hawk, and he’d barely left the HR area when she was hustling to Laura’s office on her heels, demanding to know what had happened. Stiles just laughed and jogged to the stairs, pushing through the door and heading down to the lobby.

He pushed open the door just as Derek was walking towards his usual spot in the lobby, having come out of the parking garage elevator. That meant Stiles had spent less time with Laura than he’d thought.

Smiling, he hurried up to Derek and poked him in the side from behind. He started, evidently having heard someone approach, but not realizing they were coming for him.

“Morning.” Stiles beamed at him.

“Hi,” Derek said, looking a little confused, but not displeased. “Am I late?”

“Nah, I was really early. I caught the early bus, so I just went up with the food and bugged Laura for a bit before coming back down for you. Did you have a good weekend?”

“I did,” he confirmed, smiling endearingly at him while they walked towards the stairs. “And you?”

“Yeah, it was okay. Nothing really managed to top my Friday.” He winked at Derek while swiping his fob and was gratified at the deep flush that started to creep up his neck.

Now that he knew he could have his job and Derek, well... things were about to get interesting.

“I can’t believe I’m literally three days away from meeting the infamous Stiles,” Kira insisted, following Derek around Laura’s kitchen while he finished up with one of the dishes. Laura had been bossing him around for hours and really, he was kind of looking forward to going back to some semblance of normal.

His parents were leaving tomorrow. The visit had felt both very long—mostly because Laura had been living with him for a month—and extremely short—because he wished he’d had more time with his parents—all at the same time.

He’d managed to book time off though, just as he and Stiles had discussed at dinner over a week ago, so that had helped with spending time with his parents, but it still somehow didn’t feel like enough time. It felt weird they were already heading out in the morning, and while he knew both he and Laura were eager to have their own space again, he was going to miss having his sister around. His apartment always felt really big and lonely after an extended period of time with another body there.
Maybe he’d ask Kira to stay a few nights, just to try and get used to it. She was less boisterous than Laura, so while her presence would be noticed, it wouldn’t be a judo kick to the face first thing in the morning like Laura’s was. Which, considering Kira’s profession, was kind of funny to consider.

It had been weird, being away from the office, knowing that his department felt comfortable without him. Not that he’d never taken vacation before, but usually his supervisor didn’t feel comfortable going to his EA to ask for Derek to be contacted because he didn’t want to bother him, or he felt uncomfortable, or he thought Derek wouldn’t trust him to do well on his own.

It wasn’t like that with Stiles. He was constantly checking in on the department, and while the supervisor was doing a phenomenal job, it was still the busy period and Stiles had noticed the man skipping lunch and staying late. Derek had called the supervisor to make sure he was doing okay, and Stiles had confirmed an hour later that the man had really appreciated Derek checking in.

Peter also kept texting him to tell him he was happy he wasn’t there, because it meant Stiles was at all the meetings to take notes for him. Derek kept reminding him not to steal his EA or he’d eviscerate him.

Things had been... good. Really good. He and Stiles were still kind of trying to figure each other out, but Laura had called Derek up to a meeting with Peter to talk about the restructuring of the Finance department on Thursday before his vacation, and while at first he’d been insulted and wondering what he’d done, Laura quickly squashed that by saying it was about Stiles.

Because Stiles had gone to speak to her.

Because Stiles wanted to make sure they could be in a relationship.

Because Stiles wanted to be in a relationship!

Which had kind of blown Derek’s mind.

Sure, they’d been making out in the car, but still. Every time he remembered Stiles Stilinski—like, actual love of his life and potential mate Stiles Stilinski!—wanted to be with him, his brain kind of short-circuited a little bit. So hearing Laura and Peter talking about how to restructure Finance so that nobody would feel weird about Derek and his EA dating... it was kind of crazy.

Because it was proving to him that they were moving in that direction. They weren’t just talking about it happening, it was going to happen! He and Stiles were going to actually try this whole dating thing.

Needless to say, Derek had returned to the ninth floor after that meeting and immediately asked Stiles if he was free the following evening.

Which he had been, but had very politely reminded him that Derek had booked the day off to be with his parents. Which—he’d forgotten about. So he’d asked about next Friday, which he was again reminded was already booked because they were going for drinks with Kira, Boyd, Erica, Jackson and Ethan. And maybe Laura, she’d kind of tried to invite herself along, but Derek knew she’d back off if he asked her to. He hadn’t decided yet.

Eventually, Stiles had taken pity on him and said he was free Wednesday, so Derek had confirmed Wednesday worked great, and they were going to go out on Wednesday.

As a legitimate date this time. Like two real adults going out together. On a date.
With Stiles.

“Uh, are you okay?”

Derek turned to Kira and saw her giving him a weird look before glancing down. He did the same, and saw that she’d been trying to take the tray from him and he’d tightened his grip on it. He hastily released it, clearing his throat and turning back to the oven. There were some rolls in there, the last of the food to come out, so he wanted to make sure they were doing okay.

He was still crouched in front of the oven, rubbing at one eye beneath his glasses, when he heard his mother approach. She stopped beside him and reached down to brush some hair off his forehead, the action at once familiar and comforting.

“Why are you stressed?” she asked softly.

“What if I mess this up?” he insisted, scowling at the rolls. He knew she was well aware he wasn’t talking about the rolls. “What if the universe gave me this second chance, and I blow it? What if... he isn’t actually my mate?”

“If you love him, does that matter?” she was still brushing hair off his forehead comfortingly, then bringing one hand down to rub gently at the back of his neck.

“I don’t want to steal him from someone else, it isn’t fair.”

“Very noble of you,” she said, and he could hear the smile in her voice. “But I think you need to consider why you found each other again. It’s all right to be afraid to make a mistake, but I don’t think being afraid should be a reason to avoid making that mistake to begin with. You love him. You’ve already lost so much time with him. Is it so bad to try?”

No. No it wasn’t. He was just scared, same as he’d been in high school. Loving someone so completely was a terrifying thing, and he wondered if that was how everyone felt.

He wondered if that was how Erica and Boyd had felt, who were out in the living room laughing at Laura, already planning their wedding. If it was like that for Cora and her mate, who’d known when they met that Cora would eventually have to go home, neither of them honestly knowing when they’d see one another again.

And for his parents. His mother, loving a human, who might leave her at any time. And his father, being with a Werewolf, an Alpha, who could decide he was beneath her status. Even if Werewolves were seen as lesser, for someone like his father who respected them and always had, being with an Alpha had probably been terrifying because he would’ve seen her as someone much higher in the hierarchy than he himself was.

“Why is life so hard?” Derek asked just as the timer went off for the rolls.

He heard his mother let out a soft laugh. “To remind us it is worth living.” She bent down to kiss his temple. “Come, before your uncle eats all the meat. You know how greedy he is.”

Derek snorted a laugh, even as Peter called back that he’d heard that. Talia responded loudly that of course he’d heard it, he was a Werewolf.

Standing and grabbing the oven mitts, Derek pulled the rolls out and set the tray on the stove top. There was a small basket beside him on the counter, courtesy of Laura, and he quickly transferred the hot rolls from the tray into the basket. He burned his fingers, but they healed immediately, so it wasn’t anything more than a slight sting.
If nothing else, at least he’d know tomorrow what kind of relationship this was going to be. Much as he wanted to make out with Stiles, he loved him for who he was, and he really hoped they spent more time chatting than making out.

He supposed as long as they were in public, he was safe, at least.

Derek headed into the living room with the rolls, where the pack was waiting for him, and smiled at his amazing family and friends. If nothing else, at least he always had them.

Even though it had only been three work days, because there was a weekend in there, Stiles hadn’t seen Derek for a total of five entire days. Five days! It was like those ten years apart all over again! The only solace he had this time was that whenever he had to text Derek something work-related, and he got a response, he remembered that Derek couldn’t escape him this time.

Stiles had his number, he was stuck with him now.

Still, it felt entirely too long since he’d shown up to work to Derek waiting for him, to the point where he’d literally almost forgotten to buy him breakfast. That would’ve been awful so he was glad he remembered at the last second. And then he’d arrived at work and there he was, waiting in the lobby for him, looking as perfect and nerdy as always.

God he loved him.

They didn’t have very much time to chat, since morning time wasn’t really a time for them to chat, but Stiles made sure to ask how the last evening with his parents went, how he’d slept, if they were still on for dinner. The important things.

Which they were, thank goodness. Though he knew Derek would be a bit of a mess all day because everyone coming back from a vacation, regardless of how short, always had a bazillion emails to contend with. Especially someone like Derek, who was a higher up person.

Stiles had notes from seven different meetings, and that was only related to meetings. It wasn’t including all the missed calls and the emails he couldn’t see. He knew the supervisor had done a good job, but even he kept saying he couldn’t wait for Derek to get back.

Teams really worked better when all the parts were present. A train still ran without a conductor, but a little erratically. Just a little. Derek was the conductor, so everyone was glad to have him back.

The day was as stressful for Derek as Stiles assumed it would be. He spent a majority of it on the phone, kept rubbing at his eyes beneath his glasses, and looked like he just wanted to go home and not come back. Stiles went feral on anyone who tried to bypass him and head straight for Derek’s office, because he was busy and he was sure whatever it was could wait!

He’d legitimately started stopping people from going to Derek’s door, and had even gone so far as to shut it for him so that he had extra time to make it around his cubby before people bothered his boss. And on top of that, he was right that most of them didn’t have anything important to say! One person literally just wanted to ask about his time off, which was super nice of him, but had he looked at Derek? Guy was two seconds away from a meltdown, he didn’t have time to answer inane questions!

Stiles made sure to keep a steady supply of coffee and snacks coming, Derek looking like he was heaven-sent every single time he snuck into the room with anything for him. He grabbed him some lunch, as well, because Derek still sucked at taking care of himself, and actually worried maybe
their date would be cancelled.

Derek had promised it was still on that morning, but that was before he’d logged on to see the mess that was his inbox. Stiles wouldn’t blame him if he cancelled. He’d be disappointed, of course, but he wouldn’t be upset. Derek was a busy guy, and besides, they weren’t in a hurry. Slow and steady. Jackson had made him promise there would be no hanky panky, and as much as Stiles wanted the hanky panky—so bad, like just, so incredibly bad—he’d promised.

There was a lot of history, they needed to get through all their history first. Making out, sure, not a big deal now that Laura had kind of figured things out for them to comfortably date without too many problems, but hanky panky was more of an emotional thing they both needed to be ready for.

Stiles had waited basically fourteen years, he could wait a little longer.

When three hit, Derek made no move to get up, rubbing at his forehead while looking over some documents on his desk. Stiles figured he hadn’t even noticed it was three, which was fine, he could give him a bit more time. Stiles just stayed at his desk and played some games on his phone, then got Derek another coffee and some pretzels from the vending machine, because the poor guy was really suffering.

At four, Stiles wondered if he should say something, but he didn’t want to seem impatient. He wasn’t impatient, he honestly just wanted to know if they were cancelled so that he could grab Derek some dinner before heading home.

When his phone proclaimed it was ten-to-five, Stiles moved to the office door and knocked on it hesitantly. He got a grunt in response and pushed the door open. He hadn’t knocked once all day since he was usually just trying to sneak in unnoticed to drop off food and coffee, so this was probably the first time Derek had acknowledged Stiles was asking for entry because he wanted to talk to him.

“Hey,” he said, eying the mound of papers on Derek’s desk. “Everything okay?”

“Not really,” he muttered, eyes still on the paperwork. “Laura sent me a preliminary report that got submitted to EDGAR and there was a problem with the numbers. I think there was an extra zero somewhere so I have to find it so we can fix the final report and resubmit it.”

Stiles had heard people reference EDGAR a few times since working for Super Natural Foods. Apparently it was the electronic filing system used for corporate filings, most specifically for publicly traded companies. It was a requirement under the SEC for major corporations to file audited financial statements at minimum once a year, and unaudited statements between two and three times a year depending on the size of the company.

If Derek was the one pouring over the numbers for Finance, it was likely this was one of the unaudited filings.

“Do you want some help?” Stiles asked, moving to sit in one of the chairs across from Derek. “Might not be a Business major, but I can help you find an extra zero. As you might recall, I was third in my class, so I’m pretty good at math.” He offered Derek a small smile.

“I wouldn’t want to pull you away from your other stuff,” Derek muttered, still squinting at the numbers on the page in front of him. “And you’ve been amazing keeping people out of my office. How’s the team doing, anyway? I know if they need me you’ll tell me, but they doing all right?”
“Oh, yeah. They’re fine. They went home so, they’re probably enjoying some down time right now.”

“They went home?” Derek looked up at him, an adorably confused expression on his face. “Why would they—?” He turned to check the time on his phone since his computer had long ago gone to sleep, and his face fell. “Stiles! Why didn’t you tell me it was five?!”

“You’re busy!” Stiles insisted, motioning the papers. “This is important.”

“So are you,” Derek insisted heatedly, beginning to gather all the papers up.

Stiles slapped his hands on top of Derek’s to make him stop. “I appreciate that. I really do. But I know you, Derek. You’re going to go out with me tonight, we’re going to have the best time, and you’re either going to drive back here at ass o’clock in the night to get back to it, or you’re going to stress like you’ve never stressed before the entire evening.” He tightened his grip on Derek’s hands, offering him another small smile. “I am still here. I’m not going anywhere. Let me help you. I can go and grab a few more snacks from the vending machine, load us both up on some coffee, and we can tackle this together. Once we’re done, we can do dinner. Okay?”

Derek looked like he didn’t want to agree, but it was clear Stiles wasn’t going to go out for dinner with him right now. Derek was stressing out, and Stiles just wanted to help him.

Sighing explosively, Derek just nodded and Stiles nodded back, pulling his hands away and getting to his feet. “I’ll be right back.”

“Sure,” Derek said, sounding like a put out child. Stiles had just exited the office when Derek called him back and he poked his head around the door. “Thank you. Thank you for—everything, I guess.”

Stiles just beamed at him and continued on his way to grab the snacks and coffee.

When he came back with everything, he set himself up across from Derek and was handed his own pile of paperwork. It made him weep for all the dead trees, but he tried not to think about it too much since they always recycled in the office and he started going through the numbers with Derek.

He’d turned on some smooth, classical music mostly as background noise while they both searched through the pages and pages of numbers, looking for the one extra fucking zero. A part of him wondered why Accounting wasn’t doing this, but he acknowledged that he didn’t know enough about the difference between Finance and Accounting to be able to ascertain whose actual job this was.

Time almost seemed to stop as they worked, probably because it was so damn boring, but two pairs of eyes were better than one, so Stiles persevered, chewing absently on various trail mix or cheetos, whatever was closest to him at any given time.

He’d just flipped a page when he paused and went back to the last number on the previous one, then gasped and flapped one hand insistently at Derek.

“Derek! Derek, Derek, Derek! I found it! I found the zero!”

He brandished the page at him and Derek took it urgently, looking both relieved and terrified. If Stiles was wrong, it meant they’d have to keep going. But if Stiles was right...

Derek let out a loud, relieved sigh and rubbed at his eyes beneath his glasses with one hand. “Thank God. I was starting to think this night would never end.”
Stiles thrust both hands in the air in triumph. “I’ve officially earned my position in Finance!”

“You’re an idiot,” Derek said fondly, smiling down at the page he was now writing on and highlighting the incorrect number. “I can fix this up tomorrow, it’s not going to be hard to amend. I just really needed to find it.”

“I’m glad I could help.” Stiles beamed at him, then drummed his hands on the armrests of the chair he was in before jumping to his feet. “I know it’s late, but dinner? If you’re still amenable?”

“Yes,” Derek said immediately. “Yes, I’m—” He cut off, face falling when he looked at his phone for the time.

“What?”

“It’s quarter-to-nine.”

“Fuck, is it really?” Stiles blurted out and reached into his pocket for his cellphone. His group chat with Jackson and Ethan had thirty-seven new messages, but he didn’t bother checking them. He knew the messages had started while Ethan was still at work, so it was probably just Jackson repeatedly reminding Stiles to avoid the hanky panky and Ethan telling him to stop being so involved in someone else’s sex life.

“I’m sorry.” Derek sounded so fucking devastated that it hurt Stiles’ heart.

“Don’t be sorry, it’s okay.” He smiled. “Next time? We can do it some other time. I have plans tomorrow, and we’re doing the group thing Friday, so like, Saturday? Or even just whenever next week.”

Derek looked so damn gutted that Stiles felt bad for suggesting they re-schedule. But restaurants in the area would either be full or close to closing time. They opened early because of the hours the people around them worked, so they also closed early. Stiles could think of at least three that would be on last call, and all the other ones would definitely be packed by now.

The pub would be even worse. They wanted to be able to hear one another, or else what was the point of going on this date?

“I... have leftovers.”

Stiles frowned at Derek when he said this, the Werewolf rubbing the back of his neck uncomfortably.

“From dinner last night, I mean. My sister and I made a huge dinner for our parents, and I took some of the food home. It’s not—exactly what I wanted for our first official date, but if you don’t mind leftovers...”

“Yes,” Stiles said instantly. “Leftovers, yes. Good. Excellent.” A chance to see Derek’s apartment? To be in his apartment? Fucking yes please! But no hanky panky. He had to make sure he kept his promise to Jackson or he’d never hear the end of it. No hanky panky.

Derek sagged with relief and nodded once, then motioned for Stiles to get his things while he quickly organized his desk. Stiles went to grab his bag and tinkered for a bit with what he had on his own desk, just so Derek wouldn’t feel rushed. When they were both ready, Derek shut his office door and the two of them headed for the stairs together.

Neither of them spoke while heading to the car. Stiles figured Derek was still a little brain-dead,
and Stiles himself was a bit too giddy to speak. Derek’s home. This was huge. He was going to see where he lived, what kind of taste adult Derek had. He honestly wondered if he had a huge room full of shelves for all the books he read. It would actually be really nice if he did.

Once they were in the car, Derek motioned for Stiles to pick the music and they left the office. The streets were still relatively busy despite the hour, but it didn’t take long to reach Derek’s place. He lived much closer than Stiles did, and while he was jealous of that, he acknowledged that Derek had probably bought in this area specifically because it was close to work.

Parking in the underground lot, Derek led them to the entrance and paused as he took his fob out, turning to Stiles.

“Shit, I forgot. We don’t have stairs leading to the garage, we have to take the elevator out.”

“Oh.” Stiles winced at that, but forced himself to shrug. “That’s okay.” He knew Derek heard the lie and winced again. “I’ll be okay,” he clarified. “It’s just a few floors, right? And I doubt you’ve had any malfunctioning elevators or power outages lately. I’ll live.”

“Sorry.”

“Don’t be sorry, moron.” Stiles shoved at Derek lightly and the other man swiped his fob to enter the small alcove.

It only had the elevator, so he pressed the button and they waited together. When it arrived, Derek held the door open and motioned for Stiles to enter. It took him a second, but he did. Ever since they’ve redone the doors at work, Stiles hadn’t gotten into an elevator once until now. It never got easier.

He wedged himself into a corner as Derek hit the button for the fourth floor and the doors shut. Stiles was clenching both hands around the strap of his bag and when Derek moved right up against him, he reached up for Stiles’ closest hand.

Peeling his fingers away from the strap took a gargantuan effort, but Stiles managed it. Derek took his now-free hand, brought it to his lips to kiss his fingers, and then intertwined them together. It helped, but only a little. Stiles still crushed the shit out of Derek’s hand while they ascended, but considering he was a Werewolf, he probably didn’t even notice.

As soon as the doors opened, Derek moved quickly with Stiles, knowing that he’d bolt for the exit and clearly unwilling to release his hand. Stiles let out a slow exhale once he was back on solid ground and Derek offered him a small smile before tugging on their still connected hands and leading the way to the door at the end of the corridor.

When they reached it, Derek paused, keys in his other hand. “It’s—it might still be a bit of a mess. Laura only just moved out this afternoon after work, so it probably looks like an explosion in there and—”

“Derek,” Stiles insisted. “We went to high school together. Do you remember my locker?”

Derek laughed. “I’m surprised nothing was living in it.”

“I mean, by the end there, something probably was.” He grinned. “Trust me, your place probably looks way better than mine. I live with two other dudes, our apartment is almost always a mess.”

It wasn’t like Stiles was going to be inspecting the top of doorframes for dust, he was sure Derek’s place was tons cleaner than his own.
Derek unlocked the door and pushed it open, turning on a light right inside the door and walking in further. Stiles moving along with him since they were still holding hands. He shut the door behind himself while looking around, hearing Derek snap the lock into place.

It looked really nice. The door opened immediately into a large kitchen/living area, with a huge marble island and plush, comfy looking sofas. There was a set of sliding doors at the back of the living room that led out onto what appeared to be a relatively big balcony, complete with a barbecue.

To his right was a small bathroom, with a bedroom on the adjoining wall. He assumed that was the guest room, because when he looked towards the left, right inside the door there was a small study, and off the living room down a short corridor was another door leading to what was obviously the master bedroom. He was willing to bet there was another bathroom connected to the room.

It was really big. It felt very open, and while there weren’t *that* many rooms compared to what he’d envisioned, it was still spacious and nicely laid out. It felt homey. He liked it.

“This place is great,” he admitted, Derek finally dropping his hand so that he could put his briefcase in the small study and then hang his suit jacket up in the hall closet.

Stiles walked further into the unit, pulling his bag over his shoulder, and he dropped it beside the couch, then sat down on it, still looking around. Derek had a huge TV mounted on the wall, as well as some game consoles, but he didn’t seem to have any movies. He probably just had the usual streaming services. Netflix, Apple TV, Disney Plus. Or maybe he didn’t because he didn’t have *time* for TV. Maybe he just read whenever he had a free moment.

“It’s a bit messy,” Derek muttered, moving over to him and standing by the couch.

“Bitch, where?” Stiles demanded, turning to him incredulously. “Do your Werewolf eyes see something my puny human eyes don’t?”

Derek rolled his eyes and shoved at Stiles’ head lightly, the latter grinning. “Do you want a drink?”

“Sure, if you’ve got anything.”

“I should have some white wine,” Derek confirmed, moving to the fridge and tugging it open. He instantly froze when he did and let out a string of curses. Stiles cocked an eyebrow when Derek straightened and slammed the fridge door shut so hard, he worried he might’ve broken it.

Then he stood there, back to Stiles, looking like he was *fuming*.

“Oh, is everything okay?”

“Laura took the leftovers.”

Stiles couldn’t help it. He burst out laughing. Tonight was really *not* their night for food, but that was okay. Their date wasn’t for the food anyway, and Stiles felt like Derek was stressing too much about something that really wasn’t a big deal. He would be just as happy ordering pizza.

“I’m gonna kill her.”

“Relax,” Stiles insisted, getting to his feet and wandering over to Derek, moving around the island to poke at him. “I’m not here for the food, you know. I’m here for the company. It’s cool, we can make it work.”
“I probably have some Super Natural Foods in the freezer,” Derek muttered, seeming like it killed him to say those words. Before he could grab the handle, Stiles smacked his hand away and shoved him lightly to the side.

“No, we are not eating work food after work. That’s not allowed. You like pizza?”

“Pizza will take a long time to get here at this hour,” Derek muttered.

“We’re not gonna order it, we’re gonna make it.” Stiles grinned.

“That’s going to take literally just as long.”

“No way, man! Pizza in a mug.” Stiles winked at him. “Trust me, I got this. Where’s your pantry?”

Derek motioned it, seeming confused, and Stiles wandered over to his pantry. He’d made this same recipe so many times in university that despite not having had it for years, he still remembered the ingredients. He noticed Derek also had some chocolate chips and cocoa powder and perked up instantly, figuring he could make dessert, too.

He grabbed everything he would need from the pantry, setting it all on the counter behind him while Derek watched in silence. Then he went to the fridge and started pulling out the ingredients he needed from in there. Somehow, Derek actually had marinara sauce. It looked like it was the kind for spaghetti as opposed to pizza, but Stiles figured he could just add herbs to it and it’d be good enough. Tomato sauce was tomato sauce in his book.

He didn’t have any pepperoni, but he seemed to have some kind of sausage, so he held it up in inquiry and Derek just shrugged, clearly not caring either way. Stiles also grabbed three different cheeses because yes cheese.

Moving back to the counter with everything, he looked over at Derek again. “You have two microwave-safe mugs?”

“Sure.” Derek frowned, but obediently moved to one of his cupboards, pulling two of them out and handing them over. When he started to move away, Stiles yanked him back beside him, putting one mug in front of Derek and another in front of himself.

“We’re gonna make pizza in a mug. First, we need four tablespoons of flour each.” Stiles motioned for Derek to get the measuring spoons, and then spooned out four tablespoons of flour, waiting for Derek to do the same into his own mug. He looked horribly confused, but Stiles was used to people being sceptical. These recipes were literally insane, and he still remembered how amazed he was that they actually worked. Super Natural Foods might have saved them from starving when Jackson’s dad had cut them off, but BiggerBolderBaking had saved Stiles from starvation in university. It just wasn’t quite as healthy as Super Natural Foods, which was why the latter was better in a pinch.

Stiles went through all the ingredients with Derek, the two of them grating cheese and cutting up pieces of the sausage for their pizzas. Once they were ready, Stiles checked out the wattage on Derek’s microwave, and put his in first. If he ruined it, it wouldn’t be a huge deal, but he wanted to make sure Derek’s would be good.

When his came out, he checked it with a spoon before nodding in satisfaction and putting Derek’s in. He could see Derek staring uncertainly at Stiles’, like he was wondering if this was a joke, but he didn’t say anything.
“Do you have two more microwave-safe mugs? We can get dessert started now so that it’s not scalding by the time we eat it.”

Derek stared at him for a second, then seemed to give up and just moved to grab two more mugs. His pizza was done before they got started on the dessert, but Stiles figured they should let the pizzas cool anyway so he set both their pizza mugs aside and he and Derek got to work on their desserts.

This recipe online usually required a specific type of chocolate, but Stiles had never bought it and it still tasted good, so he just used the chocolate chips and helped Derek get a bunch of them in the middle of his batter so they could have nice lava cake after their pizza. It would never be as good as the real thing, but it was damn close.

Stiles helped Derek put everything away while the first cake was in the microwave, and then swapped it out for the second. Once both were done and cooling on the counter, he stuck a spoon into Derek’s pizza mug and grinned while picking up his own, heading for the couch. He fell down into the seat he’d previously occupied, Derek sitting beside him, and dug into his pizza.

It tasted exactly how he remembered it. Definitely not real pizza, but surprisingly close considering its composition and the fact that it’d been made in a microwave. Derek looked sceptical and wary, but he eventually took a bite and seemed pleasantly surprised.

“Good, right?” Stiles grinned. “And it took us, what, seven minutes?”

“How did you...?” Derek seemed stunned, like he was trying to figure out if Stiles had used some kind of magic.

Laughing, Stiles nudged him lightly with his foot. “Dude, YouTube. You can make so much in a mug, it’s insane. I used to live off this in university.” He took another bite of his mug meal. “That was before Super Natural Foods had made it big. Once it did, that is what I lived off of when money was tight.”

“Stiles, you literally made pizza and a fucking cake in a damn mug. How are you not more amazed?”

“I’m used to it, like I said.” Stiles shrugged. “The first time, it definitely blew my mind. I freaked out and FaceTimed with Whitty, and Scott, and my dad.” He laughed, shaking his head. “The novelty wore off after the fiftieth pizza in a mug. If Super Natural Foods didn’t exist the second time I ran into financial problems, I’d have been forced back to my mug meals way.”

“You had problems?” Derek asked, poking at his pizza absently. He’d inquired very softly, like he wasn’t sure he was allowed to ask, but Stiles didn’t mind talking about it.

He went through the past few years, giving Derek all the various ups and downs. Living in San Francisco was amazing, but it had its cons, mostly the price of literally everything. It wasn’t insane like New York, but it was still pretty up there. Derek also talked about his first few years in town, and how he and his gorgeous, stunning friend—Stiles wasn’t jealous, he wasn’t!—had been living together for a few years.

Sometimes, it was weird when Stiles remembered that Derek’s family hadn’t always had money. Whenever Derek spoke about his struggles in university, and his family trying to make ends meet, and all the sacrifices they’d had to make... it kind of hurt Stiles’ soul a little bit.

He and his dad hadn’t ever had a plethora of money, but they were comfortable. They got by. And
Jackson’s family had always, always been there to help during a pinch, because the Whittemores knew how important Stiles was to Jackson, and they also really liked him and his dad. They didn’t hand out money like they were a charity case, but during really bad times, they’d lent his dad some funds to help him get back on his feet, and once he was in a good place, he always immediately paid them back.

The Hales had never really had that. People in town liked them well enough, but they were still the only born-wolves family in the area. And Werewolves weren’t treated very kindly overall, even in Beacon Hills.

They moved on to less depressing topics while eating dessert, Derek even pulling out some coffee ice cream he had in the freezer so they could eat some with their cake. He turned on the TV for background noise while they chatted, but he made the mistake of having it set on the comedy channel. The second Brooklyn-Nine-Nine came on, Derek lost him.

Stiles loved that show, and when Derek admitted he’d never seen it, Stiles informed him they would be watching the episode before doing anything else. That episode had led into a second one, and Derek seemed into it so Stiles wasn’t going to complain. They sat beside each other on the couch, shoulders touching, while they watched the show.

Time passed, but Stiles literally had no idea what time it was. He was having a lot of fun with Derek, and he didn’t want to check the time and have to end the evening. It might not have gone exactly as Derek had intended, but Stiles had still had a lot of fun. And any time spent with Derek was good time in his book.

At some point, Stiles wasn’t sure when, he fell asleep while watching TV. His eyelids had been flagging for a while, but he’d figured he’d know when it was time to call it quits. Instead, he just passed out and woke with a start, head on Derek’s shoulder and cell phone vibrating violently in his pocket.

Well, not violently, but everything felt violent when it startled someone awake.

Stiles sat up, rubbing at his face with one hand as Derek grumbled something—he’d clearly also been asleep—and reached into his pocket for his phone. He frowned when he saw Jackson’s name flashing back at him, but understood when he realized what time it was.

Whoops.

“Hey Whitty,” he said once he’d answered.

“Don’t ‘hey Whitty’ me, jackass! Do you know what time it is?! Where the fuck are you? I thought you got eaten by sewer-dwellers!”

“Sorry,” Stiles said again, rubbing at his face once more and stifling a yawn. “I fell asleep. I’m safe, promise. I’m at Derek’s.”

There was a long silence on the other end. “Stiles, I swear to God, if you—”

“There was no hanky panky,” Stiles insisted, almost impatiently. He was an adult, dammit. And Jackson was being territorial. “We stayed at work until close to nine to finish something up, then we went back to his place to eat and fell asleep watching TV.”

“I’ll come pick you up, where are you?”

“You can stay,” Derek said, obviously overhearing the conversation. “I have two bathrooms so
we’re set for showering in the morning, and I’m sure I have a shirt or two that’ll fit.”

“You sure?” Stiles asked.

“Yeah, it’s three in the morning.” Derek stretched, rubbing the back of his head sleepily. “We have to be up in a few hours anyway. No point in you going all the way home when you can just crash here.”

“Thanks.” Stiles smiled, but he could hear Jackson’s heavy breathing down the line. “Stop being territorial, you have your own boyfriend, I’m not the spare.” Stiles rolled his eyes.

“You know that’s not why.”

“I know. I promise, no hanky panky. Just sleep. Sorry I worried you.”

“Wasn’t worried about you, was worried about having to pay the mortgage on my own.”

“Uh huh. Night Whitty.”

“You owe me for this!” Jackson snapped, then hung up.

Stiles chuckled and did the same, turning to Derek. He was smiling endearingly at him. His glasses were kind of askew, and he looked... happy. Really happy.

“Sorry. Didn’t mean to fall asleep.”

“I honestly don’t know who fell asleep first,” Derek said with a laugh. “We should probably move to a bed though. I haven’t had the chance to clean the sheets in the spare, so... if you’re okay, you can just sleep with me.”

Stiles grinned. “In what universe would I ever say no to that. Look at you, getting all bold.” Stiles shoved him lightly and Derek rolled his eyes, but he was obviously embarrassed. Still, he was doing well in coming out of his shell, and Stiles loved that.

“Come on, let’s see if I can find you some sweats for bed.” Derek turned off the television, then stood and moved towards his room. Stiles stretched and followed, hanging back by the walk-in closet while Derek dug through one of his dressers. He tossed a pair of sweats and a shirt at Stiles, and told him the other bathroom should have a sealed toothbrush under the sink. Apparently whenever he went to the dentist and got a new toothbrush, he just stored them there for whenever Laura or Boyd or Kira unexpectedly spent the night and needed to brush their teeth.

Stiles made quick work of getting ready for bed, brushing his teeth with a toothbrush Derek informed him was neon green, and then changing out into his borrowed pyjamas. He laid his folded clothes on his bag, and then went back to Derek’s room where the Werewolf was pulling the blankets back.

Turning off the light and shutting the bedroom door, Stiles leapt onto the bed, bouncing a few times, and laughed at the snort that earned him from Derek.

“You’re like a giant child.”

“I’m not like a giant child, I am a giant child.” He got under the covers, finding it surreal that he was in Derek Hale’s bed, but trying not to freak about it.

Rolling onto his side to get comfortable, he found Derek had done the same, the two of them facing
Before Stiles could say anything, Derek asked, “Hanky panky?”

Stiles laughed, groaning and burying his face in the pillow he was using briefly before sighing and facing Derek once more. “Whitty made me promise there wouldn’t be any hanky panky for a while. Just—you know. Making sure we’re both positive this is what we want. He’s worried that if we move too fast we’ll just get hurt again.”

“I think it’s you he’s worried about more than me.”

“Well, I’m worried about you, so I think moving slowly isn’t a bad thing.” He shrugged.

“Still. Hanky panky?”

“What’s wrong with hanky panky?” Stiles demanded, shoving lightly at Derek’s shoulder. “Would you rather we both be crude and talk about not letting you shove your giant monster cock into my asshole? Does that sound better to you?”

Derek snorted and shoved one hand into Stiles’ face. He very maturely licked a stripe up his palm, which led to Derek trying to wipe it off on Stiles’ cheek and then they were play-wrestling and making a mess of the bed.

Stiles ended up winning, though probably because Derek let him out of pity. He was straddling Derek’s waist by then, both fists thrust in the air as he cheered his own victory.

“You’re an idiot.”

“Still love me anyway,” Stiles teased.

“I do,” Derek admitted softly, reaching up with one hand to let his fingers ghost gently across Stiles’ cheek. “I really do.”

Stiles stared down at him for a few seconds, Derek’s fingers still on his cheek, and licked his lips. “You know, Whitty said no hanky panky, but—he didn’t say kissing was off the table.”

“Kissing might turn into making out, and then neither of us would get any sleep.”

“How about just a good night kiss, then?” Stiles asked, eyes locked on Derek’s lips. “Just one, promise.”

Derek laughed, but it sounded low, and fucking sexy as hell. “Just one,” he agreed.

Stiles bent down, feeling his heart trying to escape his chest. Every time he kissed Derek. It felt like he’d never get the chance to do it again. Prom, dinner, now. It always felt surreal, and he never wanted to think it might be the last time, but he always inevitably did.

Kissing Derek now was different from how it had been back in school. For one thing, beard. For another—Derek seemed more sure of himself. Like he knew what he wanted, and despite being scared of having it ripped away from him, he was going to take what he could get when he got it.

As promised, Stiles made sure not to go crazy with the kiss. He pressed his lips to Derek’s, one hand braced against the headboard and the other at Derek’s cheek, scratching lightly through his beard. Derek had one hand still against his face and the other was buried in his hair. The kiss was soft, and sweet, and almost lazy. None of the urgency from the last two times, but Stiles blamed
that on being tired.

When he broke away, Derek shifted the hand in his hair down to the back of his neck and tugged him down until Stiles was lying flush against Derek, like a second blanket. The hand at his neck stayed there, massaging gently, and the other started sliding up and down Stiles’ spine.

Stiles shifted a bit to get comfortable, cheek pressed against Derek’s shoulder and eyes shutting. This was nice. It felt peaceful. Right.

“Hey Derek?”

“Mm?” he asked, sounding half-asleep even as his hand continued the slow drag up and down his back.

“I love you too.”

He heard the smile in Derek’s voice when he said, “Go to sleep, Stiles.”

So he settled more comfortably and did as he was told.

“Why are you acting so weird?” Kira demanded, shoving at Derek. “Stop being weird, it’s making me feel weird.”

“Jackson and Derek are both being territorial right now,” Boyd explained easily, one hand between Erica’s shoulder blades and rubbing gently. “He’s worried he’s going to have to rip Stiles’ best friend’s throat out.”

“Ethan will keep his boytoy in line.” Erica insisted, waving one hand absently. “Besides, Laura looks like she’s going to steal Stiles the second he walks in, so Derek and this Jackson guy can both fight her instead.”

“I haven’t spoken to him in days! So much can happen in a few days! Like meetings, and late hours, and dinner dates, and sleepovers.”

Derek sighed, knowing he was never going to live that one down.

Laura had unexpectedly shown up on Thursday morning a little after five because she’d forgotten something at Derek’s. Why she couldn’t wait until after work to come pick it up, he had no idea, but she’d evidently smelled Stiles and had proceeded to burst into Derek’s room to ask what had happened, only to find Stiles still there. Lying on top of him. Drooling on his skin.

That had been a fun morning for Derek, but at least he found solace in knowing that Stiles hadn’t managed to escape Laura, either. She’d been late for work asking for all the details neither would give her, and had then proceeded to give Stiles The Talk while informing him if he broke her brother, she’d break his face.

It was mostly all in good fun since she and Stiles had already had a talk about this a while back, but Derek would’ve preferred the conversation to happen sometime other than around five in the damn morning. Work had been hell on Thursday, but at least he got to glance up at Stiles every now and then and saw him smiling to himself, so that had been nice.
And now, it was Friday, and Derek was about to meet Jackson again for the first thing in ten years—excluding the awkward encounter when he’d tried to break Derek’s car window—so it was going to be interesting.

“Oh, oh!” Laura was shoving annoyingly at Derek, eyes on something behind him. “Here they come. Wow, Whittemore looks just as attractive now as he did in high school, how’d he manage that?”

“Good genes,” Jackson’s voice said over the din, clearly having heard her.

Derek smiled when he heard Stiles asking what he meant about his jeans, thinking he was referring to his pants. It was kind of adorable, but Ethan kindly explained what Jackson meant as the three of them moved to the table.

The spot beside Derek had purposefully been left free so Stiles could take it, but Jackson was the one who immediately went to sit there. Ethan grabbed at his arm and yanked him around to the other side, nodding politely to the group at large while shoving Jackson down into a two-person spot between Erica and Kira. Ethan took the seat closest to Erica, leaving Jackson across from Derek, and Stiles across from Kira.

“You must be Stiles!” Kira thrust a hand out to him. “The amount of things I know about you could fill a library. I’m Kira.”

“Hi.” Stiles offered her a smile while shaking her hand and slowly sat, turning to Derek. “Hey.”

“Hi,” he replied with his own smile.

“Stop acting like you guys didn’t literally just see each other at work like, two hours ago,” Laura insisted, leaning forward to look past Derek at Stiles. “You’re ridiculous. Both of you are ridiculous.”

“Thank you Laura, you can leave any time now,” Derek informed her. She stuck her tongue out at him and turned to Jackson, making another loud exclamation about his looks.

To be fair, Jackson did look almost the same as he had in high school, except he’d filled out a lot more. He was definitely attractive, and had Derek not grown up well aware of his shitty personality, he’d probably have had a crush on him.

Stiles may have been a dick to him in high school, but he was nice to everyone else. Jackson was a dick to everyone whose name wasn’t Stiles.

“So. Stiles.” Kira clapped her hands together, and Derek was a bit nervous about the look in her eyes. “I hear you and Derek made out in high school, tell me about that.”

“Oh God.” Derek knew this was a terrible idea. “Can we not talk about that? We’re here to either catch up or get to know each other, can we leave high school in the past where it belongs?”

“Some of us wish that more than others,” Jackson said rather rudely, giving Derek a pointed look. “High school just fucking followed.”

“You,” Stiles said, pointing a finger at Jackson, “behave. We talked about this.”

“You talked, I didn’t listen.”

Stiles let out an annoyed sigh and flapped one hand insistently at Ethan, who’d been turned to
speak to Erica. He turned back to Stiles when the flapping got more violent.

“Control him.”

“You’re asking *me* to control him?” Ethan asked, eyebrows raised. “You’re the one who controls
him, I just pretend I did all the heavy lifting.”

Stiles sighed, but seemed determined to ignore Jackson’s shitty mood, turning back to Kira and
asking her what she did for a living. She enthusiastically started explaining her job to him, and
Stiles looked so excited that Derek was surprised he didn’t vibrate right off the chair.

Conversations were flowing pretty smoothly table-wide. Jackson was the only one who wasn’t
speaking to anyone, but he was leaning heavily into Ethan and listening when his boyfriend spoke,
keeping one eye on Stiles like he was ready to attack anyone who soured his friend’s mood.

Stiles seemed to be in heaven, because Kira was very kindly bringing him up to speed on Derek’s
entire life, including all the fun and embarrassing details of the past few years. Then they started
bemoaning Derek’s decision to shave a few months back when Stiles had first started, and Kira
very loudly informed Derek that Stiles was a keeper because he had taste.

Namely, Derek with a beard.

At some point Laura piped up, wanting to be part of the conversation, and she practically crushed
Derek in her attempt to be included in the discussion happening on that half of the table. When
they finally got around to ordering food, Derek got the nachos as was his staple, and once the
waitress was gone, Laura crushed him again to speak to Stiles.

“Stiles! Oh my God, I keep forgetting to tell you! Thank you for the opportunity to taste San
Francisco’s *best* Mexican food ever!”

“Oh, did you like the food Derek brought back?” Stiles asked excitedly.

“So good!” she said with a groan. “Oh my God, I must’ve made him go back there like, eight times
while I was living with him, it was delicious!”

“You took him to Cinco de Mayo?!” Jackson’s voice cut in, sounding furious.

Stiles turned to him calmly, like he was used to these sorts of outbursts. “Yeah, I did. You know
Mrs. Calavera doesn’t like Werewolves, and I wanted to thank him for the elevator incident.”
Stiles shrugged.

“How many times did you bring him?” Jackson asked, looking borderline betrayed.

“Just once.”

“Once?” he asked with a scoff. “Then how did he go back *alone*?!”

“She said he could.” Stiles shrugged, like it was no big deal, but Derek could tell that, to Jackson,
it was a big deal. He went rigid, and even Ethan glanced at him, as if ready to stop him from
leaping across the table to strangle Derek. “She liked him, so she said he could go back. Hey, have
you ever been?” Stiles asked Kira. “You’re not a Werewolf, you should be allowed in, right?”

“Mountain ash,” she explained with a shrug. “Might not be a Werewolf, but that doesn’t make a
difference to them. If I can’t cross the threshold, they won’t let me in. Besides, I’m not a big fan of
Mexican.”
Stiles let out an overly exaggerated gasp. “Heathen!”

Derek was still watching Jackson, who was silently fuming in his seat. In a way, he felt like he could understand. For their entire lives, Jackson and Stiles had always been together. Even now, with Ethan in the picture, Stiles was still there. If Jackson needed him, Stiles was within arm’s reach. He was probably starting to worry that he was losing him, and the thought was terrifying.

Jackson didn’t seem like the kind of person who could handle loss very well.

Their food came and they all ate and shared while passing the various plates down the table. Things were going surprisingly well. Derek had honestly been a little worried about Stiles and Kira, since historically there was some tension, but they seemed to be getting along really well. And of course, the second Stiles had hesitantly asked her about her love life and Kira had informed him she was asexual, things just fell into place immediately.

Stiles actually seemed really interested in it, and had asked her a lot of questions about it. Kira seemed really happy someone wanted to know more about it, and had gone into detail about her various boyfriends and few girlfriends before realizing she didn’t feel sexually attracted to anyone, and it was just overall an interesting conversation to watch unfold. Derek liked that Stiles was so interested in it, because it seemed to make Kira feel less weird about her orientation.

It was when they were on their third round of drinks that Stiles said something that made Jackson snap. Derek had no idea what it was, but Jackson shoved away from the table angrily and stormed to the bathroom. Ethan called after him, then sighed and shook his head. Stiles winced, but when he went to get up, Ethan motioned for him not to.

“Just leave him. Let him cool off.”

“He seems... stressed?” Kira offered, wincing slightly.

“Whitty and I have been a set for a long time.” Stiles shrugged. “He’s always been like this, but he never really had to compete much with anyone in the past. Mostly my other friend Scott, but they both just snarled at each other and got over it. I think he’s having a hard time realizing he’s going to have to share again, since he hasn’t had to for ten years.”


“Huge pain,” Stiles agreed with a grin.

“Yeah, yeah, you’re both hilarious. Fuck you.” Derek shoved lightly at Stiles, glancing over towards the bathroom, then figured maybe he and Jackson should have a talk. “I’ll be right back.”

“Sure thing.” Stiles shifted his chair forward a bit so Derek could ease out of his seat behind him.

He made sure no one was paying attention to his trajectory, and then headed for the bathroom. When he entered it, nobody else was present except Jackson, who was at the sink washing his hands. He sneered at Derek in the mirror when he saw him enter.

Sighing, and really not looking forward to this conversation, Derek waited for the door to close fully behind him before speaking. “Are we going to be acting like this forever?” Derek demanded, crossing his arms and scowling at Jackson in the mirror. “Because I’d much prefer we got along, for Stiles’ sake.”

Jackson let out a scoff, drying his hands with some paper towel and tossing it angrily into the trash before rounding on him. “Listen Hale. Surprisingly, I actually like you. You’re a good guy, and I
appreciate that despite everything that happened, you’re willing to give Stiles a chance. But you have to remember he is my pack. My brother. I had him first. And I was the one who had to pick up the pieces after graduation. I was the one who had to listen to him bemoan his entire existence because you weren’t in his life anymore. I was the one he almost had a breakdown with when he was hired by your company as your assistant. Right now, you are the most threatening person in the world to me, and I’m not going to stop trying to protect him just because you’re a ‘nice guy,’” he sneered.

Derek stared at him for a long moment. He knew this was a bad idea. A gamble, even. He knew that he shouldn’t talk about this, especially not with Jackson. Especially not with anyone but Stiles first. Because Stiles was the first person who deserved to know this, and telling Jackson seemed like cheating.

But he couldn’t fight Jackson every step of the way, or they’d never move forward. He understood Jackson’s stance, he really did. Jackson was to Stiles what Laura was to Derek. The difference was that Laura was his sister, and she’d had a lot of time around Stiles to trust him with her brother. And she was a generally more trusting person.

Jackson wasn’t. He was going to call, and text, and show up as many times as he had to in order to ensure Stiles wasn’t being made fun of, or treated unkindly as some kind of punishment for high school. Like payback.

So he had to tell him something, or this would be an uphill battle, and Derek had lost enough time with Stiles.

“I think he’s my mate.”

Jackson’s entire body twitched at the words, and Derek saw claws extend and retract in the blink of an eye. He tilted his head slightly, let out a small, mirthless laugh, and said, “What?”

“Stiles. I think he’s my mate. I’ve always... he’s been someone I’ve wanted for a long time. I’ve always been interested in him, always thought about him, and even when we went our separate ways, no one ever felt right. I’ve never wanted anyone else. But now he’s back, he’s here, and for the first time in a long time, I actually want.” The word came out as a growl, rising up from somewhere deep in his chest. Jackson’s eyes flashed at him, as if he felt threatened. As if he was worried Derek was about to go after his friend because he wanted him so badly.

“I’m not going to steal him from you, Jackson. I know how important you are to him, and I can imagine how important he is to you. I know you don’t like it, because he’s always been there, but you have your mate. If Stiles truly is my mate, then let me have mine.”

They were both silent for a long while, the sound of music from beyond the door the only noise around them. He could tell Jackson was weighing the pros and cons of this. On the one hand, Stiles was his everything, but on the other, he knew better than anyone what being denied their mate felt like. Derek didn’t know if Ethan had ever been out of reach, but he felt like Jackson should understand that it was hard being apart.

Derek wasn’t going to whisk Stiles away and never let them speak ever again, but he needed Jackson to stop cutting him off at the knees because he didn’t like change. Nobody liked change, but it was inevitable. And really, this wasn’t Jackson’s decision. Clearly the universe had other plans for Derek and Stiles, and it would only make things worse for Jackson if he got in the way.

Eventually, he clenched his jaw and moved up to Derek, glaring up at him. It felt weird for Derek
to realize he was now taller than Jackson. Not by much, but still.

“If you hurt him again, I’ll set that pretty car of yours on fire.”

“I won’t.”

“Good.” Jackson shouldered past him and hit Derek with the door when he swung it open.

Derek didn’t bother retaliating, it would only make things worse. Jackson was like this, he always had been, he always would be. And Stiles was his weak spot, everyone knew it.

Letting out a small sigh, Derek figured he may as well use the bathroom while he was there, and then washed his hands and headed back for the table. Stiles was speaking animatedly with Kira, all flailing limbs and loud sound effects. Jackson had taken his seat once more, arm around Ethan’s shoulders and face turned towards the other end of the table, where Boyd was talking about his work.

Jackson didn’t turn when Derek sat back down, which he considered a win. Stiles was still flailing his hands animatedly, but when he dropped his closest one onto his thigh, Derek reached under the table and took it. Stiles didn’t turn to him, still speaking to Kira, but he twisted their hands around so he could thread their fingers together, and Derek smiled.

Slowly but surely.

They’d get there eventually.

TBC...

Chapter End Notes

If anyone is interested, BiggerBolderBaking is a real YouTube channel and has tons of mug meals :) It can be found here.
Stiles couldn’t complain about how things were slowly beginning to play out. Honestly, his main concern was and always had been Jackson, especially considering his territorial nature. Somehow though, while it was clear he didn’t like it, he’d slowly started to back off. If Derek scented him while they were at work together, Jackson didn’t jump on him immediately when he got home.

He still scented him back, because he was Jackson, but he didn’t do it instantly and as aggressively as normal. It was a bit subtler now, like he was refraining from doing it as much as possible but couldn’t quite help himself. It seemed to be making Derek happy, at any rate.

And things with Derek were good. Really good. Working for him was amazing. Hanging out with him was amazing. Having dinner with him was amazing. Sleeping over was amazing.

Not that he did the last one nearly as often as he’d like, and literally every single time to date had been an accident. The first night was exhaustion, the second had been over-imbibing when he’d gone out with Kira and Derek the Friday after having first met her, another time was when he’d stayed late at work to help Derek and his team with something and had gone back to Derek’s for dinner and had kind of never left... Just, accidents.

Which was why he blinked owlishly up at Derek, mouth hanging open, when the man approached him after work on Tuesday and asked if he’d like to spend the night the following evening.

“I figured maybe you could bring your own things, for a change,” Derek had said in way of explanation, shrugging one shoulder. “I doubt Jackson or Ethan want me in their space, and I live alone, so I thought maybe you could come spend the night. On purpose.”

Cue Stiles’ brain short-circuiting, but he’d tripped over himself to agree, nodding emphatically and almost hitting himself in the face with his phone in his haste to answer it when it rang moments after the question had been asked.

And that was how Stiles found himself sitting in Derek’s car after work on Wednesday with an overnight bag by his feet, and a colourful threat from Jackson to come home the following day or he’d hunt him down. He also noticed Ethan had shoved some lube into his overnight, which meant at least he wanted Stiles to get laid.

It was awkward that Jackson was hoping he wouldn’t and Ethan was practically begging for it. Probably because he was tired of Stiles jerking off in the shower all the time which, okay, fair. Stiles didn’t have a Werewolf nose, he didn’t smell it for days after like his roommates did.

Not that Ethan should be using his shower, but maybe the smell spread? Stiles didn’t know, and it wasn’t something he needed to know. Some things were better left unknown.

When they got to Derek’s building, the car stopped by the entrance and Stiles climbed out. This was a routine they’d figured out after Stiles’ first visit because Derek knew how uncomfortable he still got with elevators. So Derek always dropped him off at the door, parked in the garage, then came up the elevator to let Stiles in before they both took the stairs to Derek’s floor.

It was one of those oddly considerate things Derek always did for him. Acknowledging that Stiles didn’t like elevators, and while he could just meet him on whatever floor, he always took the stairs with him.
Stiles joked sometimes that it was because Derek liked looking at his ass, but he knew it wasn’t that. It was legitimately Derek just being a really nice guy who didn’t want Stiles to feel weird or embarrassed by needing to take the stairs all the time.

When they got to Derek’s apartment, Stiles hovered by the entrance for a few seconds after they walked in before moving to Derek’s room with his overnight bag. It felt so fucking weird to be having a sleepover. He felt like he was five or something, which was ridiculous because people in relationships slept over all the time and it wasn’t a ‘sleepover.’

He supposed the reason this felt so weird was because he and Derek had never really... spoken about what they were. They were definitely more than friends, and while Stiles liked to think they were together, he honestly wasn’t sure. It seemed weird to ask though.

Was it weird to ask?

It was probably weird to ask.

Setting his bag down on the floor near his side of the bed—not like, his side, just the side he slept on whenever he was over those few times—he moved back out into the main area to see what the plans for the evening were.

Derek was rooting through the fridge, which looked to actually be fairly well stocked, for once. Like as soon as Stiles had confirmed he was coming over tonight, Derek had immediately gone grocery shopping after work to prove that he actually knew how to take care of himself.

Stiles didn’t buy it, he knew Derek better than pretty much everyone but his family—and probably Kira and Boyd—and he knew for a fact that when Derek wasn’t expecting him over, his fridge was frighteningly empty.

He’d literally never met a Werewolf who was so bad at eating. How did Derek not just drop dead on the regular? Well, right now, because of Stiles, but like, before Stiles?!

“Hey Derek?”

That earned him a grunt in response, since Derek was evidently focussing on the many ingredients he was pulling out of the fridge. Stiles was waiting for him to drop something, at this point.

“Do you need help?” he asked instead of what he was going to say.

“No,” Derek said, but Stiles just moved around the counter anyway and grabbed two items out of Derek’s overladen arms. He set them on the island behind them and proceeded to empty Derek’s arms as he continued to pull things out of the fridge.

He noticed there was already a pie in there, and was actually impressed it seemed to be homemade. Then he realized Derek had actually legitimately cooked for him. Like, he’d gone out the day before, had bought groceries, come home, baked a fucking pie, and had obviously mentally prepared for the entire dinner tonight.

It was nice. And sweet. And Stiles was kind of a little bit more in love with him with each passing second.

“This is a lot of ingredients,” Stiles insisted as Derek finally closed the fridge. “What are we making?”

“You’re not making anything.”
“I am most assuredly making something,” Stiles insisted, giving him a look. “I am an excellent chopper, I’ll have you know. And if you think you can get me out of this kitchen, you are mistaken.”

“Could always carry you out,” Derek teased, lips quirking at the corners.

“I’d just come back and we’d starve from your attempts to keep me out. Besides, I’m a biter. I’d bite you. Try picking me up and I’ll bite you in the face.”

Derek snorted at that, but didn’t seem willing to argue it any further. It was like he recognized that Stiles was going to help him regardless, and it wasn’t like it would be a hardship having him around. He wouldn’t have invited him otherwise.

“So,” Stiles said, clapping his hands together and looking at everything laid out in front of them, “what are we doing? What’s being made?”

“Sheet pan shrimp boil,” Derek said, as if that explained everything.

To be fair, Stiles had walked into that one. But he just asked what he could do while washing his hands and Derek pulled out a cutting board and set him to work cutting up three andouille sausages. He did as he was told, slicing them up into thick coins, and then cubing them, as per Derek’s instructions. The man himself was getting to work boiling two pots of water on the stove directly behind Stiles.

Once he’d gotten that going, he moved to stand beside Stiles at the sink, removing the husk from some fresh corn that was going into one of the pots once it was ready. Stiles still had no idea what they were making, but he didn’t mind. It was actually really nice to be standing beside Derek like this, both of them working on their respective tasks.

Weirdly domestic too, but only weird because of how comfortable it was.

Derek tossed a few pounds of baby potatoes into one of the boiling pots of water, but he wasn’t finished with the corn by then so he kept an eye on the potatoes while continuing to get the corn ready.

Once he was done with that, he tossed those into the water and asked if Stiles wanted a drink. Apparently Derek had bought wine, but Stiles wasn’t a big wine drinker so Derek just handed him a beer and poured himself a glass of aconite-laced wine, the two of them drinking from their respective drinks as they worked.

By then, the potatoes were tender and Derek drained them in a colander in the sink and motioned for Stiles to start cubing those up while he grabbed the sweet potatoes.

“Can I ask you something?” Stiles said, slowly and carefully cutting the warm baby potatoes. He’d let some cold water run over them for a few seconds just so they didn’t burn him when he picked them up.

“Could I even stop you?” Derek teased, having grabbed a second cutting board so he could stand on Stiles’ other side to work on his own sweet potatoes. Stiles was glad Derek was working on those, sweet potato was a bitch to cut when raw.

“How did you even survive all this time with how horrible your food intake is?” Stiles asked, almost cutting into his finger before yanking it back at the last second. He saw Derek’s head turn sharply, as if he’d noticed, but he didn’t take the knife away so that was a win.
Stiles just tossed the potatoes into a large ziploc bag Derek had set out on the counter, the andouille already divided between three of them. Stiles was trying to make sure he kept track of how many potatoes he put into each, since he wasn’t sure if they had to be equally divided.

“Laura asks me the same thing,” Derek admitted, finishing up with one of the sweet potatoes and tossing the entirety of it into one of the ziplocs. Stiles figured he would put one sweet potato per bag since he had three of them. “When I started working for her, she generally tried to keep an eye on me. And in school. I guess I just always snacked on things and my mind was so occupied with other things in general that it never occurred to me I was ever hungry.”

“But you would be hungry, right?”

“Absolutely,” Derek agreed, slicing through the second sweet potato with ease, the jerk. He paused after having cut it in half and set the knife down, turning to check on the corn, and then turning the oven on so it could preheat. He came back to Stiles’ side and resumed cutting what was in front of him.

“How come you don’t listen when your body begs you for food?”

“Distracted, mostly.” Derek shrugged one shoulder. “I’ll be doing something, or reading something, and I’ll think ‘after this, I’ll eat something’ but then I just—don’t. Something else comes up, or the book I’m reading just sucks me in, and before I know it hours have passed and I’m starving.”

Stiles nodded in agreement, having finished with the last of the baby potatoes and eying the last sweet potato warily. He was definitely going to cut himself if he tried to dice that.

“You were like that in high school, too. You barely ever made it through your lunch, because the books always distracted you. You really need to take better care of yourself.”

“Good thing I’ve got you then,” Derek said softly, not looking at him, but Stiles smiled and nudged him lightly.

“Yeah, lucky you.” He looked around. “Anything else?”

“If the corn’s ready, you can cut it off the cob,” Derek said. “Otherwise, the shrimp need to be deveined.”

Stiles made a face, because raw shrimp grossed him out, so he opted for the corn. It seemed cooked enough, so he turned off the burner and used tongs to grab them all out of the pot, placing them on his cutting board. He used those to hold them upright while he cut the niblets off.

Derek ended up deveining the shrimp beside him once he was done with the sweet potato.

The rest of the meal was easy. Garlic had to be minced, and tossed into some softened butter and herb mixture, and once everything was cut and divided into the three ziploc bags, Derek split the butter/garlic/herb mixture between the three, sealed the bags, and then grabbed one to shake it up. Stiles arched an eyebrow, but followed suit, the two of them coating everything inside with the mixture.

Derek did the third bag and once everything was done, he grabbed two sheet pans, laid out the entirety of the three bags between the two of them, and popped them into the oven.

“This is the weirdest thing I’ve ever seen, but your sister owns Super Natural Foods so I’ll believe in you.”
Derek rolled his eyes but didn’t comment, instead picking up his glass of wine and moving to the living room. Stiles followed suit with his beer and saw Derek setting a timer on his phone before he put it back into his pocket.

It occurred to Stiles that Derek was still wearing his work clothes. Sure, he was too, but his attire was far less formal. He just wore nice slacks and a button-down to work. Derek always had a full on suit, complete with tie, sometimes with a vest. He always looked so well put together, and somehow the glasses and beard just made him look *extra* sexy.

He’d been cooking wearing the suit, minus the jacket. His tie was behind the vest so it didn’t hang over the food, but Stiles was surprised he hadn’t changed.

“Aren’t you uncomfortable?” he asked before he could stop himself.

Derek had been sipping at his wine, and he arched an eyebrow at Stiles while pulling the glass from his lips. Stiles may or may not have stared at his lips for entirely too long.

It was may. He may have. And by may, he definitely had.

“Why would I be uncomfortable?” Derek asked, sounding confused.

Stiles realized he hadn’t made it clear what he was referring to and he motioned Derek’s attire.

“You’re still wearing your work clothes. Don’t get me wrong, you look *fantastic* and all, but isn’t it uncomfortable wearing a suit all the time?”

He was pretty sure Derek was never going to stop wearing suits after that comment, but he smiled and looked down at his outfit. Stiles wondered what colour it was, since it just looked like a solid grey to him. He wondered what colour Derek looked good in.

“I’m used to them, I guess. It was weird when I first started wearing them, but I don’t mind them as much anymore. I hate ties.” He reached up for the one he was wearing. “But I guess I was distracted enough not to notice I was still wearing it.”

“Distracted by food for once, instead of the other way around.” Stiles nudged him with the arm holding his beer, then took a large swallow.

“I don’t think it was the food,” Derek said softly, and Stiles almost choked. He managed to refrain, pulling the beer away and wiping at his chin to make sure he hadn’t spat anything out.

Clearing his throat, he set his beer down on the coffee table, and when he turned to move the conversation along to another less dangerous topic, he found Derek *right there*. He wasn’t holding his wine anymore, looked like he’d set it down on a small table on the end of the couch, and Stiles knew he could hear his heart beginning to increase in speed.

How had Derek managed to go through high school without realizing Stiles was head over heels for him? Didn’t he smell like teenager hormones and have heart palpitations every time Derek was anywhere near him?

Then again, maybe that was *why* Derek had never noticed. If Stiles always smelled and sounded the same when he was around, maybe Derek just thought that was what he was always like. People didn’t recognize change in others if they never saw them any differently.

When Derek reached out one hand to lightly touch his face, it took a conscious effort not to just throw himself at him. He let Derek’s fingers slide softly along his cheek, the Werewolf staring at his lips. Stiles licked them unconsciously and saw Derek’s pupils dilate, the irises getting just a tad
lighter, suggesting his eyes had flashed.

Stiles reached up with one hand of his own, nails dragging through Derek’s beard. He fucking loved his beard, he was never going to let him shave again. Maybe he should find and destroy all the razors he had, just to be extra safe.

After a few seconds of scratching idly at his beard, Stiles reached up for his glasses, slowly sliding them off. Derek allowed it and Stiles turned his head to put them down on the coffee table beside his beer, Derek’s hand still against his cheek, pressure a bit firmer now.

When he turned back to Derek, he smirked at the fact that his eyes were still on Stiles’ lips and purposefully licked them this time.

Derek twitched at that, but still didn’t move closer. The air felt charged between them, and Stiles honestly wondered how long they’d be able to hold out, because it wasn’t like he was doing much better himself. He wanted to touch and lick and suck and kiss and just... devour.

He wanted to devour Derek. And he wanted Derek to devour him in return.

It was weird when he thought about things like this. Stiles had been with a few people, intimate and all that, but it never felt like this. Derek was the only one who ever honestly made him feel like he was drowning, like he couldn’t breathe, like he’d do anything to just touch him.

When Derek’s lips parted, something he seemed to have done unconsciously, Stiles was disappointed that he was the first to break, but to be fair, he usually was. Derek seemed to have far more self-control than him.

Stiles practically head-butted Derek, he closed the distance so fast. He felt kind of bad about it, but it wasn’t like Derek was complaining, considering the second their mouths met he proceeded to try and suck Stiles’ soul right out of his body. Stiles had no idea how Derek managed to do that every time they kissed, but he was talented, apparently.

They weren’t in the car this time, there was a lot more room, so when Stiles pushed further into Derek and the Werewolf didn’t budge, he just shifted around while still kissing him and threw one leg over Derek’s hips, straddling his lap.

He felt pretty good about himself when he seemed to have short-circuited Derek’s brain at that, burying both hands in the other man’s perfect hair and sliding his tongue into Derek’s mouth. God, this felt so much more intense than that desperate make-out in the bathroom all those years ago. Probably because this time around they both knew what the other person wanted, they both knew that this was a reciprocated attraction.

Stiles felt like it was more than that, though. Sure, he’d always found Derek attractive, but it wasn’t his looks he loved, it was his fucking brain! He was so smart, and kind, and soft, and had the best personality and Stiles just...

Really, really loved him.

So much.

Derek seemed to finally have rebooted his brain, because his hands found Stiles’ ass and then slid up, tugging the back of his shirt out of his slacks so he could slide smooth, warm hands up along his bare back. Stiles groaned into the kiss unintentionally at the feel of Derek’s hands against his skin, rocking his hips forward. He was definitely at half-mast right now, and heading towards full. Derek seemed a little further along, but to be fair, Stiles had short-circuited his brain, so that was to
be expected.

When Derek started rolling his hips upwards, Stiles had to break their kiss so he could get some air, breathing hard against Derek’s lips, eyes sliding shut and groan forcing its way up his throat. Derek just kissed at the corner of his mouth, then along his jaw, then down to his neck. He mouthed at Stiles’ erratic pulse, biting and sucking, blunt human nails dragging down Stiles’ back.

Stiles’ hands tugged at Derek’s hair, head tilting back to allow him more access. He let his hands slide down, then fumbled for Derek’s tie, wrenching it off and tossing it aside. He wanted to touch and he was actually allowed to, and if Derek could touch his skin, then Stiles could damn well do the same.

He started undoing the buttons of his vest, cursing and arching his back when Derek bit down a bit harder at his pulse.

“Fuck,” he groaned, with feeling, and shifted to line up their clothed cocks and bit better. That earned him a low growl from Derek, and the teeth in his neck got just a little sharper.

Evidently Derek himself noticed because he quickly released the skin between his teeth and started sucking instead. Guy really wanted a blood sample, not that Stiles was complaining.

He finally got Derek’s vest and button-down undone, and a grunt of frustration left him when he found a fucking undershirt. Jesus, he wanted skin, was that too much to ask?!!

Hastily yanking up at the offending article, Stiles finally got his hands on some quality Derek skin, sliding his palms along his defined abs and up his chest before dragging his nails back down. One of them caught on Derek’s left nipple and another low growl escaped the Werewolf.

Derek’s mouth left his neck to capture Stiles’ lips again, kissing him hard. Almost possessively. Stiles did not mind one bit.

His shirt was almost being pulled right off, since one of Derek’s hands had dragged up his back so high he was gripping the back of Stiles’ neck, claws having come out and pressing against his skin. Stiles didn’t even have the energy to care, Derek could literally claw his entire throat out and he’d just die happy right now.

One of Stiles’ hands returned to Derek’s hair, burying in the strands while he used his other hand on his chest to try and get a better position to rock his hips. Fuck, he felt like he was about to lose his God damn mind, and he could tell Derek was close, because he’d wolfed out, and he was rutting up into Stiles desperately, and the hand not at Stiles’ neck and moved down to slide beneath the waistband of his pants and underwear, and fuck this was all Stiles had ever wanted in his entire fucking life!

Fuck, he wanted him. He wanted him so bad. He wanted him, he wanted him, he—

Stiles felt like his head practically hit the ceiling, he jumped so hard at the shrill alarm that interrupted their very enjoyable activities. Derek tensed and dug his claws a bit harder into Stiles’ skin, and it took both of them a few seconds to realize that it was his timer.

That meant dinner was ready.

In a way, Stiles almost didn’t want to care. He wanted to stay on the couch, keep rocking into Derek, kiss him until he literally passed out from lack of air. He wanted to touch and lick and suck on every fucking inch of the man beneath him, wanted to memorize every single thing about him, and the way he moved, and the sounds he made.
But Derek’s health meant more to Stiles than anything else, and he knew that Derek hadn’t eaten anything since lunch at noon—because Stiles was the one who’d gone out to get his food, as always—and it was now almost eight, and much as he was enjoying this, he liked Derek better alive and healthy.

So reluctantly, knowing he was going to really have a problem in his pants for a good long while, he kissed Derek lightly once more and then climbed off him. For a second, Derek’s grip on him tightened, like he wasn’t going to let him go, but he eventually released him. Stiles could tell he was annoyed, like he wished he could just throw his phone out the window. He did at least pull it out to turn the alarm off, shoving it almost aggressively back into his pocket.

Stiles took the opportunity to pull his shirt out of his pants the rest of the way. He didn’t feel like tucking it back in so he just pulled it out. Sadly, that meant when Derek stood up, he did the buttons of his shirt back up, though he shrugged out of the vest and set it down on the arm rest, presumably to be dealt with later.

Rearranging himself as subtly as possible, though he knew Derek had noticed, he turned to head back for the kitchen. Derek had wolfed out during their making out, so he wanted to give him a few seconds to get himself back under control.

Bending down in front of the oven, and wincing when it made his pants tighten around his dick, he turned on the oven light to look in at the sheet pans. He didn’t know if they were done, but figured Derek wouldn’t have set the timer otherwise.

He could hear Derek still getting himself organized behind him, and honestly wondered if maybe they shouldn’t have just... finished their activities. It wasn’t that he didn’t want to—God knew he did—but he cared more about Derek being fed than about getting off.

Derek seemed to be taking a long time behind him so he cleared his throat and stood. “Do—should I turn the oven off?”

“No,” Derek said, voice wrecked, and that was doing nothing for Stiles’ dick right now. “We need it to reheat the pie.”

“Right. Should—I can take the food out.”

“Sure.” A pause. “I’ll be right back.”

“Okay.”

Stiles didn’t turn when Derek walked to his room and shut the door. He just found the oven mitts and then pulled the two trays out. It smelled fucking delicious, and he pulled a fork out to stab into one of the shrimp, blowing on it before popping it into his mouth.

So good. So fucking good.

He did everything he could to ignore the fact that he knew Derek was jerking off in his room. He literally tried to ignore it, busying himself with finding plates, and setting up two spots at the counter for them to eat, and refilling Derek’s wine, and finishing his beer so he could grab another.

Literally everything!

He failed, and ended up going to the other bathroom to rub one off, bracing one hand against the wall and closing his eyes so he could picture Derek the entire time.
When he exited the bathroom, Derek was in the process of putting the pie in the oven. They both knew. Neither of them were idiots, and Derek was a Werewolf, so he could smell it.

They both definitely knew.

Neither of them said anything, and they just enjoyed their dinner like two normal adults who weren’t fucking head over heels for each other.

At this point, Stiles felt like he was just punishing himself.

“Do you think they know?” Stiles asked, walking beside Derek while they headed slowly down the street.

“Know what?” Derek asked absently, looking at all the stores they were passing.

They’d just finished work, and were meant to be meeting up with Jackson and Ethan for dinner, but they still had a long way to go before then. Stiles was the one who’d organized dinner, because he was adamant that Derek and Jackson would get along. Derek was willing to tolerate time around the guy, he knew how much he meant to Stiles.

Besides, he was hoping for a bit less animosity, now that he and Stiles were actually dating. That had been a bit of an awkward conversation, because Derek felt it was clear he wanted to be dating, but Stiles hadn’t said anything for a long time, so even though they did a lot of coupley stuff, he didn’t actually know where they stood. It wasn’t until Kira had bluntly commented on something the previous Friday when they’d gone for drinks together that Stiles hesitantly asked later that night when they were back at Derek’s whether or not they were dating.

It was weird having Stiles be hesitant, but Derek honestly thought that sometimes, he was dreaming. He figured Stiles had to be feeling the same way. It was a strange thing to consider, Stiles thinking Derek didn’t want to be with him, but he supposed they both had their own insecurities from high school.

“The others,” Stiles said, stopping to look at someone make a crepe through a window. It looked pretty good, Derek would admit, but he knew if he let Stiles eat now, he wouldn’t be hungry for dinner. He was human, his stomach didn’t need constant feeding.

“Who exactly are you referring to?” he asked while they both watched the crepe get flipped, filled with chocolate, banana and whipped cream, and then folded over.

Stiles let out an almost explosive sigh, clearly being dramatic, before saying, “Do you think people at work know that we’re dating?”

Derek turned to give Stiles an incredulous look, then looked down at their intertwined fingers, then back up at Stiles. They’d literally left the office holding hands at three sharp, because it was a nice day out and Stiles didn’t have the luxury of being near a window, so he’d wanted some sunshine before dinner.

“Pretty sure the only people who don’t know are the ones who never see us together,” Derek informed him. “Our floor definitely knows.”

“Better not be spreading bad rumours about you,” Stiles muttered, scowling at the crepe-maker like he was whispering bad things about Derek under his breath, even though the guy didn’t even seem to notice he had an audience, working on making another crepe.
“Even if they did, I don’t care as much anymore,” Derek insisted, tugging at Stiles’ hand so they could keep walking. If they stuck around the crepe too long, he’d want one, and then have no room for dinner, so it was best to pull him away from temptation.

“I care,” Stiles insisted heatedly.

“I know you do, and I love you for it.” Derek leaned over to kiss his temple. Stiles was still pouting a bit though, like the idea of anyone saying anything bad about Derek ever was unacceptable.

Honestly, he sometimes wondered if that was why he never got bullied in school. Sure, Stiles used to be a dick to him, but always with a purpose—not that it excused it, but at least Derek understood it. But he had to wonder if maybe no one else from the popular crowd came at him because they all knew that Stiles loved him. If someone was mean to him, maybe Stiles or even Jackson would bear down on them and snarl at them to leave him alone.

He and Boyd had survived high school as a nerd and a quiet loner, and he really wondered how much of that was because of Stiles.

“Stiles?”

“Mm?” he asked, looking into another shop window. Derek felt like Stiles was hungry, or at least wanted something sweet, because it was a candy store. He figured when they hit the bakery up the road, maybe they’d go in and get a scone or a muffin or something.

“What was university like?”

Stiles turned to him then, looking confused. “What?”

Derek shrugged. “We haven’t really talked much about our time at university. I was just wondering what yours was like. Did you go out a lot? Parties and stuff? Did you make lots of friends?”

The confusion on Stiles’ face turned to something softer, and he beamed before beginning to regale Derek with tales of his time at university, including one particularly memorable event where he and his roommate had been forced to run back across campus naked because they’d gone skinny dipping with a bunch of girls who’d stolen their clothes.

Derek smiled while he listened, the two of them walking leisurely down the street, holding hands like the idiots in love that they were. He liked listening to Stiles talk about their time apart, he literally sounded like he was still the most amazing person ever. He pulled people in, made them notice him, probably made them love him, not that he’d notice.

Considering, Derek was proof Stiles didn’t notice when people were in love with him. He probably had at least ten people at the office sobbing that he was with Derek, and probably trying to find ways to sabotage their relationship.

Honestly, Derek thought about that a lot. About the people who didn’t want Stiles to be with him, because they wanted him. How some of the wolves at work probably thought that Derek didn’t deserve him, and that they hoped he’d find his mate so that he’d dump him and they could have him.

Thinking about mates just made him remember what his mother had told him. About how maybe the reason both he and Stiles hadn’t moved on from each other despite their time apart was because they were mates. Well, soulmates, in Stiles’ case. Still mates, just a different kind than the wolf kind.
Derek realized he’d kind of lost track of what Stiles was saying, because he was still thinking about it. About them being mates. He wondered what Stiles would think if he told him about it. About what he thought. What his mother had said.

They may not have been together for long, literally just a week officially, but they’d been... kind of together for a while. And they’d loved one another for far longer. Would it be too soon? He didn’t want to scare him off, didn’t want to put pressure on him.

Stiles wasn’t a Werewolf, so he probably wouldn’t take it the same way as a wolf would. Wolves expected to have mates, to be together, to find their perfect fit. He knew it was something most Werewolves thought about a lot, because not everyone found their mate. He wondered how many out there had human mates, how long it had taken them to realize they’d found their mate simply because their partner wasn’t a Werewolf.

His mother herself had always thought she’d never find hers, and lo and behold she’d been keeping him at arm’s length for a long time. Derek had never once thought Stiles was his mate, and had kept wishing he’d find his so that he could stop obsessing over him.

Even now, he still worried that maybe Stiles wasn’t it. He felt like the anxiety of it was more surrounding how much he didn’t want to hurt him. If Derek’s mate popped up one day and he and Stiles were still together, he would feel terrible if he had to break it off with Stiles. He knew people broke up all the time, but Stiles was just... Stiles. He deserved good things, and to be happy and loved.

“Are you okay?”

Derek turned to Stiles, realizing he’d tuned out without meaning to. Stiles didn’t look offended or upset, more concerned. Derek didn’t understand until Stiles reached up to rub at his forehead, obviously having been frowning. Before Stiles could pull his hand away, Derek took it with his free one and kissed his fingertips.

“I love you.”

Stiles beamed and leaned forward to kiss him lightly. “Love you,” he agreed.

Derek smiled and dropped his one hand, still holding the other tightly while they neared the bakery. He was going to buy Stiles something sweet, just to tide him over until dinner since he clearly had sweet food on the brain.

Even if Stiles didn’t end up being his mate, Derek would be happy with him. He just hoped that if he wasn’t, neither of their respective other halves found them.

He was pretty sure Stiles wouldn’t want to hurt him, either.

“You fucking stink,” Jackson grumbled.

“You don’t stink,” Ethan promised.

“Shut up, yes he does.”

“He smells like Derek. There’s a difference between stinking and smelling like someone who isn’t you.”

Stiles grinned at Ethan, who looked just as amused at Jackson’s disgruntled expression. Really,
Stiles was lucky that Ethan found this funny as opposed to upsetting, though he knew it was because Ethan wasn’t the jealous type. Besides, Stiles could tell Derek’s scent all over him was also bothering the Alpha, because he kept catching Ethan halting from touching him sometimes.

He knew it was for Derek’s benefit. Ethan was an Alpha, after all. When he scented Stiles, it had more weight to it. Ethan still did sometimes, purely out of habit, or just by accident, but it was obvious he was trying really hard not to.

“Don’t be jealous, Whitty.” Stiles threw one arm around his friend’s shoulders while they walked, enjoying the cool night air. “I promise to invite you to the wedding.”

“I better not be, because if I’m not the guy standing next to you when Derek decides he wants to be stuck with you for the rest of his life, you’re not making it to the wedding.”

Stiles snorted, but it was true. Jackson would definitely be his Best Man. He knew Scott might be sad about it, but while they were close and always had been, he and Jackson were just... more. Brothers. They’d been together forever, and he didn’t see Scott nearly as often.

Besides, he fucking owned an apartment with Jackson, so really, he was sure Scott wouldn’t be surprised.

Not that he should be thinking about weddings. He and Derek were definitely more than far enough away from that. Sure, they were doing well, but getting married was something that came further down the line, not something they should be doing just because they’d reconnected and were now dating.

It was weird how fast Stiles wanted to move along with Derek, though. Things seemed almost to be in fast-forward with them. He spent more time at Derek’s than at home now, and more than once he could tell Derek was refraining from offering him a key.

And a drawer.

Though the drawer had already happened, but it was clear Derek had been trying to resist, he just hadn’t managed it. Stiles was pretty sure the key would come before long.

He was glad it wasn’t just him. Sure, Derek probably wasn’t thinking about weddings, but he was thinking about the long term as much as Stiles was. It was crazy to think about how this was his life now, and he wished he could go back to little high school Stiles, give him a huge hug, and tell him that it would turn out all right.

Well, for the most part, anyway. Stiles still felt anxiety hit every now and then when he saw Jackson and Ethan together, because mates were still very much a thing. If Derek’s came along, he’d be devastated. Still, Werewolves didn’t always find their mates, so Stiles tried to think optimistically. He felt awful hoping Derek’s mate never showed up but—he just wanted to be selfish about this one thing. He wanted to have Derek, and be the one to make him happy.

Pushing himself away from Jackson when they reached their destination, he smiled while pushing open the door and waved at the establishment at large.

“Hey Mrs. Calavera!”

“Stiles,” she said politely as Antonio headed for the door. Stiles knew he could let the other two in himself, but Mrs. Calavera was very particular about the mountain ash so he just let Antonio do it. It saved him a headache when she berated him.
He moved through the restaurant to her and pulled the older woman into a tight hug. He knew she only tolerated it from him because he loved hugs, and he appreciated it. She always hugged him back, and for someone he knew wasn’t particularly fond of hugs, she gave amazing ones.

“How are you? How’s business?”

“Very well,” she said, and followed up with something in Spanish that he didn’t understand.

“I promise, I’m working on it,” he said. She gave him a sceptical look and he held up both hands. “No, honest! Derek made me download an app and he quizzes me on Sundays. I know how to count to twenty, can list some fruits and vegetables, know how to ask how your day was.” He pointed at her. “I’m learning, okay? Doing my best.”

“Mm. Donde esta Derek?”

“He couldn’t make it today, has a work meeting. Got these two hooligans though.” He thumbed over his shoulder, where Jackson and Ethan were. They’d already gone to sit at their usual table. Actually, Stiles hadn’t been back with Derek since that first time, and it occurred to him he probably should.

He knew Derek had come by a few times over the past few weeks, because Laura was apparently obsessed with their flautas. He should probably talk to Mrs. Calavera to see if he could bring the whole group around one day. Maybe he could swing that for his birthday. Get Laura, Boyd, Erica and Kira an invite, though he didn’t think she’d have a problem with Kira.

Something for another day though. For now, he just wanted to spend the evening with good company and good food. He figured maybe he could get some extra food for tomorrow, bring it to work for Laura and Derek.

And maybe Peter, considering he tended to steal Derek’s breakfast now along with his coffee. Apparently he liked to fuck with him, so Stiles had just started buying breakfast for all three of them. If Laura joined in, Stiles was going to be thankful he always used the corporate credit card for their breakfast.

Though Peter stealing Derek’s food was annoying sometimes, because Stiles already had a hard time keeping him fed, he didn’t need the added worry that Peter was going to steal it! He’d even gotten three different dinners for Derek before leaving just in case Peter wandered into his office before the meeting and decided to steal some of his food.

Mrs. Calavera smacked his arm, making him start and realize he’d been staring into space with a, presumably, goofy look on his face. Man, he wondered if he looked the same way Scott did whenever he was thinking about Allison.

“Sorry,” he said with a small laugh. She eyed him for a moment, then waved him away to go and join his friends. He beamed at her before turning to head for his table, saying hello to Gabriela when they crossed paths.

Sliding into the booth across from the lovebirds, it occurred to him then that Scott and Allison were married. Scott was a Werewolf, and Allison was human. Clearly they didn’t have any concerns about Scott’s mate showing up and ruining their marriage.

To be fair though, they’d been dating for a long time, long before Scott had been turned into a Werewolf. So maybe that changed things? Or maybe they were just so in love with each other that Scott’s mate wouldn’t even register.
Or hell, maybe the universe decided that Scott’s mate should find someone else because Scott and Allison were just so damn disgustingly cute together that who would ever want to tear them apart? He had to give one up for the universe here, it had gotten him and Derek together in a way, so he was willing to believe it wasn’t out to make everyone’s lives miserable.

Ethan was talking about one of his work projects, Jackson’s hand rubbing at his boyfriend’s back absently while he listened. Stiles probably understood more of it than Jackson did, since they worked at the same company, but he liked how focussed Jackson always got. How much he listened when Ethan spoke. It just proved how gone for him he was and it made Stiles smile.

“Margarita?” Gabriela asked, coming up beside them and smiling brightly.

“Please,” Stiles agreed. “But uh, tell Juan to go easy on the alcohol, okay? It’s a work night.”

“Lightweight,” Jackson smirked. Stiles just stuck his tongue out at him while Gabriela confirmed the other two wanted their usual drinks and then headed off to get them.

They chatted a bit more about Ethan’s project, then some of Jackson’s work. He couldn’t tell them much, for obvious reasons, but he’d been working long hours lately on a case, and his firm had barely been giving him room to breathe. They had three different lawyers working on it, because it was so high profile, so Stiles was glad he was getting a break tonight.

When Gabriela came back for their orders, Stiles decided to order flautas for Laura, and some extra food in general for both her and Derek. After Gabriela went to put the orders in, Mrs. Calavera showed up, taking a seat beside Stiles on his side of the table.

She did that sometimes, wanting to catch up, see how he was doing. She obviously hadn’t with Derek since she didn’t know him, but Stiles also wondered if she thought it was a date and hadn’t wanted to interfere.

“You ordered flautas,” she said in opening.

“I did,” Stiles agreed. “Derek’s sister loves them. She keeps saying she wishes she could marry them.” He let out a small laugh and Mrs. Calavera hummed.

She said something in Spanish, then sighed and switched back to English at the blank look that earned her from Stiles. “I would like to meet his sister. He mentions her often.”

“You want to meet a Werewolf?” Jackson asked with a snort. “That’s a first.”

Stiles gave him an annoyed look. Mrs. Calavera gave him a much cooler one. “I much prefer the other one, Stiles,” she said scathingly, eyes on Jackson.

He wasn’t sure if she meant Scott or Derek, but he wasn’t about to stoke the fire.

“Behave,” Stiles warned him, pointing a finger at him. “Do you want dinner or not?”

Jackson rolled his eyes, but kept his mouth shut, leaning back in his seat and crossing his arms. Ethan just smiled slightly and leaned into him, whispering to him under his breath. Jackson said something back, the two of them having their own private conversation, so Stiles turned back to Mrs. Calavera.

“Laura would love to come here,” he confirmed. “But uh—she’s a little more... expressive than Derek. She might try and hug you.”
Mrs. Calavera made a face at that, showing her displeasure, but Stiles knew it wasn’t only about her being a Werewolf. Seriously, she only tolerated Stiles’ hugs because she cared about him so much. He was a lucky exception.

“Perhaps next time. You can bring her and Derek.”


She gave him an unimpressed look. “You are already here today.”

“I know, but I can eat here forever, I love it here.” He winked at her and while she just huffed like he wasn’t cute, he could tell those words made her happy. She prided herself in the food she and her family made, and it was worth every visit. Multiple times a week. So good.

She left him to his dinner when Gabriela brought out the drinks, and Jackson grumbled about her being a Witch. Stiles just rolled his eyes and got him back on topic about work. Once they’d exhausted that, he said he might be asking to take time off so he could go home and visit with his dad. It’d been a while since he’d seen him and he was starting to really miss him.

Skype just wasn’t the same as getting a nice, strong, bone-crushing hug from the sheriff.

Jackson said it might not be a bad idea for them all to head back together. Ethan hadn’t really spent much time with Jackson’s family, and considering they were going to get married eventually—they didn’t talk about it, but Stiles wasn’t _dumb—it would probably be best that the Whittemores at least get to _know_ the man their son was in love with.

And Ethan was so, so great. Stiles was happy that he and Jackson had found each other.

Halfway through dinner, he excused himself to go to the bathroom, the margarita going right through him. He didn’t mean to, but he found himself humming while washing his hands, smiling while he thought about how excited Derek was going to be for lunch tomorrow when he found out what he was getting. Laura would be happy too, considering the flautas, but he was more looking forward to making Derek happy.

When he headed back out to the table, Mrs. Calavera was standing beside it, speaking to Ethan. Jackson was just pouting with his arms crossed and scowling, clearly having been reprimanded again. He slid back into his seat, listening to Mrs. Calavera tell Ethan she was impressed with his work. He looked really pleased.

Stiles figured she’d seen the new marketing for Super Natural Foods around and had asked Ethan if he’d been involved. It was actually really nice of her to comment, given her feelings on the Supernatural in general.

When she and Ethan were done with their conversation, she turned back to Stiles with the smallest of smiles and then smacked him lightly across the back of the head.

“Hey,” he insisted, frowning and rubbing at the injury. “What was that for?”

“You did not say.”

“Say what?”

“You and Derek.”

“Oh.” He smiled—probably goofily again—and nodded once. “Yeah, almost two weeks ago. Or,
well, we became official then. We’d kind of been... dancing around each other a while before
that.”

“It was gross,” Jackson muttered. Ethan nudged him, but Mrs. Calavera ignored him.

“I am glad. You look happy with him. And you are lucky, it is very rare for someone to find their
alma gemela.”

Stiles sighed. “I promise, I’m leaning,” he said again. “Show me pity!”

She harrumphed again like he was being difficult on purpose, and then said in English, “Your
soulmate.”

Jackson froze in the bite he was about to take and Ethan’s mouth dropped open. Stiles saw them
out of the corner of his eye, but he just kept staring at Mrs. Calavera like he’d hallucinated the
words.

“What?” he asked.

Mrs. Calavera looked supremely unimpressed at having to repeat herself. “Your soulmate. You do
not need to hide it from me, I knew when you both walked in. It was evident in the way you paused
before introducing him to me as your boss.” She rolled her eyes, as if he wasn’t cute for trying to
hide it.

“What?” he asked again, because he seriously had no idea what she was saying. Soulmate?

Soulmate?!

This time, his ‘what’ must’ve been a bit shriller, because she paused and eyed him for a few
seconds, then frowned. “You... did not know?”

“Soulmates aren’t—he’s a Werewolf, he has a mate. I’m just...” He didn’t even know what to say.

Stiles winced when she smacked him again, much harder this time. He resisted the urge to reach up
and rub at his head again.

She muttered something in Spanish at him, then said, “Of course soulmates are real. You think it is
only wolves who are to find their other half?” She sneered the word ‘wolves,’ forgetting two of
them were across from her, but neither of them had moved in a while and they didn’t react now,
either.

“But...” Stiles’ brain was going a mile a minute, because what?

What?!

He and Derek were soulmates?!

But what if—was it that Derek was Stiles’ soulmate? Or were they each other’s soulmates?
Because that was very different. It was very important! Because what if Derek was his soulmate,
but Stiles wasn’t his mate?

Or worse: what if it was possible for Stiles to be Derek’s soulmate, but not to be his mate? What if
Derek could have another Werewolf mate that would be different from his human side’s
soulmate?!
“Stiles!”

He started, Jackson leaning over the table and grabbing his arm hard, digging his claws into his skin. He looked worried, and it occurred to Stiles that he’d probably been trying to get his attention for a while. Then he realized it was because he was hyperventilating.

Mrs. Calavera was holding out a glass of water and instructed him to drink. He had no idea how that was supposed to help, but had once heard holding your breath helped with panic attacks so maybe she was using that same mentality. He quickly chugged the water, his lungs burning, but when he put the glass down he felt like he could breathe again. Jackson still clawing into his arm was helping, too.

“How...” Stiles didn’t know that he wanted an answer, but he asked anyway. “How do you know?”

Mrs. Calavera watched him for a long while, evidently trying to determine if he was mentally capable of handling the answer. “I see things. In people. In their eyes. I know these things. I knew they were mated before you told me.” She motioned Jackson and Ethan offhandedly. “And I knew he was yours when he walked in behind you.”

“But what if I’m not his?” Stiles demanded, feeling his heart rate skyrocket. This was so bad! Knowing soulmates were real sucked enough, but knowing that Derek was his was terrifying because what if he wasn’t Derek’s?!?

“You are,” Mrs. Calavera said calmly.

“But what if I’m not?!” Stiles demanded again, and rushed to explain before she could get more exasperated than she already was. “What if his human side agrees, which is why you saw it in his eyes, but what if-what if his wolf doesn’t?!” Then I’ll—”

“Fuck,” Jackson said angrily, digging his claws further into Stiles’ arm. He broke skin, making Stiles wince and blood well up, but he didn’t ask him to let go. He was keeping him grounded, at least. “You’re his mate.”

“But how can you know th—”

“Stiles,” Jackson cut off again, eyes flashing. “You’re his mate. He told me.”

Stiles’ thoughts, which had been going a mile a minute moments before, suddenly came to a screeching halt. He felt like the ground had been pulled out from under him.

“What?” He’d been saying that a lot tonight.

“When we went out that one time. As a group. With everyone.” Jackson waved his own words away with his free hand. “When I went to the bathroom and he followed me, he told me I’d have to put up with him being around because he was pretty sure you were his mate.”

Stiles stared at him for a few seconds, then slammed his free hand on the table loudly. “Why the fuck wouldn’t you tell me that?!” he shouted, earning him a disapproving look from Mrs. Calavera, but she very kindly didn’t comment. She could evidently tell something was going on, even if she didn’t know what.

“Because he said he thought you were his mate!” Jackson snapped. “Not that you were! I wasn’t going to get your hopes up only for them to get shot down! I thought it would be better to wait.”

“But—but you guys looked at each other and knew, right?” Stiles demanded, feeling panicked.
Jesus Christ on a cracker, what was happening right now?! “You both knew! So how can—how can he not know?”

“It’s different,” Ethan said, sounding much calmer than anyone else at the table. “Stiles, you’re human. It’s different. It feels different. You have to... it’s more physical. With a human.”

“Like sex?” Stiles asked bluntly.

Mrs. Calavera cleared her throat and seemed to decide this was a good time to take her leave. She squeezed Stiles’ closest shoulder once, then turned to move away from them. He knew he’d have to apologize to her later for causing a scene, but right now, he kind of had a one-track mind.

“Not necessarily,” Ethan said. “Some have known just by holding each other. Others have known by having intercourse. Some found out just by brushing hands.”

“How do you know this?” Jackson asked, as if that was more important than what Stiles was asking.

“I looked it up after you mentioned it.” Ethan shrugged. “I was curious.”

“You told Ethan and not me?!” Stiles demanded.

“I told you, I didn’t want you to get hurt!” Jackson snapped. “And will you calm down? This is good, isn’t it? Calavera just said you guys are soulmates, and Derek already thinks you’re his mate. Just go fuck him or something and find out.”

Stiles stared at Jackson for a moment. Stiles kept... stopping things. He’d slept over at Derek’s many times, and every time they got intimate, something always interrupted them. They hadn’t gotten overly intimate more than a few times, but every time they stopped before, well, the good part.

Like with the timer for dinner that one time. And Laura showing up another time. And the fucking fire alarm going off another time.

And Stiles’ dad calling one time, thoroughly killing the mood.

Every time they were so close, something interrupted them.

But what if...?

What if.

Stiles tore his arm free from Jackson’s grip, lines of broken flesh raking down his arm when he didn’t let go fast enough. Jackson cursed, clearly not having been prepared for Stiles pulling away like he had, and got to his feet as Stiles raced for the door, shouting his name after him.

Slamming through the door and leaving smears of blood behind him when his shoulder rammed into it, he was surprised he didn’t just break it. His brain was back to going a mile a minute, and he wondered if this was why he felt like this. Why Derek had always been so present in his wank sessions. Why he’d always been the first person Stiles noticed in a room. Why he’d never forgotten him, never moved on from him, never wanted anyone else.

Because Stiles had met his soulmate in high school, when he didn’t even know soulmates were a thing, and the universe had banged its head against its desk at him having had him, and then leaving. So it had pushed them back together.
Because Derek was his soulmate.

Derek was his soulmate!

Stiles knew it was crazy, because Cinco de Mayo was a good twenty minutes from the office on foot, but he didn’t care. He just started running, feeling frantic and energized all at the same time.

If this was true, he needed to know, and he needed to know now.

So, he ran.

“Thanks for staying for the meeting,” Laura said, leaning back in the elevator while raking a hand through her long hair. She looked tired, Derek was a little worried about her. She’d been working a lot lately, and he felt like she really needed to take some time off.

“No problem.” It really hadn’t been a big deal. He hadn’t understood much of it, but he knew that Laura valued his input, especially since Peter hadn’t been able to make it.

Something else had come up requiring attention from one of the owners, so they couldn’t both be absent from the meeting. Since Peter was better with being a passive aggressive asshole, and the item required a passive aggressive asshole, he’d been the logical choice. With the meeting, whenever anything major came up, Laura always liked having Peter there as co-owner. If he—or even Laura—weren’t available, they brought in Derek.

It was a family business, after all, and while he wasn’t an owner, he still had shares and he was a Hale. It made sense to keep him involved whenever the situation called for it.

“So what’s the plan for the night?” Laura asked as the elevator doors opened and she pushed away from the side of the lift. “Gonna call your boyfriend?” she asked teasingly, voice going a little into sing-song mode.

Derek rolled his eyes at her teasing, but it was hard to resist the smile twitching at his lips. Not that Laura couldn’t tell. He’d been a little bummed at losing out on time with Stiles tonight, but he also knew Stiles was going to dinner with Jackson and Ethan. He was probably still eating, actually.

Pulling his phone out while he and Laura crossed the lobby, briefcase and suit jacket in one hand and phone in the other, he unlocked it so he could text Stiles. Maybe if he was done eating, Derek could go and pick him up? Stiles could come over, spend the night.

He’d been spending the night a lot, which Derek was sure Jackson didn’t like, but it was... nice. Really nice. He loved having Stiles around, in his space, his scent on his things. He especially loved having his own scent on Stiles.

Just as he’d opened his messages to send one to Stiles, Laura inhaled sharply beside him and then ran forward, barely getting his name out urgently. “Derek!”

Derek glanced up, wondering what was happening, and felt his lungs close up. He dropped everything he was holding instantly, hearing his phone crack loudly against the marble floor, his briefcase popping open.

He didn’t care.

He bolted for the entrance, overtaking Laura, the guard behind the main desk fumbling for his phone, likely to call the police.
Stiles was at the door.

Stiles was at the entrance to the building, struggling to get shaking hands to swipe his fob. He was sweating, and panting, and fuck, his long shirt-sleeve was stained with blood! There was fucking blood and Derek was going to murder someone!

He wrenched the door open before Stiles managed to get his fumbling hands under control and grabbed Stiles’ shirt. He wrenched him into the building urgently, slammed the door shut behind him, and pulled him into his chest, eyes scanning the street outside for threats.

Walking backwards quickly while still holding him, he tried to put some space between them and the entrance.

“Stiles, are you okay? What happened? Who did this?!” Laura demanded, having reached them by then and following while Derek continued to back away towards the elevators. She was running her hands all over Stiles’ back, seemingly looking for more injuries, even though his white shirt made it clear it was only on his one arm.

Derek had one hand gripping the back of Stiles’ neck tightly, stealing his pain, and the other wrapped around his middle, still trying to find the threat as the guard behind the desk spoke urgently into the phone.

Stiles was clinging to him for dear life, breathing so hard against his skin that Derek wondered how long he’d been running. Why had he run back to the office when he could’ve gotten help from presumably anywhere along the way? Not that he was complaining Stiles felt safest with him, but that wasn’t the point. Stiles’ safety was the most important thing, so he was pissed Stiles hadn’t felt safe anywhere else along the way.

And where the fuck was Jackson? Derek knew Stiles had been with him, he could smell him on him, so how could something like this have happened with Jackson so close? Had they gotten separated? Shit, was Jackson okay?!

“Stiles,” Derek said, struggling to stay in control. He could feel his eyes burning and his words a little slurred from the fangs in his mouth, but he kept control, not moving any further into his shift. “What happened? Are you hurt anywhere else? Where’s Jackson?”

Stiles was still gasping against Derek’s skin, gripping the back of his shirt so tightly it was actually choking him a little bit. He didn’t say anything though, because he could feel Stiles trembling against him, could smell how terrified he was. He just needed to know what to do! Stiles wasn’t speaking, presumably because he was still trying to breathe, but Derek needed to know who to go and murder!

He needed to know who’d hurt him, and he needed to know right now. Because he was going to lose his fucking mind if he didn’t find out in the next ten God damn seconds!

“Stiles!” he insisted, rubbing his cheek against Stiles’ hair, feeling his glasses shift slightly from the action. “Talk to me. Please.”

“The police are on their way,” the security guard said from beside them. “I’ll wait for them outside.”

“Thanks Henry,” Laura said softly, still pressed up against Stiles’ back in an attempt to comfort him.

Stiles was safe. He was safe. Derek just needed to know who to kill. Fuck, he needed him to say
Finally, *mercifully*, between gasped breaths for air, Stiles managed to bite out a few words. Derek didn’t understand any of them except the tail-end of the last one.

“…ate.”

“What?” he asked, shifting slightly in an attempt to get his head lower so he could hear better. “Stiles, what?”

“You’re my soulmate,” Stiles repeated through gasped breaths, clinging to Derek even more tightly, if that was even possible.

Derek froze at the words, stiffening against Stiles, brain panicking a little. How had—how had Stiles found out about his conversation with his mother?! Had—

*Fucking Jackson!* Derek thought viciously, scowling angrily but trying to rein in his temper. Stiles was probably freaking out about it because he didn’t know what being a mate *was*. Though now Derek was wondering what being his mate—possibly, it wasn’t confirmed yet—had to do with his injuries and mad dash to the building.

Had someone else found out? Maybe someone looking to hurt the Hale family for their success? Had someone gone after Stiles because of who he was to Derek?

“We can—we’ll talk about that possibility later,” Derek said, words a little stilted. Laura winced at him for it, but he ignored her. “For now, wh—”

“No,” Stiles insisted, and he pulled his face out of Derek’s chest, looking up at him, chest still rising and falling rapidly in his attempt to get air into his lungs. “You’re my soulmate.”

Derek blinked down at him, thoughts halting for a moment as Stiles’ words, his emphasis, hit him.

Stiles hadn’t said the word ‘mate.’

He’d said the word *soulmate*. The same word his mother had used when explaining that humans had the same capability of finding their other half as Werewolves did.

They just used a different word.

“I’m—I’ll go wait with Henry,” Laura said, pulling back and moving quickly to the door.

Derek could hear the sirens approaching, the police likely to arrive momentarily, but he couldn’t tear his eyes away from Stiles, who still smelled like pain and terror and was staring at him so desperately that Derek wanted to just soothe whatever the fuck was wrong.

Was Stiles… was he *scared* of being Derek’s mate? Soulmate? Whatever. Did he not *want* it? Why was he so *terrified* right now?

He meant to ask Stiles if he was okay, if they needed someone to check his arm, if he had to go to the hospital, but instead what he said was, “Why are you so scared?”

Stiles’ eyes had a momentary flash of confusion before they seemed to widen and he tightened his grip on Derek’s shirt.

“Because what if *I’m* not yours? What if—”
“You are,” Derek said. They might not know officially, Derek’s wolf may not have confirmed it yet, but he knew. He’d always known, deep down. Stiles was his everything, always had been, so there was no way he wasn’t his mate.

Stiles stared up at him, and finally, the terror coming off him slowly started to dissipate. It didn’t disappear, because it was clear he was still terrified, but those words seemed to soothe some of his anxiety.

Derek glanced up when he saw the police cruiser stop at the curb, lights flashing and siren cutting off. They needed to talk about this, but first they had to deal with the problem at hand. He looked back at Stiles, bringing the hand behind his neck around and pressing it to his cheek.

“Stiles, we have to talk about this, we do. I have questions, and I want to know everything. But we need to talk about your arm first. About why you ran here from wherever you were, why you looked so scared. What happened? Who did this to you?”

Stiles blinked at him owlishly, like his brain wasn’t computing, and then slowly turned to look at his arm. He stared at it for a long while, Derek following his line of sight and scowling. It looked like claws, and while the injuries had stopped bleeding, three of them looked very deep. He was going to maul whoever had done this to him.

Derek glanced up when another car screeched to a halt outside the building, frowning when he recognized Jackson behind the wheel of a sleek Mercedes. Derek was surprised he didn’t still own a Porsche, but figured it was probably because a Porsche only sat two people, and he now had a mate and a brother, so he needed to up the seating.

“Whitty,” Stiles said, like he knew he’d arrived. Derek’s gaze shifted back down to him, then over his shoulder again at Jackson, who was now standing with Henry and Laura, speaking to the police. He looked furious, but Derek knew he was probably worried. Jackson always hid his fear behind anger.

He was similar to Derek that way.

Ethan was looking through the window at them, concerned, but not overly worried. Not the same level as Jackson.

“Yes, he’s here,” Derek confirmed. “He’ll be right in.”

“Oh,” Stiles said, denoting he hadn’t realized Jackson had arrived, which made Derek wonder why he’d said his name.

Then he remembered the last question he’d asked.

And realized Stiles had just answered.

Stiles let out a grunt when Derek’s arms tightened to a painful degree, but he couldn’t help it. Jackson had done this? Why the fuck would Jackson have done something like this to Stiles?! To Stiles?!

“Derek, it wasn’t—it was an accident,” Stiles insisted, apparently realizing where Derek’s mind was going.

He didn’t care if it was an accident, though. He didn’t care if Jackson had his claws out and Stiles had fallen into him. He did not care. Jackson had hurt him, and Derek was going to kill him!
Evidently the conversation outside wasn’t going to be over until the officers spoke to Stiles, because Derek saw Laura turn to swipe her fob and open the door. Jackson was the first person through, rushing for Stiles, and Derek roared.

He hadn’t meant to, exactly. Growl, sure. Snarl, probably. Roaring hadn’t been his first thought, but at the sight of the man who’d just hurt his fucking mate, he lost control and roared. Pivoting, he twisted them around so that he was between Stiles and Jackson, still hugging him tightly and craning his neck to look over his own shoulder at the wolf coming for him.

Jackson’s eyes burned blue and he wolfed out, snarling in response, clearly defensive of Derek keeping his injured friend away from him. Before he could come for him though, Ethan grabbed at his jacket and wrenched him back, Laura moving quickly to stand between the pair of them, and Derek and Stiles. She let out a snarl of her own, not liking that Jackson had been about to attack her brother and pack.

“Everyone is going to need to calm down,” one of the two police officers who’d entered the building said. He had one hand resting on his gun. The other cop actually had his own drawn, looking nervous. He seemed younger, so he probably felt a bit antsier being around Werewolves whereas the other looked to be a little more weathered and used to this sort of thing. “We were called because someone was attacked. I’d like to speak to that person.”

“I wasn’t attacked,” Stiles said, poking his head over Derek’s shoulder. “It’s—there was a misunderstanding.”

The cop looked tired all of a sudden, looking over at Stiles’ clearly visible bloody arm. “Son, I don’t know what’s going on, but you have four Werewolves looking ready to maul each other, and your arm is a mess.”

“That was—I was having a panic attack. My friend grabbed my arm to calm me down, and he was stressed, so he was wolfed out. And when I panicked more, I wrenched free from him and he sliced into me before he could let go.” Hearing that didn’t make Derek hate Jackson any less. “It was an accident.”

The cop didn’t look convinced and Stiles let out a sigh, shuffling a bit to turn more towards the cop. Derek snarled unhappily, but he allowed it, because it was what Stiles wanted and he was pretty sure the cop wasn’t about to throw down.

“You said there are four Werewolves here, right? And it’s obvious all four of them care about me. So when I say it was an accident, one of them would tell you if I was lying.”

Derek frowned, because while Stiles’ heartbeat was still erratic from his mad dash back to the office, he was telling the truth. It honestly, truly had been an accident based on the signals his body was giving off.

As expected, the cop wasn’t fully on board, and he ended up saying he wanted to speak to Stiles formally anyway, face to face, without Derek holding onto him like he was. Letting Stiles go took a considerable effort, but Derek managed it, Laura’s hand gripping his shoulder tightly. Stiles didn’t go far, just moving to the security guard’s desk with the older cop so he could give him the run down on what had happened. The younger cop was still hovering uncomfortably between the two groups of Werewolves with Henry, gun still drawn and looking extremely nervous.

Jackson was growling low in his throat, angry electric blue eyes locked on Derek. Ethan was still holding onto him like he was worried letting him go meant he’d attack Derek.
For his part, Derek glared right back, feeling his anger bubbling up and receding the longer they stood there. Laura’s hand was still on his shoulder and he could feel her claws pricking at his skin, trying to keep him under control. The night had been bad enough, and adding him and Jackson trying to kill each other in front of two cops probably wasn’t going to help.

He kept one eye on Jackson, but also ensued his attention was on Stiles, too. Just in case.

It also allowed him to hear the whole story, and while he was sure Stiles wasn’t happy about having to tell a cop this before Derek, at least being present allowed him to hear what had happened.

He suddenly felt like he understood why Mrs. Calavera seemed to like him right away. If he was Stiles’ soulmate, and she knew it, she also knew she was stuck with him, and at least he seemed to make Stiles happy. But it was also insane to realize that she’d known the moment they’d walked in together. She could’ve saved them both a lot of grief by telling them this months ago.

Derek listened while Stiles finished up, explaining in a low, somewhat embarrassed voice, that he’d run all the way to the office in a panic, and that was why people thought he’d been attacked. The cop, to his credit, didn’t look like this entire thing was a waste of his time. He just re-confirmed with Stiles that he was okay, asked if he needed an ambulance or a hospital visit, gave him his business card and then went back over to Henry.

The two of them had a brief chat, and then he looked at the four Werewolves in turn, scowling at Derek the most, likely because of his reaction when the door had opened.

“Remember that he’s human,” the cop said, motioning Stiles, who’d stayed by the service desk. “If I get another call about this in the next few days, I don’t care what he says, I’m going to be bringing people in.”

“We understand,” Laura said, tightening her grip on Derek’s shoulder to stop him from responding. Derek could see Ethan doing the same to Jackson, claws literally digging into his mate’s arm to make him stay quiet. “We’re sorry for the trouble.”

“Mm,” the cop grunted, eying them all for a few seconds, then motioned for his partner to follow. “Someone make sure his arm gets cleaned up. He won’t go to the hospital, but it needs to be treated.”

Laura nodded her agreement and then he and the other cop headed for the exit. Derek heard the older one muttering under his breath that he was getting too old for this kind of garbage before they left.

Nobody moved while the officers climbed back into their cruiser and pulled away, turning their lights off as they eased back into traffic. The Mercedes was still parked haphazardly on the curb, but parking was permitted there after rush hour, so Jackson would probably be fine for a little bit.

For a long while, nobody moved or said anything. There was a very awkward silence, that was interrupted only when Henry cleared his throat uncomfortably and got five sets of eyes snapping towards him.

“I’m going to do some rounds,” he said slowly. “Check the floors and whatnot.”

“Sure,” Laura said. “Thanks Henry.”

“Yup,” he replied, and evidently knew she was thanking him for leaving more than for actually going to do his rounds. They all waited while he headed for the elevator, disappearing into one
immediately and then listening to the doors slide shut.

The second they did, Jackson tore free from Ethan and bolted for Stiles. Derek snarled and practically launched Laura away from him in his haste to break free from her and follow suit. Jackson vaulted clear over the service desk and Derek roared again when he got too close to Stiles.

“Whoa, hey! Hey!” Stiles shouted, holding up both hands, index fingers up and face twisting slightly in anger.

It was enough to have Jackson halt before touching him, but Derek still moved around the other side of the desk and tried to stand between him and Stiles. That earned him Jackson shoving at him roughly and snapping his teeth in his face. Derek retaliated by slashing at him with his claws, narrowly missing Stiles when he pushed between them and shoved them both away from each other.

Derek knew he only succeeded because neither wolf wanted to hurt him, the two snarling and snapping at each other. It didn’t help Derek that the arm extended in his direction to ward him off was the injured one.

“Stop it,” Stiles snapped. “Seriously, what the fuck? You’re adults, stop peacocking!”

“Derek can’t help it,” Ethan said quietly from his spot, not having moved. He evidently figured this was better handled by staying out of it. Laura seemed to be of the same mind since she hadn’t left her spot either. “If you’re his mate, even if the bond hasn’t solidified, it’s instinctual to react. Jackson’s just territorial.”

“You sliced into his arm,” Derek said darkly, angrily.

“It was an accident,” Jackson snarled back.

“Shut up,” Stiles snapped at them both. “Seriously, my night’s been stressful enough, both of you get a grip!”

When neither said anything further, content to glare at one another, Stiles lowered his arms and winced, reaching around to grip his injured one. Derek’s nostrils flared and he saw Jackson jerk, as if about to move forward, but he held his ground.

Stiles exhaled once, sharply, then turned to Jackson with a frown. “What the hell took you so long, anyway? I can’t believe I actually made it to work before you did. I was on foot, you know. I literally ran here. Could’ve used a ride.”

Jackson’s fury turned to insult in a split second. “If you’d waited instead of rushing out of there like an idiot, you would’ve gotten a ride. How the fuck was I supposed to know where you were headed? I was driving around all over the place trying to find your dumb ass before Ethan remembered you mentioning Derek had a late meeting.”

“I’m sorry that I panicked when I realized the love of my life since high school might be my soulmate,” Stiles said dryly.

“Mrs. Calavera was pretty clear it wasn’t ‘might be,’” Ethan said from his spot.

“Thank you, Ethan.” Stiles said with a sigh rubbing at his face with both hands, then running them through his hair. He suddenly looked exhausted, and in pain, and confused. “Look. My arm hurts. I’m confused. I kind of want to figure this shit out.” He turned to Jackson. “Whitty, can you just—please. I get it, okay. I get it. It was an accident, and now you’re peacocking because you’re upset
you hurt me, but it was my fault, so just... I just need to figure this out, okay?"

Jackson looked like he very much wanted to say that, no, it wasn’t okay. He looked like he wanted to grab Stiles and haul him straight to the ER and hover over him like an obsessive older brother and yell at people for not moving fast enough and helping Stiles.

Derek felt some of his anger slowly retreat at that realization. When he finally really looked at Jackson, and how wrecked he was beneath all the anger on his face. He was devastated that he’d hurt Stiles, and he’d never done that before. Not to this degree. And he didn’t know how to deal with it, because he’d never had to.

And to make matters worse, Stiles didn’t want Jackson to help him, he wanted Derek. And that had never happened before, either. Stiles wanting someone else over him.

In a way, Derek felt like he understood where Jackson was coming from. He didn’t mean to feel threatened, but Derek was taking over the role Jackson had always filled, and he probably didn’t know how to handle that.

“There’s a First Aid room on the third floor beside HR,” Derek finally said, voice coming out surprisingly even. “Why don’t we all go up there and take a look at your arm?”

Stiles turned to him, looking a little relieved, and nodded. Jackson just crossed his arms, but his stance made it clear he was following even if he wasn’t invited.

Derek motioned for Stiles to lead the way to the stairs, and then followed. It made his skin crawl a bit having Jackson at his back, given how aggressive he was, but there was no way that he was letting him get between him and Stiles.

When they reached the door, Derek pulled his fob from his pocket and pulled it open for Stiles. When he turned, he found Laura cleaning up the mess he’d left in the middle of the lobby, his papers all over the place and his phone probably broken. She glanced up when he paused and offered him a small smile.

“I’ll wait here with Ethan. Try not to kill each other.”

“No promises,” Jackson muttered, but Derek ignored him and just followed after Stiles to the third floor, Jackson on his heels.

Derek had to leave them alone in front of the First Aid room to go and find the key. It made him antsy, and took him a good two minutes of Stiles insisting it was fine before he managed to walk away. He wondered if it was because hearing Stiles say he was his soulmate made it real. Now that he knew, he didn’t want to leave him alone with another potentially dangerous Werewolf.

The only reason he managed was because it was Jackson. And while yes, he’d just hurt Stiles, it had been an accident, and he kept repeating that to himself over and over again. He didn’t think murdering Stiles’ oldest, closest friend was going to help their relationship.

Finally finding the key, he went back to unlock the door and motioned Stiles inside. He stripped out of his shirt, wincing when the sleeve brushed over his injured arm, and then moved to the small sink in the room to clean off all the blood.

Jackson let out what could only be described as a whine when he saw the extent of the injuries and Derek felt a little stressed looking at them.

“That looks bad,” he insisted. “Should we be going to a hospital?”
Stiles turned to give them both unimpressed looks. “If it was bad enough I needed to go to the hospital, the cops would’ve insisted. You’re both just not used to injuries staying for longer than a second, it’s not even that bad.”

He reached out for some paper towels, dabbing at the wounds and Derek craned his neck to get a better look. Two of them looked around five inches long, the other three were shorter. One of them—Derek assumed it was Jackson’s thumb—looked the shallowest and smallest, at about an inch, like he’d managed to let go fast enough there but not so much with the rest.

In a way, Derek didn’t know why he and Jackson were there, because it was clear neither of them knew what to do. They were both Werewolves, and while Derek knew Jackson had been bitten, he was very young at the time so he probably didn’t really remember much about being human. Though he had been around Stiles basically their whole lives, and it wasn’t like Stiles didn’t get hurt on occasion. But maybe he was always too stressed to help and Stiles ended up just taking care of it himself, like he was now. He didn’t seem bothered by it, he was just going about his business, grabbing various items off the shelf, cleaning his wounds, checking to make sure they had all really stopped bleeding.

When he pulled gauze out, he turned and held it up, and Jackson moved forward immediately. Stiles made a noise at him and looked pointedly at the sink, so Jackson quickly washed his hands, dried them, and took the gauze.

He was almost overly cautious while taping it down to Stiles’ skin, using a bandage afterwards to roll slowly around his arm to keep everything in place before pinning it down. Stiles tested the mobility, making sure it wasn’t too tight, then nodded a thanks and looked around.

“Where’s the incident report file?”

Derek frowned. “Incident report?”

Stiles almost sighed. “If you use anything from the First Aid room, you’re supposed to make record of it to make sure the inventory stays stocked. Also, if it’s a workplace injury, it needs to be recorded.” Stiles raked a hand through his hair, Derek’s eyes following the bandaged arm as he did so. “I’ll talk to Erica tomorrow, it’s fine.”

Turning, he went about putting everything back and tossed out the items they’d used in a small, sealed garbage under the sink. It occurred to Derek that Stiles hadn’t worn any gloves, but he’d washed his hands and since he’d been working on himself and not someone else, he probably hadn’t wanted to waste them.

Once he was done, he turned back to them both while pulling his ruined shirt back on, doing up the buttons while arching an eyebrow, since they were both just staring at him.

“What?”

“Are you sure you’re okay?” Derek asked.

“The adrenaline kind of wore off, so now I’m mostly just tired,” he admitted.

“You should take tomorrow off.”

Stiles snorted. “And do what?”

“I can take the day off, too,” Derek offered. “We can—talk. I don’t think tonight’s a good time, we’re all a little bit...” He let that trail off, unsure of how to end that statement.
Stiles watched him for a moment, then nodded, rubbing at his head. “Okay. Yeah, okay. Thanks. Can I—” He cut off, winced, and glanced at Jackson.

The other Werewolf snorted. “You don’t need my permission to spend the night with your boyfriend,” he muttered, but it was clear he wasn’t happy about it.

“I’ll come back tomorrow, I just—this is important.”

“I know,” Jackson said, and Derek was surprised he sounded so sincere. “I get it.”

“Thanks Whitty.”

“I’m sorry.”

“I know.” Stiles smiled and moved forward to punch him lightly in the arm. “You were trying to keep me grounded, it’s fine.”

“It’s not fine,” Jackson snapped, hiding his worry behind anger again, but Stiles just rolled his eyes and punched him again, then motioned for them to exit.

Derek had already managed to leave them alone together, he wasn’t willing to let Jackson get between them again, so he stared pointedly at Jackson to leave first. He sneered at Derek, but complied, exiting the room. When Stiles made to follow, Derek pulled him back gently by the good arm and got between them so that Stiles took up the rear.

Locking up, Derek shoved the key in his pocket, figuring he’d just give it to Laura when they got downstairs, and the three of them headed back for the stairs. Laura and Ethan were hanging out by the service desk talking when they reached the lobby, and they both turned when the trio approached.

“You survived,” Laura teased. Stiles snorted and shrugged in answer. “Are you okay?”

“I’m fine,” Stiles insisted. “It’s throbbing a little, but it’s honestly not that bad.”

“You looked a little crazy when you showed up,” Laura reminded him. “Are you sure?”

“I’m sure,” he promised. “Derek and I just… need to talk.”

Derek reached into his pocket to hand Laura the First Aid key. She took it, and swapped him for his jacket, briefcase and phone. The screen was cracked, but otherwise it looked undamaged.

“We’re both taking tomorrow off.”

“Figured as much,” she said with a small smile.

“We’re going home,” Jackson muttered, moving further around the desk and looking at Ethan. “Let’s go.”

“Good night,” Ethan said politely to the others, then glanced at Stiles. “Text us later.”

“Yeah.”

Ethan nodded once, then moved back around the desk, reaching out to take Jackson’s hand. Derek watched them exit the building, and even though they got into the car, it seemed to take a while for them to actually leave. Like Jackson was struggling to come to terms with Stiles not needing him right now.
Eventually, the Mercedes pulled away from the curb and disappeared from sight. Laura seemed to have been waiting to make sure Jackson wouldn’t come back, then turned to the pair beside her with a smile.

“Enjoy your day off. I’ll have IT put out of offices on for you, and if anything urgent comes up, I’ll have one of the other VPs handle it.”

“Thanks Laura,” Derek said sincerely.

“Anything for you, my favourite pain in the ass.” She winked at him and he just sighed, lacking the energy to react any further. “Have a good night boys.”

“Bye Laura,” Stiles said.

She waved at them both while heading for the second set of elevators that led down to the underground parking and was gone moments later. Derek turned back to Stiles, and he saw his boyfriend’s entire being just sag from exhaustion. Stiles took two steps forward, resting his head against Derek’s sternum, and just melted into him.

Derek wrapped his arms around him and squeezed, being mindful of his injured arm. He still kept feeling stabs of anger race through him at the realization that he was hurt, and that he knew who was responsible. Similarly, he had to remind himself it had been an accident, and that Stiles would be sad if Jackson suddenly went missing.

Besides, Ethan would be out for revenge, and Derek wouldn’t risk Stiles’ life like that.

“Are you sure you’re okay?” he asked, for what felt like the millionth time.

“I’m not fragile,” Stiles said in response with a sigh. “I’m just tired. It’s been a long day.”

“Yeah,” Derek agreed. “Let’s go home.”

He felt really good when Stiles didn’t comment on his place not being home. They stood there a moment longer, long enough for Henry to come back from his rounds, and then headed for the stairs to the parking garage.

Stiles fell asleep as soon as they were in the car, and Derek let him have his rest while he drove them back to the apartment. He didn’t want to leave his boyfriend half-asleep and alone at the entrance while he parked, especially considering the night he’d just had, so he parked his car in the visitor’s lot just to get Stiles upstairs.

Shaking him awake, they climbed out of the car together and Derek let him into the building. Stiles was slow going up the stairs, but Derek didn’t comment on it like he normally would, following silently along and then unlocking his apartment door when they reached it.

“Just gonna park the car, I’ll be right back,” he told him, setting his suit jacket and briefcase down on the kitchen counter.

“Okay,” Stiles said.

Derek locked the door on his way back out. Just in case.

He took the stairs back down, since it would be faster, and was back in his car and in the underground lot within a minute. Waiting for the elevator seemed to take an eternity, but when he finally got back to his apartment, Stiles was still in the bathroom and he let out a relieved sigh, like
he’d unknowingly been worried he was going to disappear on him.

Knocking lightly on the door, he said, “I’m gonna get ready for bed. See you there?”

“Sure,” Stiles said, still sounding half-asleep.

Derek went through his room and into his en suite. He wasn’t as careful taking his clothes off as he’d normally be, not bothering to hang anything up or even put anything away. He just left it all in a heap on the floor, brushed his teeth, grabbed some shorts for bed, and went to plug his broken phone in on his nightstand. He turned off his alarm while he stood there, wanting to be sure it wouldn’t wake them up tomorrow morning.

Stiles wandered in a few minutes after Derek had gotten under the covers. He was wearing his usual plaid pyjama pants and an oversized grey shirt, and since his clothes were also suspiciously missing, Derek expected another pile of clothes in the other bathroom.

Shutting the door, Stiles turned off the light and then crawled over Derek to get to his side of the bed. Once he was under the covers, Derek wasn’t sure if he should reach out for him or not. Stiles solved the problem for him by curling into his side, injured arm up, and Derek pulled him closer, kissing his forehead.

“Love you,” he whispered into the darkness.

Stiles didn’t say anything back, but Derek didn’t mind. He knew it was only because Stiles had passed out again, and he was more than okay letting him sleep.

They were going to have a long day tomorrow.

Stiles woke up slowly, his arm throbbing painfully and his bladder uncomfortably full and demanding his attention. He didn’t want to wake up yet, because he still felt so fucking tired, but his brain kept poking at him and insisting that he had a reason to be awake today.

He couldn’t really remember what that reason was, so he tried to ignore it and go back to sleep, not wanting to deal with his throbbing arm yet. It wasn’t until someone inhaled deeply and his face was smooshed into someone’s chest that the reason behind his arm hurting hit him and his brain instantly demanded his full attention.

No going back to sleep now.

His eyes opened slowly, still struggling to come to terms with having to be awake right now, and he stared at a hard, chiselled chest that his face was currently pressed into. Sunlight was shining brightly through the room and he had a split second of panic about being late for work before remembering that he had the day off.

Both he and Derek. Because they had to talk. About a lot of things.

But first, bathroom. Movies were unrealistic when they had couples wake up and just lie in bed chatting for hours. Bathroom visits were a must first thing in the morning.

Stiles shifted in Derek’s arms, the Werewolf grunting and tightening his grip, like he didn’t want to let him go. Stiles had to shove at him gently to get him to wake up enough to release him. Derek grunted unhappily, but complied, letting him go and rolling onto his other side, burying his face in his pillow and beginning to snore softly.
A laugh escaped Stiles, despite his best efforts, but it was kind of adorable. He sat up, rubbing tiredly at his face, and glanced down at his bandaged arm. Running his fingers lightly over it to check for any bleeding, he nodded in satisfaction when he found it to still be a pristine white colour.

Sliding off the end of the bed and scratching at his shoulder, he yawned widely while heading for Derek’s en suite, almost tripping over the discarded pile of clothes on the ground but managing not to brain himself on the edge of the sink.

He nudged the door halfway shut before relieving himself and washing his hands, looking up at himself in the mirror. He still looked really tired, but felt that was probably just because of everything that had happened the previous night.

A part of him still felt panicked, even now, that this was all a huge mistake and he was about to have his entire world crumble around him. In a way though, he felt like maybe he only thought that because this was his soulmate, and the idea of being rejected by him was the worst pain he could ever experience.

Movies and books made soulmates sound so easy. Even Werewolves made mates sound so easy. But real life wasn’t like that. It was messy, and confusing, and scary. It wasn’t about looking at Derek and knowing instantly that he was his soulmate.

It was about two teenagers pining from afar, one thinking he wasn’t worth loving, and the other feeling like he wasn’t good enough. It was about a hot, desperate make-out in a dirty bathroom one of the last times they would ever see each other. It was about ten years apart, feeling like something was missing but never really understanding what that something was.

It was about two men finding each other again, against all odds, and making this work. Being vulnerable, and honest, and laying it all bare.

Real life wasn’t like movies and books, and sometimes, Stiles wished they could just be more realistic to stop people from having unrealistic expectations.

He stood staring at himself for a long while, hands braced on the counter, trying to convince himself this wasn’t going to backfire. It shouldn’t though, right? Because Mrs. Calavera had said they were soulmates. How she knew, Stiles wasn’t sure—maybe Jackson was right, all those times he’d joked that she was a Witch—but she’d said they were soulmates. Jackson had said Derek thought they were mates. And last night, during his panic, Derek had confirmed he thought that was true.

Stiles stared at himself for a moment longer, then finally pushed off the counter and headed back into the bedroom. Derek was still sleeping, snoring softly, so he crawled back into bed and got comfortable under the covers before inching closer to Derek’s back and pressing against him, injured arm wrapping around his middle and cheek pressed against the middle of his back.

He closed his eyes, but didn’t sleep again. He just lay there, holding Derek, listening to the sounds from outside, and the soft snoring from his boyfriend. He could hear his steady heartbeat with how he was lying, and it made him feel calmer. More grounded.

Time passed, though he wasn’t sure how much. Enough that his stomach was starting to inquire about food. That was when Derek inhaled deeply and shifted, Stiles knowing he was on the verge of waking up. He didn’t move, still pressed against his back, and heard the slight uptick of Derek’s heart beating when he finally reached consciousness again.
Derek inhaled deeply again, then let it out, reaching down for the hand around his middle and bringing it up to kiss at Stiles’ fingers. Then he shifted like he was going to get up and Stiles pulled away from him, Derek letting his hand go. He climbed out of bed without a word and stumbled sleepily to the bathroom. Stiles couldn’t help but smile, because movies were such bullshit.

Rolling over onto his back, Stiles stared up at the ceiling. At the weird shapes and shadows dancing off it from the sun reflecting off various items. Derek wasn’t gone for very long, just enough to relieve himself and wash his hands. When he climbed back into bed, Stiles turned to look at him, and found Derek lying on his side, facing him, eyes half-closed like he still wasn’t fully awake.

It was the most adorable thing he’d ever seen.

“Can you even see me?” Stiles asked lightly, since Derek wasn’t wearing his glasses.

“Fuck you,” was his loving response.

Stiles let out a small laugh and rolled onto his side as well, one hand under his cheek while he stared at Derek, memorizing every inch of his face. This wasn’t the first time he’d done it, and it likely wouldn’t be the last. It was just the first time for him while knowing this man was his soulmate.

“Mrs. Calavera says we’re soulmates,” Stiles said softly. “She said she knew the moment we walked in together.”

“My mom says she thinks you’re my mate,” Derek replied. “It hasn’t... really been confirmed yet, but I don’t think she’s wrong.”

Stiles frowned a little, remembering what Ethan had said at the restaurant the night before. “Ethan said it’s different for everyone. That there needs to be a level of intimacy when it’s a Werewolf and a human, unlike when it’s just two Werewolves.”

“My mom said that too,” Derek admitted. “My dad is human, so she’d know.”

Stiles nodded slowly, thoughts going back to Allison and Scott. “I think... I always knew that a Werewolf could have a human mate, but it never really... I guess I didn’t clue in when it came to me. I just thought about it with other people.”

“Did you want to be my mate?” Derek reached out, dragging his fingers gently through Stiles’ hair, eyes on what he was doing. It was soothing, and comforting, and Stiles closed his eyes, enjoying the feeling of it.

“I think I did,” he said quietly. “But I guess I never thought it could happen, so I tried not to think about it too much. I didn’t want to lose you, not again.”

“Yeah,” Derek admitted, just as quietly. “Me neither. When mum told me about it, I was... I don’t know. Happy, but terrified. I didn’t know if it was true, and I didn’t want to hurt you. Or myself.”

Stiles opened his eyes, but Derek was still watching his own hand slide through Stiles’ hair, like he was transfixed by the action.

“Do you want me to be your mate?”

Derek’s hand paused, eyes returning to Stiles’. “More than anything.”
Stiles smiled. “Yeah. Me too.”

Derek’s own lips quirked up slightly at the corners, and he went back to running his fingers through Stiles’ hair, eyes returning to what he was doing. “Why were you so scared yesterday? When you showed up, you were terrified. Why?”

Stiles reached out with his free hand, the one not pillowing his cheek, and pressed his palm against Derek’s chest. It felt unfair that Derek could hear his heart so clearly and Stiles had no idea what Derek’s was doing. Even pressing against his skin, he still couldn’t feel it.

“I didn’t know if soulmates and mates were different.” He frowned slightly, eyes on his hand the same way Derek’s were on his own. “I thought maybe... your human side was my soulmate, but what if your wolf side had someone different as your mate? I didn’t know if I’d lose you to someone else. I think... hearing what Mrs. Calavera said, I got scared someone was going to take you from me, and I couldn’t help but panic. Like learning you were my soulmate suddenly clicked something into place and the thought of losing you was overwhelming.” He let out a small puff of a laugh. “I really scared Whitty.”

“You really scared me,” Derek insisted softly, nails dragging a bit harder against his scalp. “You looked crazed. You were sweating and panting and bleeding. I thought someone or something had attacked you.”

“Yeah, not my finest moment, having my boss and the VP of HR-slash-owner of the company I work for seeing me like that.” Stiles let out a small snort.

“It was more your worried boyfriend and his protective sister,” Derek reassured. “Sorry we called the cops.”

“It was the logical thing to do,” Stiles said with a small shrug, fingers flexing against Derek’s chest. “And really, I think doing that helped. Having to compartmentalize and explain what had happened to someone in an attempt to defuse a tense situation helped me calm down. I think I would’ve kept panicking otherwise, so in a way, it worked out.”

“I guess.” Derek’s hand shifted from Stiles’ hair down to his cheek, thumb brushing lightly against his skin. Stiles looked back up at him, Derek’s eyes watching his thumb stroke back and forth, back and forth.

It was always at times like this, when Derek’s face was so soft, that Stiles saw the teenager from his childhood. The one who smiled at his books when he read them, and got happy when he was doing well in class, and enjoyed being a nerd without caring what other people thought of him.

Stiles loved this nerd with everything he had. Every bone in his stupid body.

“I used to slip good luck notes in your locker before your competitions,” Stiles admitted.

Derek smiled slightly. “I went to all your lacrosse games, even the away ones.”

“I teased you about Laura picking you up because I was scared you’d be too afraid to drive again after your accident, and I wanted to spite you into getting back behind the wheel.”

“I swapped out the notes Scott got sent home with whenever you were sick because he sucks at taking notes, and I didn’t want you to fall behind.”

“I read every book I saw you reading at lunch, because I wanted to see what made you smile the way you did.”
Derek smiled at him, still rubbing gently at his cheek. “That one time you passed out from heat exhaustion in tenth grade, when you were delirious and miserable, I’m the one who snuck into the nurse’s office to steal your pain.”

Stiles remembered that day. He’d always assumed it was Scott or Jackson, even though a part of him had insisted the guy who’d bent over him had been too tall to be Scott, and too dark-haired to be Jackson. He’d never really given it much thought after it had happened, but knowing what he did now, he wasn’t the least bit surprised to find out it had been Derek.

Because it had always been Derek in the end, hadn’t it?

“I love you,” he said. “My nerdy, sexy boyfriend.”

“I loved you more before you called me nerdy,” Derek insisted and Stiles laughed, rolling onto his back and covering his face with both hands, Derek’s sliding off his cheek.

It felt really good to just... talk. Admit everything. Lay it all bare. They’d done it before, of course. Little things from their time in high school, but there had just been so much and they were both still trying to be so careful. But now, if this was it for them, there was no reason to hide anything anymore. If this was true, then everything leading up to this moment had happened to get them here.

The bed shifted and Stiles felt a weight pressing down on him. He let his hands slide up off his face, arms resting above his head. Derek was looming over him, weight pressing down on him, arms bracketing Stiles between them.

He offered him a small smile, then tilted his head up to kiss him. Derek leaned away from him, smirking slightly at the look that earned him.

“Don’t be a brat,” Stiles insisted, starting to reach up to pull Derek down, but he just shifted one arm to grab at Stiles’ wrists with one hand, pressing them down into the bed above his head.

“I’m not the brat in this relationship,” Derek informed him, then bent down. Stiles started to lean up to meet his lips, but Derek turned his head at the last minute to avoid it and pressed a kiss to Stiles jaw instead, then down over his pulse point, and around to the hollow of his throat.

Stiles closed his eyes, tilting his head back and letting Derek lick and bite at his neck. He knew it was a wolf thing, for the most part, but Stiles had always been weak for people at his neck. No one had ever managed to make it feel quite as satisfying as Derek, though.

He unconsciously started rocking his hips up into Derek’s, able to feel the rigid line of his erection through two layers of clothing. Derek grunted at the action, and the one arm that had remained bracketing Stiles’ head shifted down to grip his right hip, keeping it pressed into the bed.

“Tease,” Stiles breathed, testing the strength of the hold by bucking up. He managed somewhat, mostly because of the fact that Derek was only holding him down on one side, but he didn’t try too hard.

“For once, we have time,” Derek insisted, mouthing hotly against Stiles’ throat. “Let me do this.”

Stiles wasn’t going to complain, except if his hands went numb, because a lot of Derek’s weight was currently pressing down on his wrists. At least he knew his pain was being sucked, because his arm wasn’t hurting anymore, but he hoped that wasn’t ruining the experience for Derek.

Derek’s other hand left Stiles’ hip when he made it clear he would behave, ghosting across his
abdomen feather light. Stiles’ stomach muscles twitched, the action tickling slightly, but he tolerated it as best he could. Derek’s mouth was back to his pulse, biting and sucking gently, clearly intent on giving him a hickey as slowly as humanly possible.

Stiles had learned early on Derek liked giving him hickeys. It made it very clear to everyone who Stiles belonged to, and Derek was as possessive as Jackson was. Probably more, considering.

A small grunt left Stiles’ throat when Derek’s hand settled on his crotch, squeezing him through his pyjama pants. Then he flattened his hand, and started running it slowly up and down Stiles’ dick, using the material that separated them to add extra friction.

The pace was agony, Stiles tugging lightly at his trapped wrists and arching his back, but Derek just dragged his lips along Stiles’ jawline and pressed their lips together. Stiles lifted his head instantly, biting at Derek’s bottom lip and opening his mouth in invitation, Derek’s tongue sliding in as slowly as his hand was moving.

Stiles could feel sweat beginning to break out across his body, constantly breaking the kiss to gasp for air, feeling like he was slowly going insane.

“Fuck, please,” he hissed, clenching his eyes shut and letting his head fall back onto the pillow. He arched his back again, needing more friction, and Derek just chuckled, kissing his chin. “Please.”

Derek kissed him lightly on the lips again, then the corner of his mouth, his cheek, his temple, all while continuing the agonizingly slow pace.

Stiles tugged uselessly at the hand still holding his own down, twisting his head to one side and arching his back again, trying to rock his hips into Derek’s hand to force him to speed up. He didn’t, he just started to ease up on the force he was using, so that Stiles got barely any friction, a frustrated groan escaping him.

“Fuck Derek, please!”

“I love it when you beg,” Derek admitted, licking at some sweat that had slid down to Stiles’ collarbone, and then kissing his pulse. “Never thought I’d see the day where I’d have popular golden boy Stiles Stilinski under me, begging me to jerk him off.”

Stiles just groaned at that, because fuck if Derek wasn’t turning him on even more by talking like that, voice low and dark and sinful.

The whine that left him was borderline pathetic when Derek’s hand moved away entirely, and Stiles had to open his eyes to figure out what he was doing when the bed shifted. Looking down the length of his body, he saw that Derek was pulling his shorts down over his ass, clearly not trying to take them off entirely, just trying to free his dick.

Which he did, Stiles practically hearing the slap of it when it was freed and hit his stomach. Pre-cum was drooling from the tip and Stiles tugged at his wrists again, wanting to reach down and fucking touch it.

God, his dick was fucking gorgeous. As far along as they’d gone in their relationship to date, they’d never actually gotten to the point where they were naked. Or, not to a point where Stiles saw Derek’s dick and vice versa, anyway.

Seeing it now was like a kick in the chest, because Stiles wanted to slide down the bed and fucking swallow it, but he couldn’t, because Derek wouldn’t let him go!
He could feel Derek’s eyes on him, the look predatory and hungry, but Stiles was too focussed on Derek’s perfect **dick** to think about anything else. He groaned, eyes almost sliding shut when Derek reached for one side of Stiles’ pyjama pants, tugging.

Stiles lifted his hips off the bed, Derek letting out a hiss when he rocked into his bare cock, but he made quick work of tugging at Stiles’ pants with one hand. They weren’t as tight as Derek’s boxer-briefs, so they slid off his hips easily and down his thighs, Stiles letting his ass hit the bed again.

When Derek wrapped his hand around Stiles’ dick, he **did** close his eyes again, groaning and letting his head fall back against the pillow more fully. Derek’s lips were back on his, hand stroking him just as agonizingly slowly as before, but only for a few seconds. Only long enough to make Stiles start begging into their kiss again.

Then, Derek lowered himself, lining up their cocks and rocking his hips, his hand half-wrapped around both of them. Derek was the one to groan into their kiss this time and Stiles started rocking his hips a bit more insistently now, lifting his head once more to chase Derek’s mouth, sliding his tongue past his lips.

Derek’s hand was big, but not quite big enough to comfortably wrap around both their cocks. Still, he stroked them both as best he could, rocking his hips down against Stiles’ while he did the same.

Stiles still couldn’t free his hands, and Derek seemed content to leave him like that, swallowing all of Stiles’ groans and grunts almost greedily. They both pulled back occasionally to gasp in laboured breaths of air against each other’s lips or skin. Whenever Stiles let his head fall back onto the pillow, tilting it back, Derek attacked his neck, hand increasing in speed.

“Fuck, oh fuck, oh **fuck**,” Stiles was rocking upwards almost desperately, chasing his orgasm, feeling it building like a line ready to snap. “Yes, fuck!”

Derek was biting at his jaw now, hand slippery from pre-cum and sliding wetly around both of their cocks. He was stroking them almost erratically, hips rutting down desperately even as Stiles continued to jerk up into him. He was so close. He was so, so fucking **close**...

He felt his entire body tense, arms tugging uselessly against Derek’s hand and lips parting in a silent exhale when he came, feeling ribbons of cum hit his stomach and chest, Derek’s hand still moving desperately as he chased his own release.

And the line feeling ready to snap was still building, Stiles feeling like he was about to lose his God damn mind, because he’d just come **so hard** and his dick was over-sensitive, and he was **spent** but he still felt like pressure was building, coiling tighter and tighter and then—

Derek snarled against his neck, and Stiles felt more cum hit his stomach and chest, mixing with his own, and the line **snapped**.

Stiles froze beneath Derek, feeling like all the air had been punched out of his lungs and his entire body had just turned to stone. He felt like Derek had just wormed his way under his skin, solidified himself inside his flesh, touching every part of him at once while staking claim on every inch of him, inside and out.

Derek had gone rigid above him, breath halting for a moment, and Stiles wondered if he was feeling the same thing. If he felt like Stiles was touching him everywhere at once, demanding ownership of every single aspect of his entire being.

Stiles wondered if this was what a Werewolf finding their mate felt like, because he sure as shit
knew without a shadow of a doubt that Derek was his soulmate, and his mate, and his Werewolf.

When Stiles felt like his lungs were going to explode from lack of air, and Derek’s muscles began to relax above him, he inhaled sharply and just like that, the moment passed. His body relaxed, feeling loose and pliant, almost boneless. He felt weightless, and his breathing became erratic, struggling to inhale oxygen properly after both their activities as well as the unexpected complete body shutdown from moments before.

Derek was shaking against him, carefully moving his hand away from their over-sensitive dicks and placing it on the bed, clenching his fingers against the sheets beneath them. He let more of his weight fall onto Stiles, loosening his grip on his wrists, his face buried in Stiles’ neck while he struggled to catch his own breath.

Stiles could feel his own breathing returning to normal much faster than Derek’s, and it occurred to him that maybe it wasn’t just about what they’d done. Derek was probably overwhelmed, because finding a mate was so much more intense for a Werewolf than apparently finding a soulmate was for a human.

He supposed he should’ve figured that out himself, seeing as how he’d been there when Jackson and Ethan had found each other. Not the exact moment, but the aftermath of it, and they had looked just as overwhelmed as Derek was acting, even if they hadn’t admitted anything to him at the time.

Pulling one hand free from the now loosened grip, Stiles brought it up over and around, letting it land on the small of Derek’s back before sliding it upwards, rubbing a smooth rhythm along his spine. His other hand he twisted to find Derek’s, still above his head, and he laced their fingers together loosely as best he could. It wasn’t the right hand for hand-holding, but he just twined their fingers together because that was really all he needed right now.

Derek’s fingers squeezed back tightly, breath shaky against Stiles’ neck where his face was still buried and tremors coursing through him in intervals, like he was trying to get himself back under control, but couldn’t.

“I know it’s not the same thing,” Stiles said softly, still rubbing at Derek’s back soothingly, “the feeling you have right now. But this is why I was how I was last night. I was terrified that I wasn’t yours.” Derek’s hand tightened even more around Stiles’, the action almost painful, but he didn’t mind. “I wanted so badly to be yours, and the thought that I might not be was the worst thing I think I’ve ever experienced.”

Stiles smiled, letting himself melt further into the bed, Derek a calming, grounding weight above him. He was a little heavy, but Stiles could tell he was trying to keep some of his weight off him, both with the hand against the bed, and the elbow of his other arm. He was just overwhelmed and struggling to keep control.

Because Derek had been looking for his mate his entire life, and Stiles couldn’t begin to imagine how he must feel knowing the one he’d always wanted was his mate. Stiles supposed that made sense. It explained why they’d always been how they were. He wondered how common it was, finding a mate so young. Allison and Scott had, after all, provided they were actually mates since he’d never asked. And while Stiles and Derek had had a few setbacks, they’d still found each other again.

The universe had pushed them back together, because apparently it hated that they were both so fucking stupid.

“You’re mine,” Derek said, voice tight, right against Stiles’ neck. His fingers loosened and
tightened against Stiles’, and he shifted his other hand, sticky with cum, to grip Stiles’ hip almost painfully hard. “You’re mine.”

“And you’re mine,” Stiles confirmed, kissing at whatever part of Derek’s head he could reach in this position. “I say we celebrate by ordering tamales. Mrs. Calavera is probably going to explode when she realizes how colossally dumb we both are.” Also he—kind of had to apologize to her for yesterday. Throwing more money at her for phenomenal food seemed like a good way to do that.

“Not yet,” Derek grunted against his neck. “I don’t—not yet.”

He meant he didn’t want to move yet. That he was still trying to calm himself down from getting something he wanted. That he was just so fucking overwhelmed the mere idea of moving was too much.

Stiles felt like he could relate, because he never wanted to let go of Derek.

He just knew that his stomach would rebel before long, and even if Derek ignored his, Stiles wasn’t one to let his stomach go hungry.

It was a good thing he was Derek’s mate. Meant he could make sure he kept him fed for the rest of his life.

“I feel like it’s a good idea,” Derek insisted, following along with Laura while they headed for the main boardroom. “It’ll cost more, and be more work, but if we can find a way to manufacture it so that it keeps longer, I don’t see why we wouldn’t try to branch out more into pantry items. Canned deer chili or moose-meat spaghetti sauce.”

“I’m just worried that if we try and do something too bold, we’ll run into a deficit and have to increase the price of what we already have on the market to make up for it.” Laura turned to him, stabbing at the elevator’s ‘up’ button and sighing, raking one hand through her hair. “The whole point of our food is that it’s affordable for Supernaturals who are struggling to hold down jobs.”

“But,” Derek insisted, the elevator dinging and the doors opening, the siblings stepping into it while Derek hit the button for the seventh floor, “by that same logic, not everyone has a huge freezer. What if they can’t easily go to the store to get food, and it’d be easier for them to divvy the product up between freezer and pantry? Also, most of our frozen foods require a microwave, and we don’t know that everyone has access to one. Anything that would be pantry-related could technically be done in either the microwave or on the stove.”

“We have food that can be done in an oven,” Laura argued. “And I’m not disagreeing with you, I just want to make sure we’re doing what’s best for the community at large.”

“We could always do a survey,” Derek offered, the elevator stopping and the doors opening, both of them exiting and heading for the boardroom at the end of the corridor. “A poll or something. Have some voting ballots at the register of all our stores, or hire people temporarily to ask the customers their opinion as they’re shopping, or even heading in or out.”

“Would we have an accurate number though? If someone goes frequently, they could just skew the voting.”

“I’m sure there are ways around that.” Derek pushed the door open for Laura, motioning her in, then followed. They would have to shelf their conversation for later, since that wasn’t the purpose of their meeting today, but he hoped she’d think about it. It was a good idea, it would just require a lot of work, and careful planning. They definitely couldn’t just jump in half-cocked, Derek knew
that, but he wanted to make sure they helped the largest number of people possible.

Things weren’t getting any easier for their kind, that was for sure.

He moved after Laura around the large table, a few seats already occupied by other VPs who were chatting amicably as they waited. Peter was at the head of the table, holding pretzels in one hand, and using the other to pop one into his mouth at a time.

“I love it when Stiles is the one setting up our meetings,” Peter informed Laura when she sat down on his left. Derek took the empty seat beside her, smiling at the coffee, small wrapped sandwich, and chocolate croissant waiting for him.

“Why do you think I make him set them up?” Laura asked with a snort, pulling a cookie closer to herself and tearing off a piece of it. “You’re more tolerable when you’re in a good mood.”

Peter just smiled mischievously at her and sipped his own coffee.

Stiles had really outdone himself this time, though. The meeting had been called at the last minute, and most of the VPs had all had other meetings almost back to back before then. Derek could see there was coffee at every person’s seat, and various snacks laid out equidistant from one another in the middle of the long table, allowing people to grab what they wanted. Small pastries, cookies, fresh fruit.

Derek was the only one with an actual meal, but he knew that was more because Stiles was aware he definitely hadn’t eaten lunch, and he cared about his mate, so if Derek was going to be in a long last minute meeting, he was damn well going to eat something.

Stiles emerged from the small kitchenette attached to the boardroom, carrying a large pitcher of water, which he set in the middle of the table. Two more were lined up down the length of it, with glasses spread out for easy access if people needed water after they were done their coffees.

His boyfriend smiled at him from across the table, then moved aside when one of the last VPs arrived, moving to take the only empty seat left right where Stiles had been standing. He moved around the table, standing beside Peter, but looking at Laura.

“Did you need me to stay for this one, or are you good?”

“We’ll be good this time around, thank you Stiles.” She smiled at him.

He nodded once, then moved around behind her to head for the door. Derek twisted in his seat, catching his forearm and making him pause. He tugged gently on it, pulling Stiles down, and kissed him lightly. Stiles lingered for a few seconds, then broke away, but didn’t straighten, their faces still just inches apart.

“Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.” Stiles kissed him lightly again. “I’ll see you back downstairs later.”

“Mm. If I’m late, just head to the pub without me. Kira’s more tolerable when you’re there to entertain her while she’s waiting for me.”

“It’s because I’m the fun one,” Stiles teased, kissing him again, and then finally pulled away. Derek let his hand slide down Stiles’ wrist, over his hand, and then released him, watching him head for the door and exit the room.
“You two are so gross,” Laura grumbled, Derek turning back around with a soft smile on his face. He couldn’t help it, Stiles always made him smile.

“You’re just jealous he always bring me more food than he does you,” was his retort, unwrapping his sandwich and taking a huge bite of it right in her face. She retaliated by trying to steal with croissant, which he hastily moved out of her reach.

“I have to admit, I really wouldn’t mind an Executive Assistant trade every now and again,” the VP of Marketing said, leaning back in her seat and crossing her legs, holding her cup of coffee in her lap with both hands. “Stiles puts virtually all the other EAs in the building to shame. My own’s been trying to up her game because she’s worried I’ll convince Derek to trade with me and she’s scared Derek will fire her for not being nearly as good as Stiles is.”

“I don’t know why she thinks you’d ever succeed in convincing me to trade EAs with you,” Derek insisted back with a smile. The VP laughed and winked at him, then took a sip of her coffee.

It wasn’t the first time someone from another department had tried to poach Stiles, and Derek knew it was far from being the last. Even Laura had tried, a new spot opening up in HR due to the necessity of adding extra bodies. HR was Stiles’ original domain, and when Laura had offered him the job, Derek was positive he’d take it.

But, Stiles had just smiled, and said he rather liked being Derek’s EA, and that he didn’t have any immediate plans to change departments. Laura had been annoyed.

Derek had laughed.

Considering everyone now knew Stiles was Derek’s mate, it made things seem less... tense around the office. Rumours had stopped spreading, people were less afraid of Derek, and Derek himself knew that he definitely smiled more. It was almost like a weight had been lifted, like all those years of waiting had been worth it because he finally had the one person he wanted at his side.

Stiles and Jackson were still figuring things out with their place, since Stiles owned half the mortgage, but he’d moved in with Derek a few days ago. Jackson had tolerated it, but ordered Stiles to come back to their place at least once a week, and they had to have dinner together no less than five times a month.

Even though Stiles had rolled his eyes, he’d agreed, and Derek didn’t mind. He understood their dependency, even if Stiles didn’t admit it would be just as hard for him to be away from Jackson. It would be kind of like shared custody for the first year, at least, he was sure. But that was okay, because Derek knew Stiles was his mate, and that made it easier to let Jackson be possessive about who he saw as his brother.

Derek still couldn’t believe any of this had happened. Sometimes, it felt surreal. Stiles coming back into his life, being his assistant, being his boyfriend, being his mate. It was all he’d ever really wanted, to have Stiles in his life, to be with him.

Boyd had beamed at him when he’d found out. Kira had cried, and crushed him into a hug so tight it actually hurt. Laura already knew, but Cora had screamed and jumped like an idiot when he’d Skyped with her the day after it had happened. His mother had been calmer, only smiling demurely, but his father confirmed later that she’d celebrated the good news by cooking a huge dinner for them that they’d enjoyed on their patio overlooking the beach.

Stiles’ dad was visiting next month, excited and a bit nervous to be meeting him—officially—for the first time. Scott and Allison were coming back to Beacon Hills for Christmas, and had agreed...
to drive up to San Francisco for a few days to visit. Danny had said he’d drop by whenever he could, but that he would be dropping by, mostly to yell at Stiles for not having told him they were even dating. Apparently that progression in their relationship had slipped his mind, so Danny’s version of the story had gone from tentative friends to mates, and he was not pleased.

Derek smiled while he thought about everything. About his life, and the way it had turned out. About the boy in high school who’d always seemed so unattainable, high up on his pedestal, far out of Derek’s reach. If only he could go back in time to tell his younger self that all the pain and hardship he’d endured would be worth it, in the end.

Like Stiles had said, there was one universe where the nerd got to be with the jock, and apparently that universe was this one.

Peter stood from his seat, clearing his throat to get everyone’s attention. “Shall we begin?”

Derek turned to him, still trying to wipe the smile off his face, and thanked the universe for blasting his door right off its hinges with its aggressive knocking.

This was definitely the best universe to be in.

END.

End Notes

Come chill with me on Tumblr.

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