Electricity In the Contact

by ladyblahblah

Summary

In which Derek has been invited to the Greater Pacific Northwest Alpha Symposium (that's not what it's called, Stiles, stop saying that), and showing up unattached would mean an arranged marriage. When the rest of the pack objects, he agrees to let Stiles come along to pose as his mate. Derek is reasonably sure that he's not going to make it out of this weekend alive.

Notes

The first chapter of this story is a fill for queenofsnowflakes and mizzyfreak7, who won two of my fic fills for the Sterek Campaign auction to benefit Wolf Haven International. Fake!boyfriends is one of my favorite tropes of all time, and I'm so thrilled that they both agreed to let me show them what I could do with it. ^_^ Thank you both again, and I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the work for more notes.
“Touch. It is touch that is the deadliest enemy of chastity, loyalty, monogamy, gentility with its codes and conventions and restraints. By touch we are betrayed and betray others ... an accidental brushing of shoulders or touching of hands ... hands laid on shoulders in a gesture of comfort that lies like a thief, that takes, not gives, that wants, not offers, that awakes, not pacifies. When one flesh is waiting, there is electricity in the merest contact.”

--Wallace Stegner, Angle of Repose

“It looks like registration doesn't start until four-thirty, so we'll have some time to, you know. Settle into the room.” Stiles moves his head and shoulders in a twitchy sort of jerk that makes Derek's fingers tighten on the steering wheel as he fights the urge to wrap a hand around the back of his neck and hold him still. “I've never really gotten that. I mean, what does that even mean? Who the hell 'settles into' a hotel room? This isn't freaking Oregon Trail, we're not growing crops and hunting buffalo and worrying about warding off dysentery.”

“It's just an expression.”

“Oh really? Is it? I know it's an expression, dumbass,” Stiles shoots back, tapping and swiping at the screen of his iPad. “I'm just saying, it's a stupid one.”

“Fair enough.”

“So. Registration starts at four-thirty, and then there's 'informal mingling' in the atrium/pool area ... thing. Which granted, sounds excruciating, but we should probably at least make an appearance, right? Get your face in people's heads; emphasize the fact that you're there from the very beginning. Networking shit like that.”

“Nothing shit. Thus speaks the college graduate. I forget, what did you major in again? Advanced Slacking?”

“Fuck you, asshole, I had a 4.0.” Stiles glares down at the tablet in his lap and Derek watches his jaw ticking from the corner of his eye, counting silently. He makes it all the way to four before Stiles
adds, “And it was a double-major in Folklore and Criminology. You know that, don't be a dick.”

Derek feels the corners of his mouth twitching, and bites down on the urge to smile. “Sorry.”

“Whatsoever. So anyway, that looks like all that's on the agenda for tonight. The meetings and workshops and crap aren't until tomorrow and Saturday. Man, I still can't even believe that this is a thing. We're going to an alpha convention.”

“Yeah.” Derek shoots him a bemused look and slips into the passing lane to get around the minivan in front of them. “I know.”

“Yeah, but. An alpha convention. A convention of alphas.” Stiles is staring at Derek like he's willing him to understand. “Alpha werewolves.”

“I know. Are you under the impression that I've managed to forget what I am? Do you have some reason to believe I've suffered a debilitating blow to the head recently?”

“You—no. Too easy.” Stiles slumps back into his seat with a heavy sigh. “My life is weird.”

Derek snorts. “I'd have thought you'd be used to that by now.”

“Dude, you don't just get used to werewolves. Okay? I can tell you that from legitimate firsthand experience, going on eight years now. It's like anglerfish; you know they exist, but they don't ever get any less freakin' unnerving.” He scrolls down the screen again with a quick swipe of his fingers. “I've gotta hand it to whoever put this program together, though, they're like a Jedi master of doublespeak. If I didn't know we were heading to the Greater Pacific Northwest Alpha Symposium —”

“For the last time, that's not what it's called, stop calling it that.”

“I'm just saying, I'd never know it just by looking at the schedule! It sounds like your average, run-of-the-mill, so-boring-I-might-actually-die generic business conference. Check this out. Efficient Resource Utilization; Tactical Leadership and Conflict Dispute; Managing—”
“I've read the schedule, Stiles,” Derek snaps.

“I know! I'm just—” Stiles breaks off on a sigh, scrubbing a hand over his face. “I know. Sorry. I'm just . . . sort of nervous, I guess.”

“This was your idea.” Derek glares out at the road, hands tightening on the wheel. “I could've gone alone.”

“Oh, yeah, that's a great idea. You go alone, some alpha looking to expand their territory realizes you don't have a mate, and you end up trapped in a loveless political marriage, because the pack may be improving, but there's no way in hell we can take on anyone as established as you keep saying most of these people will be.”

“You're making it sound more dramatic than it actually is. Arrangements like that really aren't as uncommon as you'd think, and it's not like there's anyone . . .” He bites down on the rest of that sentence, wishing he could shift into a higher gear; wishing he had something, anything active to do instead of just sitting there like an idiot. “I don't see why it matters to you one way or the other.”

“What, you mean aside from the fact that whoever you got paired off with would be pack, and we already have enough to deal with trying to make the people we already have get along most of the time?”

Stiles gives an irritated huff, glaring through the windshield at the road ahead. His fingers are playing absently with the sleeve of his jacket now—Derek's jacket, settled around his shoulders and wrapping Stiles in Derek's scent while the smell of Stiles's skin works its way into the leather. After three days Derek thinks he should be used to it by now. He's not.

“Blame Scott.”

“What?” It's more of a struggle than Derek would like to admit to pull his attention back to the conversation. Luckily Stiles doesn't seem to be expecting him to keep up and simply shrugs, tucking the iPad back into its case.

“Don't get me wrong, I think pragmatism is great.”

“Yeah,” Derek snorts. “I know.”
“Do you want an answer to your question, or do you wanna be a smart ass?”

“Both.”

Stiles chokes out a surprised laugh that makes Derek have to fight to keep from grinning back. “Well, stop thinking you can hold a candle to my wit and try to remember that I'm doing you a favor here. Because none of us want some stranger being, like, alpha-by-proxy or something—”

“That's not exactly how it—”

“You should get the choice, okay?” Stiles shifts his shoulders, staring determinedly out the window. “Maybe you're not into the whole happily-ever-after soulmate thing Scott and Allison are working on; maybe you'd be completely fine with marrying a total stranger to solidify your power-base or whatever; but if that's what you want, it should still be your choice. Not something you got roped into because you were on the wrong side of a power match.” He shrugs again. “That's it. That's why I'm doing this.”

It's a hard thing to keep from touching him, then; Derek's hand is already lifting from the wheel, fingers tingling in anticipation of the feel of Stiles's skin, but he makes himself drop it to rest on the console between them instead. The line is too blurry now between what he wants and what's appropriate, and the situation they're heading into is already too ripe with opportunity for him to take advantage. No need to start out already having fucked things up.

“Thank you,” he says instead, surprised to find Stiles staring at him in blatant frustration when he glances over. “What?”

“See, that's what's making me nervous.”

Derek blinks. “Me saying 'thank you'?”

“No. Well, yeah, a little; it still makes me worry you've been replaced with a pod person or something. But I'm talking about this.”

Stiles has always been faster than Derek gives him credit for, and his fingers are sliding against
Derek's hand resting between them before Derek realizes what he's doing. It's nothing, really—just a quick brush of fingertips against the back of his hand, sliding over his knuckles—but he finds himself twitching, an aborted jerk of his hand that has Stiles groaning in annoyance.

“That! Right there! You're the one who said that sharing clothes wouldn't be enough to fool an entire hotel full of werewolves.”

“I know.” He'd been trying to talk Stiles out of the idea at the time. Clearly he should've tried harder.

“You said there'd have to be physical contact pretty much on the regular.”

“I know.”

“Okay, well, that's gonna be a little hard to pull off if you're swooning like a Victorian maiden every time I try to hold your hand.”

By rights, the look Derek sends his way should have Stiles dropping stone dead. “I don't swoon,” he growls.

“Oh, my mistake. You just try to flee in horror; much more manly.” Stiles runs a hand through his hair, yanking briefly at the strands between his fingers while his jaw clenches. “Is it really going to kill you to pretend you're into me? I've seen you do it before with other people, I know you can. I'm not asking for a marriage proposal here, I just . . . I can't carry this on my own, Derek.”

“This was a bad idea.”

“Are you kidding me? This was a terrible idea.” A little bit of the tension eases out of Stiles's face, and a smile starts to tug at the corners of his mouth. “But we're not exactly spoiled for choice here. Just pretend I'm . . . shit, what was her name? Maurissa? Even I could smell the sex on you two, and that lasted for like a month. We just need three days. C'mon.” He flutters his eyelashes and pouts his lips in an over-the-top—but still, Derek can admit, more or less accurate—imitation of Maurissa's come-hither look. “You know you want this,” he rasps out in a husky contralto, and Derek nearly bites a hole in his own lip trying not to laugh.

“You look ridiculous.”
“I look alluring,” Stiles breathes, still pouting in Derek's general direction. “Don't fight it, baby, just—come on, be seduced, damn it,” he gripes in his normal voice again.

“You're an idiot.”

“I'm smarter than you could ever hope to be.” Stiles nudges his shoulder, grinning widely. “You're more relaxed now, aren't you? That's what we need! For you to get out of your head a little bit, stop overthinking shit, and try to have some fun with this.”

“Fun.” Derek lifts a disbelieving eyebrow. “Stiles, we're about to try to convince a hotel full of alpha werewolves that this transparently fake relationship is the real deal. And, let's not forget, hoping that if they find out otherwise, they won't be insulted enough to launch an attack on our territory.”

“Exactly! What's not fun about that?”

“You mean besides everything?”

“Killjoy. Oh, hey.” Stiles sits forward in his seat, zeroing in on the sign they're about to pass. “There's a rest stop up ahead; get off at the next exit, I have to pee.”

“Again?”

“I know, right? It's almost like it's a bodily function that I have to deal with on a semi-regular basis. Seriously though, how have you not needed a bathroom break yet?”

“Superior physiology,” Derek mutters, but he downshifts and slows as they approach the exit.

“Ha ha, cute. I know it's not a werewolf thing, because Scott's bladder's still the size of a grape.” He eyes Derek suspiciously. “You don't have one of those Stadium Pal things on, do you?”

“Sta—no, you know what? I can tell just by your voice that I don't want to know.” There's only one other car in the lot when they pull into the rest area, and Derek pulls into a space as close to the
restrooms as possible. “Hurry up.”

“You seriously don't have to go?” Stiles asks, opening the door while he's still fumbling with his seatbelt.

“No. I might stretch my legs a little, though.”

“That's the spirit! I'm gonna see if there's a vending machine; you like those crappy chocolate cupcake things, right?”

“I'm really not—”

“I'll grab you some cupcakes!” Stiles calls over his shoulder as he slips out of the car, setting off towards the low building at a loping jog.

“Sure,” Derek says on a sigh, and climbs out of the car after him.

It's cold but not freezing, and overcast but dry, which Derek is willing to accept as a minor miracle. He doesn't even want to think about what this trip would be like with wet roads on top of everything else.

Three days, he reminds himself, taking a deep breath of the fresh air as he walks out over the grass. Just three days, and then everything will be back to normal.

He can still feel the ghost of Stiles's touch against his hand. He scrubs irritably at the skin there, trying to banish the feeling and regain his equilibrium. It's been too long since he's had someone touch him like that; far too long for him to be able to brush it off as quickly as he needs to. Derek hates that it feels like so much, that it matters to him. Just a simple touch without violence or sex or need behind it, given with no thought behind it but a desire for contact. For reassurance, and comfort, and connection.

That's the problem, though, he reminds himself: none of that is strictly true, after all. It would be all too easy to let himself believe it, to fool himself into thinking that Stiles is touching him because he wants to. Even now, it's a struggle to remember that it took Lydia a full two hours to convince Stiles to attend this conference with Derek in the first place, though the idea of passing one of them off as Derek's mate had been Stiles's in the first place. Too easy to forget that in the nearly eight years
they’ve known each other, Stiles has never given any indication that he’d be interested in anything more than getting into Derek’s pants. And though there may have been a time when Derek would’ve taken that gladly, and counted himself grateful to have someone willing to give him even that much, at some point it ceased to be enough.

He misses Laura; it’s a sudden wave of grief and loss that hits so hard he almost loses his footing in the force of it. Even after all this time it still happens like this sometimes, where her loss feels as fresh as it had the night he’d buried her. He misses her scent and her warmth, the way she’d haul him in for a hug when she was happy or wrestle him to the ground when she was pissed off; the way she touched him constantly, even if it was only the quick clap of her hand around his shoulder. He was her brother, her beta, and she never let him forget that he belonged. When he was younger, Derek had never considered how hard it might be to be on the other side of that—to walk the line between comfort and authority, giving one while maintaining the other. He knows now, though, and though his betas have never felt compelled to reciprocate, he takes some small amount of comfort from the fact that it’s been years since he’s given them cause to doubt that he cares about them.

Laura would have done better. But Laura is gone, and he doesn’t doubt for a moment that she’ll find a way to haunt his ass if he does any less than his absolute best for his pack.

Derek stopped hoping for a happy ending for his own sake a long time ago, but if the pack is dead set against a new mommy, he’s just going to have to suck it up and do his best to make this ridiculous plan work. It’s why he agreed to it in the first place, after all, and it’s not as though anything has changed.

Pack comes first. Always.

“They didn’t have cupcakes,” he hears, and turns to see Stiles making his way down the path, waving a candy bar in the air, “so I got you a Snickers. The machine is practically wiped out; I almost called the number on that little sticker on the side to report it as an issue. I mean, what the hell kind of vending machine doesn’t even have Reese’s?” Stiles tosses the candy bar and Derek catches it easily. “It’s a travesty, is what it is.”

Derek doesn’t have time to think of an adequate response to that before Stiles marches straight into Derek’s personal space, wraps a hand around the back of his neck, and brings their mouths together in a sudden kiss.

Stiles’s lips are soft and warm, firm and certain against Derek’s. The kiss feels welcoming, friendly; almost casual, as if this is something that they do every day and not something that has Derek’s heart trying to beat its way through his chest. His free hand opens and closes, unsure, but Stiles is already pulling away with a pair of quick parting pecks to Derek’s lips, leaning back again with a soft laugh. His eyes are bright, his cheeks faintly flushed, though from the kiss or from the cold Derek honestly
couldn't say. The hair at his temples is damp, as if he splashed his face with water while he was washing his hands, and the sight of it feels oddly intimate.

Derek opens his mouth to speak and realizes that he has no idea what to say.

“See?” Stiles takes another half-step back, smiling as he makes an expansive gesture. “The world didn't end. Neither of us dropped dead. I'm not saying we have make out in front of a room full of werewolves, but c'mon, a little bit of physical contact isn't really that big a deal, is it?”

“No.” Derek swallows, trying to ignore the way that he can smell their scents mingling, how he can still taste Stiles on his lips. He reaches out and wraps an arm around Stiles's shoulders, refusing to react to the feeling of an arm sliding around his back in return. “You're right; I just need to get used to this.”

“Hey, you and me?” Stiles nudges against his side, grinning. “We're master bullshitters. If anyone can pull this off, it's us.” He pulls away and heads towards the passenger side of the car. “You ready to go?”

“Yeah.” Derek takes a deep breath. “I'm good.”

Stiles has his phone out by the time Derek slides behind the wheel. “Scott's complaining again about not being able to take Allison,” he says, waving his phone so that Derek catches a glimpse of the texting screen.

“He's the one who decided to marry a hunter,” Derek says flatly. He takes just a moment to enjoy the purr of the engine before he shifts the car into gear. “He knew there'd be consequences when he did that.”

“I don't know if you've noticed, but Scott isn't too good at understanding consequences when he doesn't think he did anything wrong. As far as he's concerned, marrying Allison should've netted him nothing but sunshine and puppies.”

“And I'm sure it will, as long as she stays away from the big gathering of powerful werewolves who all know her family's reputation.”

“I'm not texting that back, it'll take forever. 'Derek says suck it up.' There.”
"You did not just—Jesus Christ, Stiles. Are you trying to get him to go back to hating me?"

"Dude, you are severely overestimating the number of fucks Scott gives about your opinion. It'll be fine."

"I'm going to remind you that you said that the next time he says you guys should just let me die."

"Oh come on, he hardly ever does that anymore, lighten up." Stiles shoves lightly at his shoulder again, and Derek counts it as a personal triumph that he neither flinches away nor leans into the touch.

"You know, we haven't really talked too much about this." Derek shifts lanes, letting himself focus on that for a moment instead of the conversation he's about to instigate. "What things are going to be like this weekend. We should probably . . ."

"Set up some ground rules," Stiles finishes. "Right? Before we have to just, like." He waves a hand. "Jump on in."

"Yes." Derek glances over and finds Stiles staring straight ahead, a faint flush still visible on his cheeks. "You know we're going to have to share a bed while we're there."

"Yeah. Appearances; probably wouldn't look good to book a room with two beds if we're supposed to be in deep, werewolfy love." Stiles clears his throat. "But you know, I could sleep on the couch, or even on the floor if you—"

"No, you can't," Derek interrupts. "For one thing, we both know damn well you'd bitch so much I'd let you have the bed just to shut you up."

"True," Stiles admits, and Derek can hear the smile in his voice.

"But I wasn't kidding about the importance of scent, Stiles. We can't half-ass this."
“Are you sure you don't want to—no, okay, I get it, not the right time to mock your choice of words there. Okay, so. Sleeping together. In the most literal sense. No problem.”

“We don't have to be . . . clothing isn't going to get in the way, scent-wise, so you don't have to worry about that.” Derek glances at the door handle, seriously considering the benefits of flinging himself out of the moving car rather than continue. “But there will have to be contact.”

“Contact. Right.” Stiles's voice sounds faintly strangled. “Like . . . cuddling?”

“I swear, Stiles, if you can't take this seriously—”

“I'm being serious! Totally serious! I just want to know what to expect.”

Derek clenches his jaw so hard his teeth start to grind together. “Yes, all right? We're going to have to fucking cuddle.”

“Okay, I don't want you to think I'm not taking this seriously here, but oh my god, hearing you say that was even better than I thought it would be.” Stiles holds up his hands when Derek glares at him, the smile already fading from his face. “That said, ground rule number one: you are absolutely never to comment on any, uh . . . consequences of said contact. I'm a young, healthy guy, okay? And certain reactions are only natural, especially when I first wake up, so I don't wanna hear any bitching or snarking from you. Got it? It doesn't mean anything, it's just . . . nature.”

“Fair enough.” Derek takes a deep breath. “I'm going to have to act like I have the right to touch you. When we're in public.”

“Well, yeah. Same goes for me, I'd guess.”

“That would probably help sell the idea that I'm not holding you hostage or something, yeah,” Derek says dryly. “If I make you uncomfortable, though . . .” He stalls out, suddenly unsure, and horribly aware that they really didn't think this through.

“Sourwolf.” Stiles shrugs when Derek raises a questioning eyebrow. “I called you that, once. It was back when we first met; don't feel weird for not remembering, it's not like—”
“I remember,” Derek says. There’s not much about that night that he doesn’t remember, really; it’s hard to forget nearly dying. “But what does that have to do with anything?”

“I was just thinking, I could call you that. Like a safeword. It sounds enough like an obnoxiously cute nickname that it'll help sell the whole 'newlyweds' vibe we're going for, and we won't blow our cover.”

“Huh.” Derek considers that for a moment. “All right.”

“What about you?” Stiles asks, and Derek frowns.

“What about me?”

“I mean, what's your word gonna be? If you want me to back off?”

“I . . .” He shakes his head. “I'll be fine.”

“Come on, man, this is a two-way street here. I don't want you suffering through something that skeeves you out just because you're worried about blowing our cover. So pick something, or I swear to god I'll call this whole thing off right now and catch a bus back from Seattle.”

“You're making this a bigger deal than it has to be.”

“Oh my god, would you just pick a fucking word already?”

“Sheriff.” Derek can't help but smirk at the look of thinly-veiled horror on Stiles's face. “How's that?”

“Well, that definitely ought to kill the mood,” Stiles mutters. “Okay.”

His fingers are tapping out a nervous rhythm on his knee, and Derek does his best to steady himself before he reaches out and stills them. Stiles looks up, surprised, and a brilliant smile breaks across his face.
“We’re totally going to be able to pull this off.”

“Yeah.” Derek lets Stiles lace their fingers together, their hands resting palm-to-palm against his leg. “Piece of cake.”
Chapter Notes

2000 words of this chapter are dedicated to homoeroticismforthewin, who won my services in the Sterek Campaign Fanfic Auction.

In which Derek doesn't understand emotions, even when he's actively having them. Maybe especially then.

Please take note that the lovely Julie took my ridiculous concept of Stiles coming up with a song to taunt Derek with and MADE IT AN ACTUAL THING. You should all go listen to it because it is a thing of majestic beauty and will make your life at least 79% better.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Here are your room keys.” The woman behind the counter has unremarkable brown hair and a pleasant smile. Her name tag reads ‘Ann’ in neat, etched letters; she slides a small envelope across to them, and Stiles takes it with a grin. “Your room is booked up through Sunday; checkout ends at eleven. Enjoy your stay, and feel free to call down if you need anything at all.”

“Thanks.” Stiles takes the envelope and Derek's credit card, sitting like a miniature black hole against the earth-toned marble. He'd almost forgotten it was sitting there. “Come on, hon; let's get going. Long drive,” he stage-whispers to Ann, who answers with the polite, understanding smile of someone who's really not being paid enough to give a shit.

Derek lets Stiles settle a hand between his shoulder blades and guide him towards the bank of elevators. He imagines it probably looks sweet, from an outside perspective—the sort of thoughtless, affectionate gesture that comes with a relationship of long standing—but he can feel the tips of Stiles's fingers pressed a little too hard against his back, like he's readying himself to hold Derek back at a moment's notice. It's good. Grounding. Derek takes a deep breath, trying not to flinch. Stiles, thank god, manages to keep quiet until the elevator doors slide closed behind them.

“Dude, what's wrong? You look like you're about to . . . I don't even know. Hulk out, or something, except you sort of also look like you might throw up.” Stiles casts a wary glance his way. He looks like he's seriously debating whether or not to take a cautionary step back, but his hand stays put on Derek's back. “Warn me if you're gonna puke, okay?”

“I'm not—” Derek takes another deep breath. Nerves are making Stiles begin to sweat a little, and the scent of it is quickly filling the car. It helps. “I didn't realize how difficult it would be. Feeling so
many other alphas here all at once; it's . . . an adjustment.”

“Shit. Shit.” A stream of curses continues to fall from Stiles's lips; Derek is reluctantly impressed.
“We still have to register. Do you want me to just—”

“No.” The doors slide open with a quiet ping, and Derek takes one last gulp of the Stiles-scented air.
“I can't hide away in the room. You can be there, but I'm the one who has to make an appearance.”

“Why the hell would they . . . oh.” Stiles follows him into the hallway, looking like he wants to start
cursing again. “I swear to god,” he hisses under his breath, “alphas and their freaking tests.”

“I don't know why you're surprised; this entire weekend is equal parts pissing contest and power
grab. Most of the attendees aren't going to be above playing dirty.” Derek lets Stiles pull ahead, since
he's the one with the key. Also the one who was paying attention when they got their room number.
“You'd better get used to it now.”

“You'd better get used to it. I know I've never been to one of these things before, but I'm still willing
to bet that getting into a territorial throw-down is considered bad form.”

“I'll be better once we get to the room.” He moves a little bit closer, trying to get another hit of
Stiles's scent. It's never been something he's considered particularly soothing before, but he's more
than willing to cling to any small bit of familiarity if it helps him keep control. “Once I have
something that feels like my own territory.”

“Sure. Okay. We should be right around . . .” They turn a corner and Stiles gives a victorious little
crow, practically leaping to the first door on their right. “Here it is, home sweet home, in a temporary,
bullshit sort of way.” He fumbles with the keycard until the light flashes green and shoulders his way
through the door, spreading his arms wide. “All this is yours. Go ahead, do whatever you've gotta do
to stake your claim or whatever. Except this side of the bed,” he adds, dropping his bag on the floor
and flinging himself onto the side of the mattress closest to the window, “because I'm calling dibs.”

“That's fine.” Derek would rather have the side closer to the door, anyway.

He watches Stiles bounce up again, darting around the room and fiddling with everything he can get
his hands on. “I mean it, Derek, go nuts,” he says. “I promise, I won't even mock you. And this is a
one-time-only offer, so you'd better take advantage of it while you can.”
Derek opens his mouth. Closes it again.

“Good point.”

He drops his own bag by the dresser and drops into a sprawl across the wide bed. The mattress is firm but giving, the down comforter settling pleasantly beneath his weight. It's been a long time since he's had anything this nice for himself, since he's allowed himself a pleasure as simple and selfish as a bed designed to make you never want to leave it. Derek feels himself relaxing even before the faint trace of Stiles's scent on the pillow hits him; when it does he can actually feel the tension bleeding away, and he lets out a low, relieved groan.

There's a clatter from across the room, and when he wrenches his eyes open he sees Stiles fumbling to set the miniature coffeemaker upright again.

“Jeez, dude, does that thing have Magic Fingers or something?” Stiles asks, looking torn between shock and laughter. He turns away to straighten the little basket of teas and sugar packets while Derek keeps his gaze determinedly averted from his hands. “I'm gonna check out the bathroom, try to keep things PG in here, okay?”

“What happened to foregoing the mockery?” Derek demands.

“Oh come on, we both knew that wasn't gonna last.”

Derek allows himself another moment to simply lie there, letting his mind wander briefly to what it will be like to share this bed with someone; to wake up curled around a warm body, or to find one draped over him maybe, soft with sleep under Derek's hands, flushed and stirring and—

He forces himself to his feet and begins to wander the room as well, running his hands over things at random—the coffeemaker, the television, the curtains. It's not the first time he's wondered if Stiles realizes how very wolf-like he seems at times, how much his behavior has been influenced by the company he keeps. There's a flutter in his stomach at the thought of Stiles marking his claim on the room they're sharing, and Derek tamps it down as best he can. Stiles soaks up mannerisms like a sponge sometimes; it's hardly surprising that he's picked up a behavioral quirk or two from Scott and the rest of the pack, but it doesn't mean—

Anything. It doesn't mean anything.
“Dude!” he hears Stiles call from the bathroom, a moment before Stiles appears in the doorway with a delighted grin on his face. “There’s a Jacuzzi. Lydia is the freakin’ best.”

Derek rolls his eyes. “Just stay out of the minibar; that's all I ask.”

“No problem. I packed snacks, and according to the schedule tonight's shindig is open-bar.” He pauses, one hand braced against the doorframe. “Unless you need me to be, like, the designated driver. Without the driving. Designated sober person who'll keep you from accidentally starting an inter-pack incident?”

“Right,” Derek snorts. He picks up his bag and starts unloading his clothes into one of the dresser drawers. “Because when I think of you, I think diplomacy.”

“Ow.” Stiles lays a hand over his heart. “Hurtful. Hold up, are you really unpacking? Is this, like, a territory thing? Are you nesting?”

“I lived out of suitcases for two years. I'm not exactly eager to relive the experience.”

“Right. Yeah. I . . . okay, you might have a point about the diplomacy thing. Sorry.”

“Forget it.” Derek huffs out a laugh and watches Stiles's eyes crinkle in pleasure. “I'm not going to be drinking tonight anyway; if you want to indulge, feel free.”

“See, that's what a healthy marriage is all about!” Stiles claps him on the shoulder as he edges past for his own stuff, flinching a little when he retrieves the hanging bag from where it's crumpled on the floor. “Give and take. So.” He shoots Derek a critical look. “You feeling better? You look less like you're contemplating some sort of mass murder/suicide pact.”

“I'm fine.” Derek pauses, testing the assertion, and nods. “It just hit me harder than I expected.”

“Uh huh. And after we leave this room?” Stiles asks shrewdly. “You're not gonna flip out again as soon as you set foot outside your den, are you?”

“Cute.” Derek glares. His jaw twitches for a moment; he doesn't want to say what's coming next, but
he doesn't have a whole lot of choice. “Just stay close.”

“Hey.” Stiles shoves the bag into the closet with a clatter of the hanger and crosses the room again to wrap a hand around the back of Derek's neck. “That's the deal, right? Sorry, is this okay? I guess that was sort of a . . . you know.” He lets go, shrugging. “Relationshippy kind of thing to do, there.”

“Stop making up words,” Derek grouses. The nape of his neck is still tingling; Stiles's fingers were surprisingly cool. “And you don't have to pretend when we're in here.” He steps back. “We shouldn't. Call it another ground rule.”

“That . . . makes sense. Sure.” Stiles rubs his palms against his thighs and starts to shrug out of Derek's leather jacket. “It's a quarter to five, so if you're good to go we should get changed and head down.”

“Fine.”

Derek pulls one of his shirts out of the drawer before stripping off the sweater and t-shirt he's wearing in a single move. He tosses the t-shirt to Stiles, who catches it and starts stripping down as well. Derek turns his attention to the simple faded-green henley he's pulling on; by the time he looks back up Stiles is decent again, tugging at the lapels of his blazer. It's the same charcoal number that he's had since high school, Derek would bet, the one he hadn't worn for nearly a year after Peter had told him that the color made his skin positively glow.

“So, the way I see it,” Stiles is saying as Derek slips into his own jacket, “underhanded tactics be damned, you've got an advantage going into this thing. You and Scott both.” He pauses for a moment, worry overtaking his face. “Oh, shit, Scott. He didn't even have anyone with him when he got here; what if he—”

“I'm sure he's fine,” Derek assures him. “I warned him what it would be like, having this many alphas in this small a space. And it's nothing he hasn't felt before on a smaller scale.”

“Yeah, but you didn't even know how bad it would be.”

“He'd be able to handle it better than I did.” He hates admitting it, but it's true. “Scott's never been too territorial.”

“True. That's true.” The worry on Stiles's face is starting to ease; Derek can practically see the gears
in his head turning as he thinks it over. “I mean, he started out as an alpha in someone else's territory; he'll be fine. Which—my point!” His eyes snap back to Derek's as he jabs a finger at him. “You guys deal with sharing space with another alpha every damn day; you're used to it.”

“Not that used to it,” Derek grumbles.

“Okay, yeah, but still doing better than, I'm gonna guess, about ninety percent of the people here. Just try to remember.” Stiles throws a companionable arm around Derek's shoulders as he leads him from the room. “You know how to do this.”

He does. Stiles is right: the fact that he and Scott work together on a semi-regular basis is a definite advantage, even if they're still at each other's throats more often than not. That part, at least, is mainly metaphorical these days, and right now he'll take every last edge he can get. When they step out into the hallway the sense of other alphas nearby still feels like an assault, but it's manageable this time. The weight of Stiles's arm around his shoulders helps hold him steady, makes his breath come easier.

“So, I'm not sure what's appropriate here.” Stiles drops his arm when they reach the elevators again; Derek braces himself, but his calm doesn't waver. “I mean, aside from that couple down in Sacramento, my experience with this stuff is pretty much limited to Scott and Allison, and Erica and Boyd.” He laughs a little as the doors open and they step inside. “Which, considering I'm pretty sure we all forgot what 'boundaries' are about five years back, might not be the most helpful sample group.”

“We understand boundaries just fi—”

“Erica stuck her hand down Boyd's pants in front of all of us last week,” Stiles interrupts. “And the weird part was that it didn't even seem weird to me until I thought about it like three days later.”

Derek can't help but huff out a laugh at that, and Stiles grins.

“Anyway, my point,” he continues. “When is PDA gonna cross over into 'trying too hard' territory? By non-pack werewolf standards, I mean?”

“You're overthinking this.”

“You know what, let's go ahead and take a moment for how utterly unsurprising that is. Okay,
The elevator eases to a halt, and Derek reaches out to rub his hand over the back of Stiles's head, scratching blunt fingernails over his scalp. He watches Stiles's eyes droop, feels him lean subtly into the touch, before Derek gives him a light shove and earns an indignant squawk.

“Just follow my lead,” he grins, and strolls into the lobby.

“Yeah, that'll happen,” Stiles mutters behind him, but he scrambles to catch up nevertheless.

It's easier than Derek had anticipated to pull the mask back on. He remembers what it was like, those first couple of years after Peter's death: the constant struggle to project an aura of composure, a sense of control. A strong alpha means security. His mother's words hadn't been aimed at him, but they've never faded from his mind. He hears them again now as his back straightens and his shoulders drop, as he cloaks himself in the certainty of his authority.

“Everybody do the Alpha Strut, say he-e-e-ey,” Stiles sings under his breath, and Derek has to pause before he stumbles.

“Am I going to have to mind-wipe that stupid song out of your head?” he asks through gritted teeth.

“Aww, don't sulk, sweetcheeks,” Stiles smirks back at him. “You know I like the way you walk.”

The fact that Derek didn't expect the slap on the ass that punctuates that declaration is, he decides, a worrying sign.

Registration is surprisingly painless. A sign in the lobby directs them to the atrium and the table that's been set up just inside, covered with a blood-red tablecloth and neat rows of badges. There's a small group of people already hovering in the area, chatting with each other or giving their names to the couple behind the table. The pretty middle-aged woman—Cecily Gunderson; Redmond, Washington pack, according to her badge—hands over a folder with the conference logo printed on the front, and Stiles takes it while Derek signs them in, doing his best to ignore the way his jacket clings to his skin in the humid heat coming off of the pool.

“Here.” Derek turns towards Stiles in time to have him drape something around his neck. His badge settles just below his sternum, and Stiles smooths a hand down the lanyard to make sure it's lying properly. “Now you're all tagged and ready to go. Maybe I should put my number on the back, just
in case you get lost?”

“Sure.” There's an uptick in tension around them; Derek reaches out to make an entirely unnecessary adjustment to Stiles's collar, waiting until Stiles's eyes meet his. “Or we could just save time and put the sheriff's number on there instead.”

Stiles starts to pull his hand back immediately, but Derek snags his fingers and gives them a reassuring squeeze, painfully aware of the eyes trained on them. With a deep breath, Stiles musters up a smile.

“We can skip the phone numbers, I guess. Probably for the best, if—Scott! Hey, man.”

They move away from the table as Scott approaches, clearing the way for the other guests and meeting him halfway as he comes in from the lobby. Their hands are still linked between them; Derek sees the frown that flits over Scott's face when he notices. Stiles must see it too, but he doesn't pull his hand away.

“You got in before us, didn't you?” Stiles asks when they reach each other. “I thought you'd have been down here first thing.”

“I was talking to Allison.” Scott glances at their hands again, opens his mouth; glances at the growing crowd milling around them, and closes it again on a sigh. “I'm gonna sign in, and then we can eat. Are you guys hungry?”

“Oh my god, yes,” Stiles groans. “Turns out, those vending machine trail mix packs? Not as filling as you might hope.”

“You didn't say you were hungry,” Derek says with a frown, ignoring the look Scott shoots him as he moves past them to the registration table. “We could've stopped for something.”

“It's fine.” The fingers twined with Derek's give a quick, gentle squeeze. “I knew we'd be eating when we got here, I wasn't in a huge hurry. You know I'm not afraid to make it obnoxiously clear when I want something.”

“No.” Derek takes a step back, letting their hands slide apart. “You're not. You and Scott go ahead and grab a table; I need to use the bathroom.”
“Hah! I knew you'd have to give in to the call of nature eventually. You should've gone before we left the room, though; our bathroom is swank. All right,” he waves Derek off. “Go take care of business, we'll meet you in the lounge area over there.”

The bathroom that Derek finds is empty; when he's finished, he turns the water on as hot as it will go and scrubs at his hands until the ghost of Stiles's touch is washed away.

He finds Stiles and Scott sitting at a small table, sprawled in a pair of woven chairs adorned with bright orange cushions. Stiles looks up as Derek walks over and offers a smile that doesn't quite reach his eyes, gesturing at the chair beside him. It's edged back against the plant-lined wrought iron fence that separates the lounge from the swimming pool; it's the most defensible position possible in a space this open, and Derek gives his shoulder a grateful squeeze as he slips past him.

“We went ahead and ordered iced tea all around; figured there was no point paying for alcohol when we don't have to, right? We've also got cheese dip coming.” Stiles says, eyes darting around like he's keeping an eye out for the waiter. Then he leans in a little closer on the pretext of reaching for the salt shaker, and murmurs, “So earlier, that was about the dog tag crack, right? Not the touching? For future reference, so I can keep from fucking up again.”

“Yes. The touching was... it was fine.” Derek reaches out and rests his fingertips against the back of Stiles's hand to prove it—and partially, he'll admit, because the way Stiles is fiddling with the sugar packets now is driving him up the wall. Stiles smiles a little easier and turns his hand so that Derek's fingers are brushing against the thin, delicate skin of his inner wrist.

“No more dog jokes, then.” Stiles nods. “Roger.”

“Is it really that big a deal?” Scott asks, and Derek just barely manages to keep from startling at the sudden reminder that he's still at the table with them. “I mean it's—” He cuts off when the waitress appears with their drinks, offering her a smile that makes her beam back at him, and she doesn't look put-out in the least when he tells her they're going to need a few more minutes before ordering. “It's just a joke,” he finishes once she's left again. “You know Stiles, you know he didn't mean anything by it.” There's a familiar confrontational set to his jaw as he stares Derek down. “I don't mind when Allison says stuff like that to me; it's just teasing, the way that couples do. Why's it a big deal?”

“Because some of us grew up knowing that if people found out what we were, we'd get hunted down like animals,” Derek says quietly, unable to keep the hint of a snarl out of his voice. “It might not bother you, but those of us who were born instead of bitten have already heard enough of that sort of thing. All right?”
Scott looks torn between understanding and defiance. “You never said it bothered you before.”

“This isn't just about me, okay? We need to be making a good impression, as a pack.”

“Does that mean we get to slap you down too, if you start being an asshole?” Stiles asks, simpering and lifting Derek's hand in his. “Pookiebear.”

“Damn it, Stiles, don't make me safeword you twice in under an hour."

“Oh, come on.” Scott eyes them balefully, looking physically pained now. “Do you have to keep . . .” He gestures at their hands again. “That? Doing that?”

“We talked about this, remember?” Stiles fixes him with a stare that stops just shy of desperate. “You said you were cool with it, because everyone deserves the chance to choose their own relationship, right?”

“I . . .” Scott heaves a heavy sigh and slumps down in his chair. “Yeah.”

“Okay, so stop being a tool and suck it up. Anyway, it's not like you have any room to talk after all the canoodling I've had to watch you and Allison do over the years.”

“Why are we friends again?”

“Because I shared my pudding cup with you back in second grade. The pudding cup bond isn't easily broken.” Stiles lets go of Derek's hand and opens the menu resting in front of him. “I think I'm in the mood for a burger, how about you guys?”

“Canoodling?” Derek lifts an eyebrow at him as he opens his own menu. “Really?”

“Now, lovemuffin, it's no fair trying to order dessert first.” Stiles breaks down into gales of laughter at the unamused looks that Derek and Scott both send his way. “Oh man, your faces. Totally worth it.”
“Now who's being an asshole,” Scott mutters, and Stiles leers across the table at him.

“Jealous, huh? Don't worry, I'm sure we can work something out since the two of you are so close.”

Derek doesn't know where the growl comes from; instinct, if he had to say, and he knew this whole charade was a terrible idea from the very beginning. Scott and Stiles are both staring at him now, the echo of his warning snarl still hanging in the air between them.

It's Scott who starts to laugh first, though he's barely begun when Stiles's face begins to crumble into matching hysterics. They're both still going, breathless and red-faced, when the waitress returns, and Derek orders for all of them over the sounds of their helpless laughter.

The rest of dinner passes almost tension-free. Derek focuses on his burger and manages to mostly tune out Scott and Stiles's good-natured bickering. It's familiar, and oddly comfortable; it could almost be any one of a hundred nights back in Beacon Hills, with the pack gathered safe and easy around him. Almost. At home he's never felt this overwhelming awareness of countless eyes that are tracking Stiles's movements, watching him in curiosity or uncertainty or plain, naked greed.

He can't blame them, really. Stiles is eye-catching even when he doesn't try, all long limbs and pale skin, quick smiles and bright eyes. Right now he's displaying himself to his best advantage, with the sleeves of his blazer pushed up, leaving his wrists and forearms bare as he gesticulates wildly at whatever Scott is saying. Stiles laughs and as Derek's eyes track the flash of his throat he catches three other wolves in the vicinity doing the same. He glares at them and reaches out to brush an imaginary speck of dust off of Stiles's shoulder, torn between gratitude at the surprising ease with which he's slipping into the role of territorial mate, and irritation over the fact that Stiles had to choose that fucking shirt to wear tonight. As if the way the sharp dip of the neckline lengthens his neck wasn't bad enough, Derek can practically hear what people are thinking when they see the word FERAL scrawled in messy letters across his chest. One of the last things he needs is to spend tonight constantly running interference against everyone wondering just how accurate a descriptor that word might be.

Derek doesn't need the images it calls up in his own mind, either.

“Ugh, that was good.” Stiles leans back in his chair, tossing his napkin onto the table. There's nothing but crumbs left on his plate; when Derek pushes his own towards him, he makes a delighted sound and snags the last remaining pickle spear. Derek just rolls his eyes; it's not as if he really likes the things, anyway. “So.” Stiles crunches happily and jerks his head towards the pool. “Sounds like things are getting started over there, you guys wanna head over and check it out?”
“I guess so.” Scott makes a face but stands, tossing his own napkin down. “It’s why we’re here, right?” He glances at Derek as he stands as well, determination sparking in his eyes. “Hey, Stiles, could you give us just a minute? I wanna talk to Derek about something.”

“Uh.” Stiles scrambles to his feet, casting an uncertain glance between them. “Sure. I’ve gotta pee, anyway, so I’ll just . . .” He takes a hesitant step away before pausing, turning back. “Just—try not to kill each other, okay? There are way too many witnesses, and I don’t wanna spend tonight being questioned by the cops.”

Scott rolls his eyes dramatically at that as Stiles walks away, and Derek tries to fortify his nerves. It’s a rare thing for Scott to volunteer to talk to him alone; in the years they’ve known each other, a request like this has almost never boded well. Possibly, Derek is willing to admit, because he has a difficult time holding onto his own temper when it happens. He’s finding it difficult to concentrate on anything but Stiles’s retreating form now, though he reminds himself that there’s no reason to worry. Nothing is going to happen to Stiles between here and the bathroom; and even if it did, Stiles can take care of himself.

“What is it, Scott.”

“There are a lot of people watching you two,” Scott says, glancing around; Derek just stares back at him.

“Yeah,” he says slowly. “We sort of figured there would be. No one's gotten wind yet about me being . . .” He can’t bring himself to say the word. “Anyone who bothered to give it any thought probably figured I’d be showing up alone.”

“No, yeah, I know. I just meant—” He makes a frustrated noise. “This isn’t even what I wanted to talk to you about, I just . . .”

“Just what, Scott?”

“I’m sorry, okay?” Scott spits out. Derek blinks in surprise as he takes a deep breath and makes a visible effort to calm himself. “About . . . before. The thing about the joke. I’m just—I’m sorry.” He sounds sincere this time, though still uncomfortable, and he’s meeting Derek’s gaze head-on. “I do know what it’s like, to feel like people think . . . I just, I never thought about it that way. So.” He shoves his hands in his pockets, a hint of a smile tugging at his lips. “Just because you’re a dick most of the time shouldn’t make me forget how to be a decent person.”
Oddly, the insult has a stabilizing effect, and Derek feels his breath coming easier than it has since Scott started speaking.

“What can I say,” he shrugs, fixing Scott with his most understanding look. “Alphas can be real assholes sometimes.”

“Oh, cute; really, really funny.” Scott rolls his eyes, though less dramatically this time, and his shoulders drop as his tension leaves him. “Look, asshole or not, I've got your back tonight, okay?” Even though he doesn't look particularly pleased with the idea, there's no trace of a lie in what he says, “I want this to go well as much as you do, so if you need backup for anything, well. You've got me.”

“That's...” Something he hasn't admitted he's been worried about, Derek doesn't say. “Just help me keep an eye on him,” is what comes out instead, his eyes automatically glancing over his shoulder at the route Stiles had taken through the room. “God knows what'll happen once he gets a few drinks in him.”

“Goes without saying, man.” Scott rounds the table and claps him on the shoulder. “I'm not about to let anyone mess with Stiles.”

“Good.” Derek takes in Scott's sharp gaze above his wide, friendly smile, and nods his understanding. “Glad to hear it.”

Chapter End Notes

As ever, feel free to follow me on Tumblr, where you can find me at hungrylikethewolfie! Come and join in on my fandom shenanigans and assorted interests!
Derek wakes slowly, drifting reluctantly into awareness and wondering if he has time to slip back into sleep for a while longer before the alarm they set last night goes off. Their room looks out over the atrium, and the light that filters through from the skylights there is the dim grey that might mark it as just past dawn, though with the weather they've been having lately it could easily be noon already. The clock on the nightstand is sitting at an angle that means Derek would have to move to see the time, and the idea of letting go of Stiles for even a moment is one that holds precisely zero appeal right now.

He'd thought that it would be strange, waking up with another person in his bed. It's been longer than he cares to think about since he's found himself in this position. Even when he and Maurissa had been seeing each other, they'd hardly ever spent the night together; hardly ever spent more than five minutes in bed at all, in fact, doing anything that wasn't meant to lead directly into mutual orgasms. And before that, he hadn't had anything even approaching a real relationship since . . . well, since he was in no position to have anyone sharing his bed at all. It's a surprise, then, to realize how natural it feels to find himself wrapped around another warm body, with early-morning light just beginning to filter in through the window.

It feels like an odd sort of reprise to what they'd done last night. Admittedly, when he'd had his arms around Stiles then they'd both been vertical, not to mention more heavily clothed. It's odd that Derek should feel more natural now, spooned up behind Stiles when he has no true right to be, his face in Stiles's hair and his left arm draped over his waist. Last night had been pretense, a visual declaration aimed directly at the alpha from Salem who'd been eyeing Stiles like a midnight snack. Wrapping his arms around him, Stiles settling easily back against his chest; nosing gently at the line of Stiles's jaw until it tilted just so, until Derek could breathe in the scent that his pulse was hammering out and bare his teeth in a triumphant, possessive smile. Stiles had been laughing then, helpless snickers that he'd barely been able to keep inside until they were alone, rocking him with quiet jolts there Derek had only barely felt. Now . . .
Stiles is warm and loose-limbed in sleep, tucked back against the curve of Derek's body. His breathing is slow and even, his heartbeat a steady, soothing pulse in Derek's ears. Sometime during the night Derek's left hand seems to have made its way just beneath the hem of Stiles's shirt, to rest against the gentle curve of his stomach. It's still there now, sliding back and forth in slow, idle strokes across the trail of soft hair leading down from his navel; and even as a part of Derek knows that he should stop, he finds himself burying his nose in the nape of Stiles's neck and breathing deep. Stiles smells like skin gone slightly stale with sleep; like the faintest lingering sharpness of last night's alcohol; like the soap he prefers, and the vague hint of leather, and Derek.

He feels guilty, like he's taking advantage of the situation. Knows he is, honestly. Still, it's not enough for him to untangle himself and head to the shower when it feels so nice to stay. He tells himself that Stiles was the one who had insisted on this in the first place, who had rolled his entire head in exasperation when Derek had hesitated and yanked him into bed.

"I know I'm not winning any prizes for my appeal here, but man the fuck up and cuddle me already, dude."

He'd been tipsy from the open bar and nearly as relieved as Derek that their first social test had gone off without a hitch. And it hadn't exactly been a hardship, curling himself around Stiles again in the wide, soft bed that was already beginning to smell like the two of them together.

It's a surprise when Derek's head clears enough to realize that, far from passing the night restless and awake, he must have fallen asleep almost immediately after Stiles. In his case, however, there was no alcohol to blame; only the undeniable comfort of Stiles curled up warm and trusting against his chest, and the sense of safety he certainly hadn't expected to feel in an airport Marriott hotel room.

He'll let himself have this for just a little while longer. A few minutes probably, at most, until the alarm goes off. Just a few minutes to pretend that this is real, that when Stiles wakes up he might turn in Derek's arms with a sleepy smile; might roll his eyes but let Derek convince him to stay in bed for the rest of the morning. He'll let himself imagine what it would be like if any of this were real, if he could fall back asleep and know that Stiles would still be there when he woke up.

When the alarm does start blaring it seems to shatter the fragile peace Derek has wrapped around himself, sending reality crashing rudely back. Stiles lets out a noise caught somewhere between a groan and a death rattle and flings out an arm to slap blindly at the clock, muttering nonverbal but dire-sounding nonsense under his breath. Derek couldn't keep his lips from curling if he tried, even as he braces himself to pull away.

"'s early," Stiles finally manages to mutter with a reasonable facsimile of coherence, and before Derek can extricate himself with the promise of coffee as fast as the miniature machine can brew it, shoves himself back against Derek's body, practically burrowing in. "Ten m're minutes."
Derek freezes. As cozy as their position had been before, Stiles has managed to situate himself even more firmly against Derek, has all but moulded himself against him. He shifts his hips in a lazy, absentminded sort of way, trying to wriggle into a more comfortable position, and Derek lets his fangs grow long enough to sink into his lip as he fights against the urge to tug Stiles toward him with unmistakable intent. Instead he wraps a hand around Stiles's shoulder and shakes, canting his own hips away.

“Stiles.”

“Nngh, what, I—”

Derek can tell the exact moment their situation sinks into Stiles's brain through the haze of sleep that's clouding it. His spine stiffens and his scent grows suddenly, unpleasantly sharp in a way that Derek has never quite been able to settle as embarrassment or anxiety or some combination of the two. Stiles shoots up into a sitting position, eyes wide and fully awake now, one leg curled up enough to hide—something that Derek isn't looking at. He keeps his eyes on Stiles's shoulders instead, on the way they bunch beneath his t-shirt as he spreads his arms in an elaborate stretch.

“Hey. So . . . I don't know about you, but I slept pretty well. Bed's comfortable. No expense spared here, clearly. Uh.” He glances over, cheeks and ears flushed red, and scowls at the amused smirk Derek isn't bothering to keep off of his face. “Shut up,” he snaps, pointing a finger in Derek's face; Derek barely resists the instinct to snap playfully at it. “Rule number one, remember?”

“I haven't said a word,” Derek protests, spreading his hands in an innocent gesture that's probably counteracted by the fact that he can feel his smirk growing wider.

“Yeah, well. Keep it that way. And since you're being a di—jerk, I'm calling first dibs on the bathroom.”

“Whatever you say, dear.”

Stiles flips him off over his shoulder, and Derek lets himself focus on that instead of the slightly awkward roll of his hips as he walks to the bathroom. It doesn't mean anything, he hears Stiles's voice in his head reminding him. It's just nature. Rather than give in to the temptation to read something into whatever's going on in Stiles's pants, Derek rolls out of bed and starts the coffee.
In defiance of the ease they've both been enjoying so far, sharing a bathroom turns out to be a crash course in awkward interaction. By the time he gets his turn in the shower Derek decides he's better off trying to breathe through his mouth rather than risk getting a whiff of what Stiles may or may not have been doing during his brief time alone. It appears that he's the only one concerned with respecting the bounds of privacy, however, as he's halfway through lathering up his hair when the door swings suddenly open.

“Don't mind me,” Stiles calls out, “I'll be in and out in just a second.”

“Are you kidding me?” Derek snaps, hissing when a stream of suds slides down his forehead and into his eyes.

“Sorry! Sorry, I just . . . uh, I left my deodorant in here. Sorry,” he says again; Derek can just barely hear him through the sound of the water as he thrusts his face into the spray. “I'll just . . . yeah.”

Derek finishes his shower quickly after that, any urge to linger far outweighed by the fact that he forgot to lock the damned door. Grateful that he did, at least, remember to grab a change of clothes before his shower, he ignores the unpleasant catch of denim and cotton against his still-damp skin in favor of getting dressed before Stiles can remember that he's forgotten anything else. When he opens the door to the room a cloud of steam escapes; scrubbing a towel over his hair, he glares out at Stiles on general principle.

“The fan in here doesn't work for shit.”

“Ugh, I know.” Stiles gives the laces on his sneakers one last tug and straightens. “I felt like I was gonna suffocate by the time I got out. So, uh. You mind if I get in there again? I've gotta . . .” He makes a vague gesture in the direction of his hair, freshly-washed and fluffy.

Derek grunts and moves aside, curling his fingers in his towel instead of tangling in that soft-looking mess. “You look like a baby chick.”

“Joke's on you, dickface, because baby chicks are adorable.” He shoulders his way into the bathroom and Derek hears him make a choking sound behind him. “Oh my god, it's a freakin' sauna in here.”

“We've already had this discussion. About thirty seconds ago.”
“Bite me.”

“Don't tempt me.”

“Hey.” Derek turns to see Stiles stepping back into the room, his face slightly flushed from the steam. “About . . . you know. Earlier.” He jerks his head towards the shower, keeping his eyes carefully averted from Derek's. “I'm not used to sharing a bathroom with anyone I'm not—or, like, Scott, so. Sorry I barged in; it won't happen again. Or if it does, I give you permission to literally throw me out on my ass. Anyway, I made some more coffee if you want it.”

He ducks back into the bathroom, and Derek spends a moment simply blinking at the empty doorway. When he checks the desk there's nothing in the miniature pot, but one of the disposable cups is full of dark, steaming coffee. A single sip and his eyebrows lift in surprise as a strong shock of sugar bursts against his tongue.

“You know how I take my coffee?” he calls out, staring down at the cup in bemusement, something warm and unfamiliar uncurling in his chest.

“I am a freaking master of observation,” Stiles hollers back, and Derek smiles even as he rolls his eyes at the assertion.

As it turns out, they're up early enough for breakfast in the restaurant downstairs—eggs and sausage from the buffet for Derek, while Stiles goes for some sort of cereal-crusted French Toast drenched in syrup, and “Don't even make that face dude, I know about your secret sweet tooth, and if you keep it up I'm not gonna offer to share”—before they head to their morning seminars.

“Scott mentioned maybe meeting up for lunch,” Stiles says as he drains the last of his orange juice and starts shoving the paperwork he's been studying back into his folder. “If that's cool with you.”

“That's fine. We'll both be at the cross-cultural traditions panel right before; we can meet you in front of the restaurant.”

“Sweet. I was thinking though, I'm pretty sure none of us are signed up for anything until the new mate seminar afterwards, so if you wanted to check out something outside the hotel—”

“I still can't believe you talked me into that,” Derek grumbles, getting to his feet. “It conflicts with the
one on social networking; I actually wanted to catch that one.”

“Dude, for the five thousandth time, that's what you've got me for. I am your social networking guru. All you have to do is actually . . . oh what's the word . . . listen.”

“You're not technically part of—” He stops himself before he finishes, keeping his eyes carefully trained on Stiles's face instead of looking around to see if anyone overheard. “The world we grew up in,” he finishes pathetically, and Stiles has to visibly fight to keep from rolling his eyes.

“All your betas are bitten ones, which makes the human perspective all that more important. As I've told you. Many times. And see?” He pokes Derek in the chest before slinging an arm around his shoulder and leading him out of the restaurant. “This is exactly why we need this seminar—you've gotta learn how to share power, otherwise your sweet little wolf cubs are gonna grow up with authority issues. More than they've got now, even, which I think we can both agree would be sort of impressive.”

“They're all at least as old as you are, and I'll give you a hundred dollars if you'll repeat that 'sweet little wolf cubs' comment where Erica and Boyd can hear you. I promise not to let them actually kill you.”

“My hero,” Stiles says dryly. Then, quietly enough that even Derek has trouble hearing him, “I'm serious, though, about this being important. If you ever do find someone you genuinely want to pledge your wolfly troth to, you'll be thanking me for making sure you have the tools to help the transition go smoothly with the pack.”

“I'll be sure to mention you during the wedding toasts.”

“That's all I ask.” Stiles pulls his arm away, nodding at the hallway to the left. “I'm down that way. Meet back here at noon?”

“Yeah.” Derek tries to ignore the anxious, queasy fluttering in his stomach; should've had a lighter breakfast, probably. “See you then.”

He hadn't expected, when he agreed to attend this conference, that he'd really be learning anything of any substance. He remembers looking through the materials Laura had brought back after her one and only attendance, thinking that there didn't seem to be anything on offer that wasn't covered by common fucking sense. In the years and disasters and devastations that have followed since then,
he’s come to realize that leading a pack isn’t as intuitive as he’s always thought, as easy as his mom had always made it look. Nevertheless, he’s pleased, in a cynical sort of way, when the first two panels he attends don’t do much to prove his initial assumptions wrong. Scent and Territory In Contemporary Society is interesting, but nothing he didn’t already know; The Animal Instinct and Its Impact In The Public School System he mostly sits through in order to pass the information on to Erica and Boyd, though Derek can admit that with a new addition to the pack on the way, a responsible alpha should be ready to deal with all contingencies.

“Well.” Scott stretches in the seat next to Derek as the panel for Cross-Cultural Traditions in Leadership Protocols finally ends. “That's an hour and a half of my life that I'm never getting back.”

“I figured you’d be interested in the topic,” Derek says, arching an eyebrow and gathering up his notes. Mostly, his legal pad is covered with smart-ass commentary and boredom-induced doodles, though one corner is entirely devoted to the games of Hangman he and Scott had going for the last twenty minutes. “All things considered.”

“Yeah, I thought so, too. But dude, there was literally nothing those people said that we didn’t already know. Hell, we could’ve done a better job ourselves.”

“Don’t let Stiles hear you say that. He'll think it's an excellent idea, and he'll nag both of us to death until we sign up to do it next year.”

“Maybe we should,” Scott shrugs. “I mean, with all the shit we've gone through—”

“Keep dreaming.” Derek feels his phone buzz in his pocket and pulls it out to check his messages. “Speak of the devil. He says he's hung up with some people he just met and running late,” he reads with a scowl. “Twenty minutes max, apparently.”

“Hey, let's go outside for a minute. I'm feeling a little . . .” Scott shrugs again, rolling his shoulders. “Cooped up, I guess.”

“An awful lot of us in one place.” Derek nods in understanding. “I think I saw a garden or something out back; come on.”

As open spaces go, it's not the most impressive. It's small, and walled in, with the parking lot near enough that the smell of asphalt and motor oil nearly overwhelms the soft green scent of grass and flowers. Everything is covered with a sprinkling of moisture from the still-misting rain, beading on
leaves and darkening the paving stones, blanketing the two plastic picnic tables. They can see the sky, though, low and grey as it may be, and some of the tension coiled between Derek's shoulder blades begins to ease as soon as they step into the open air. Out of the corner of his eye he can see Scott relaxing as well, released from the strain of keeping himself in check around so many other wolves.

“This was a good idea,” Derek says, breathing deep.

“Yeah, it was. You need to back the fuck off with Stiles.”

“I—excuse me?” He turns to face Scott, who's staring back with a look that's just short of belligerent. “What the hell do you—”

“You know what I mean.” Scott sets his jaw, but he doesn't look away. “He's doing you a favor here, okay, but that doesn't give you the right to be all . . . he doesn't want to see you shackled with someone you don't want, just because you're working that obnoxious self-sacrificial vibe you like so much. And . . . I don't want that, either,” he says with a sigh, softening for just a moment. “It's a good thing he's doing. But it's also stupid as hell, because he just got out of a relationship not too long ago, and he's—”

“Vulnerable?” Derek crosses his arms over his chest, smirking as Scott and ignoring the way his stomach is twisting again. “I'd love to hear you tell him that. It's the day for that sort of thing, I guess.”

“Look, you can revert back to your bullshit 'I'm too good for human emotions' persona if you want, but you know I'm right. And since I know it is bullshit, I'm also pretty sure that you're not actually enough of an asshole to let him get hurt while he's helping you out. You like Stiles, I know you do; and if he ends up confused about your intentions because you let yourself get too wrapped up in this act you're putting on, you're gonna hate yourself almost as much as I will. He's a good guy who likes to do stupid stuff to help his friends, even if it means he might get hurt, and just because he's doing you a favor doesn't mean you—”

“I know all of this, Scott.” His throat is clenching painfully now, anger and hurt and disappointment caught in a painful knot; a dangerous combination when his control is already under this much strain. “I'm well aware that he's only doing this because . . . you don't have to worry about him getting confused about anything.”

“See, you say that, but you know how he throws himself into things. He's been acting like his breakup's no big deal, like he doesn't even need to talk about it; he hasn't dealt with any of that, he's
just letting it stew and ... and fester. Emotional transference is like, his main deal, and you're offering yourself up on a platter here.”

“I know you're worried, and you're a good friend for looking out for him.” Derek tries to hold onto that, to remind himself that Scott really does mean well. Stiles is like a brother to him, always has been, and Scott has always tended to get just a little bit extra overprotective when it comes to his best friend. “We’ve talked about this. Believe me, Stiles isn't in any danger of suddenly imagining that he's developed feelings for me.”

“What are you even—” Scott's words stumble to an abrupt halt as he takes in the scowl on Derek's face. “You like him.”

“As you pointed out all of two minutes ago,” Derek agrees. “I'm not going to hurt him; there's nothing to worry about; let's just go get lunch already.”

“No, I mean.” The way Scott is peering at him is frankly unsettling. “You like him. Like. You have feelings for him.”

The bottom drops out of Derek's stomach. “You don't know what you're talking about,” he says quietly.

“Oh my god, that's why you agreed to this whole thing in the first place, isn't it? Because you like him, and you want to pretend that—”

“That's not why.” Derek can hear the growl beneath his own words, but he's in no mood to care. “He offered. I accepted. We have—we have ground rules, neither one of us is going to get confused that this is anything more than what it is—”

“You don't think he deserves to know? Come on, this is so ... don't you think it might change things just a little bit?”

“Yeah, I think it would,” Derek finally snaps. “I think it would make him uncomfortable; I think it would fuck with his ability to put on a believable front; I think that it would take all of ten minutes for anyone paying even the slightest bit of attention to realize that none of it is real, and I think that whatever happened afterwards, Stiles would end up blaming himself.”
“Maybe, but he still—”

“You're not going to tell him.”

It's the wrong thing to say; he knows it the second the words are out of his mouth, even before Scott's face hardens and his eyes flash red.

“You're not my alpha, Derek. You don't get to dictate what I do or don't tell my friend. You don't get to dictate what I do, period.”

“I'm not trying to—fuck.” Derek falls back to lean against the wall, lifting a hand to scrub over his eyes. “I don't know if I can take . . . I just don't want him to know,” he finally manages, forcing himself to meet Scott's eyes. “Please.”

Everything about Scott softens as if a switch has flipped, as defiance and anger give way to compassion and, though Derek is sick to see it, pity.

“Derek,” he starts. “I know you're kind of leery of relationships, but—”

“Please, Scott.” Derek doesn't want to argue about this. Not now, not ever. “Just . . . don't tell him anything.”

Scott frowns at him like there are a million things he wants to say, but in the end he doesn't do anything more than sigh heavily and clap a comforting arm against Derek's arm.

“Okay. You're an idiot, but . . . okay.”

“Thank you.” The words are easier to say than they used to be, but they still stick a little bit in Derek's throat. From the way Scott snorts he can probably tell, and Derek gives his shoulder a light shove as they head inside. “Come on, let's get some food before the place gets cleaned out.”

It's a legitimate worry; a pack of werewolves at lunchtime is practically a guaranteed formula for eating someone out of house and home, and a hotel full of alphas stands a good chance of eating literally everything available, even if the management has gotten a heads-up about its guests' robust
appetites. Sure enough, the restaurant looks packed by the time they get there and find Stiles waiting impatiently out front.

“There you guys are. I tried to get them to hold a table for us, but they wouldn't seat me until our full party was here.” He glares over his shoulder, as though the empty hostess station has personally offended him. “Poolside dining's full, too.”

“We could always order room service,” Derek suggests as Scott lets out a high, hungry whine.

“We could, if we wanted to get grossly overcharged,” Stiles says. “Luckily,” he grins, flipping his folder open with a dramatic flourish, “you have impeccable taste in life partners, and I, your faithful mate, have provided for you.”

“Stiles, I may be hungry,” Scott says deadpan, “but I'm drawing the line at eating your lecture notes.”

“So funny. Like a lupine Lenny Bruce.” Stiles rips a sheet of paper from the pad and brandishes it in front of him. “I have procured a list of highly-recommended restaurants, all within reasonable driving distance.”

“Did you talk to the concierge?” Derek takes the list to glance it over; there are short descriptions of the food next to each name, along with some sort of notation system that he can't make out. “This is an awful lot of detail.”

“Some people I met in the seminar on interspecies relations helped me out, actually. It was pretty much all human mates of alphas in there; we bonded. And a couple of them are actually from the area, so I got some good recommendations. There are some local places that sound pretty cool—they're the ones with stars next to the names,” he adds, pointing.

“You guys go ahead.” Scott takes a casual step back, keeping his eyes away from Derek. “I think I'm gonna get room service after all; I wanna call Allison, fill her in on how things are going so far.”

“What? Come on, I know you already talked to her this morning,” Stiles protests. “Besides, isn't she spending today with her dad? You really wanna call up the Ar—in-laws' place from a werewolf symposium?”

“Stiles is right.” Derek keeps his gaze steady when Scott finally meets his eyes. “It's really not
“Hey, you two are newlyweds; you shouldn't have to be self-conscious about how you act around each other with a third wheel around.”

“Are you kidding? When have you ever made anyone self-conscious?” Stiles demands.

“Enjoy your lunch,” Scott grins, already backing towards the lobby. “If it's somewhere with lobster, bring me back some!”

“Ugh, it's like sophomore year of high school all over again.” Stiles squints after his friend. “Do you think something's up with him and Allison? She's not secretly pregnant, is she?”

Derek nearly chokes on nothing at all. “How the hell would I know?”

“Hey, you're the one with the hyper-senses,” Stiles says, gesticulating widely in Derek's general direction. “I thought you might've sniffed something out.”

“Believe it or not, I don't make a habit of sniffing out other people's fertility.” He wraps a hand around the back of Stiles's neck, guiding him forward. “Let's go, I'm hungry.”

“I'm just saying! Anyway, he's delusional if he thinks I'm saving any lobster for him.”

“I'm sure he'll get over the loss.”

“Oh, hey, I nearly forgot,” Stiles says as they pass the information table. “There was an extra spot available in that civil rights lecture this afternoon, so I signed up for it. Susanna's running it—she's the one who gave me most of the restaurant suggestions, and I bet I could get you in too if you wanted.”

“Civil rights lecture?”

“Yeah, um . . . History of Civil Rights in Lunar-Driven Communities,” Stiles says, flipping to the
schedule printed inside his folder. “It sounded interesting, and neither of us have anything else down for four o’clock. Apparently it’s a must-do every year, but there’s something this year about reinstating some sort of regional council or something, which Susanna says she thinks I should look into.”

“Susanna says, huh?”

“She started out in environmental law; that’s how she met her wife, who heads one of the packs here in the city. Rebekah something. I didn’t want to ask for the last name and blow my alpha-mate street cred.”

“Metting. The Metting pack’s a big one; well-established, and fairly stable for a city pack. They’re major players. And did you just casually drop in the fact that she’s married?”

“It's okay big guy.” Stiles pats his back and pulls away, heading for the passenger side of the Camaro. “I know you’re the jealous type. So what do you say, you wanna hit the lecture with me? I can totally get you in; Susanna said she'd like to get a look at the guy good enough to win my heart.”

Derek shoots him a look. “She did not.”

“Well, okay, not in those exact words. There were a few unsubtle hints about one of her nieces, though, before I told her I was solidly spoken for. If you don’t come, she might start thinking I made you up just to avoid her matchmaking, and be insulted.”

“Right.” Derek slides behind the wheel and leans in, watching Stiles's eyes go wide and alarmed, and swallowing both the shame of having let Scott get his hopes up and the pang of disappointment all at once. He doesn’t need heightened senses to feel the hammering of Stiles's heart when Derek buries his face in the crook of his neck, rubbing his cheek against Stiles's skin until he can smell their scents begin to mingle. “There,” he says, pulling away again, unable to keep from grinning at the shock on Stiles's face. “That ought to help.”

“Jackass,” Stiles mutters as he sits back and buckles his seatbelt with unsteady hands. “That tickled.”

“You’ll survive.”

“So you really don't want to go?”
“I actually thought I might hit the gym. Been sitting too long; I’ve got some energy to burn.” Derek turns the key in the ignition and puts the car into gear. “So. Where are we headed?”

Chapter End Notes

As ever, please feel free to follow me on Tumblr for insights into my writing process, general fan flailing, the occasional fic-prompt fest, and the dozens of other reasons I am terrible at replying to comments I’M SO SORRY.
Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

The last half (and then some) of my auction fill! Thanks again to rivki8699 for her generous donation!

In case you're wondering, the waiters are also werewolves. The alphas organizing the conference bring members of their packs to work as service staff. Also I'm terrible at describing fashion, just . . . so you know that going in.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“I swear to god, he never used to be this big a pain in the ass.”

Derek sets his book aside as Stiles bursts into the room, slamming the door open as much as the pneumatic hinges will allow. He looks harried but not in any real danger, and Derek relaxes back into his chair.

“Who's that?”

“The Stay Puft Marshmallow Man,” Stiles says snidely as he tosses his folder onto the desk. “Who the hell else do I know at this thing? Scott.”

“Trouble in paradise?”

“You know what your problem is? You think you're funnier than you actually are.” He drops onto the bed with a groan, throwing an arm over his eyes, and Derek sets his book aside, settling in to watch the show. “He means well,” Stiles says after a moment, “I know he does, but he's never exactly been able to grasp the fact that he can't fix everything, you know?”

Derek can't help frowning. “Is there something to fix?”

“No! No,” Stiles repeats, more calmly the second time. “That's what he can't seem to get through his head. That, and the fact that my love life isn't exactly any of his business.”
“I . . .” Panic hits, hard and irrational, and ultimately inescapable. Derek drags in a deep breath as casually as he can manage, hating himself a little for the way his nerves begin to soothe as Stiles's scent hits him full-force. “What did he . . .”

“Just the same thing he's been on me about for the past month and a half. 'All those feelings don't just disappear overnight, Stiles. You need to talk about it, Stiles. You shouldn't keep things bottled up like this, Stiles,’” he groans, scrubbing both hands over his face. “Jason and I only went out for, like, two and a half minutes, I don't get why he's making such a big deal over it.”

“Weren't you together for three months?”

“Technicalities,” Stiles dismisses with a wave. “The point is, there weren't all that many feelings to work through. It was never . . .” He gestures vaguely. “We had fun, and we liked each other, but it's not like I lost a soulmate or something. He's overreacting.”

“It's understandable.” It's not that Derek really thought that Scott would've broken his promise—not quite this soon, at least—but he's still breathing easier than he was a moment ago. “It isn't like you to keep quiet about a relationship, especially when it ends; it's unusual, so he's worried.”

“Excuse me, I don't always talk about my relationships.”

“Says the guy who got plastered on Jim Beam and showed up at my apartment at one in the morning to deliver a ten-point rant on why he was better off without the girl who'd just dumped him.”

“Okay, that happened once,” Stiles says, lowering his arm to glare at him, “and I was eighteen. Relationship dramatics are like a rite of passage when you're a teenager. God, I thought that you of all people would get this.”

Derek arches an eyebrow. “Me of all people?”

“Your last relationship lasted longer than every other one that I've been around to witness combined, and you didn't feel the need to talk and grow and share after that ended, did you?”

“What I had with Maurissa was never serious.”
“Yeah, well neither was what I had with Jason. Teach me your ways, Obi-Wan,” Stiles says with a grin, rolling onto his side. “How do you keep people from prying into your relationship business?”

“I'm not as naturally loquacious,” Derek answers, ignoring the irony of the question, given Scott's earlier intrusion into his own interests. “People don’t usually expect to get anything out of me.”

“Come on, dude, if you want to get me out of my clothes just ask, seriously; no need to break out the five-dollar words.”

“How about if I get you out of those clothes and into the ones you brought for tonight?” Derek says dryly. “Dinner's in about half an hour.”

“Smooth, man. Smooth.” Stiles levers himself upright with another groan. “Should I shower? Or is that just gonna undo the Eau de Derek effect? We're supposed to be rockin' the newlywed vibe; are they going to expect us to smell like we're banging every chance we get? Ugh.” He collapses back onto the bed. “This is way more complicated than I thought it was gonna be when I got the idea. When we got the idea. Scott and Isaac are taking at least part of the blame for this.”

“We don't have to go down to dinner,” Derek says with an easy shrug. The idea is a relief, to be completely honest. “If you'd rather blow it off.”

Stiles sighs heavily. “Yeah, we do.” He sits up again, rolling his shoulders. “Networking. Solidifying the pack's social standing. Important shit. Plus, Lydia made me promise to bring back pictures, and I guess we could just get dressed and take them up here, but at that point we might as well go down for the food and free booze, right?” He slips to his feet. “What do you think? Shower?”

Derek stands as well, padding forward across the carpet until he's close enough to get a good, solid hit of Stiles's scent.

“Shower,” he agrees. “You smell like too many other people.”

“I'll use your shampoo, big guy,” Stiles says, clapping Derek on the shoulder as he moves past him to the bathroom. “Make a real statement.”
It's a temptation that Derek isn't entirely able to resist, to think of some of the far more satisfactory ways to ensure that Stiles smells like him by the time they leave this room. As new as their relationship is meant to be, the idea that people might expect them to be all over each other is probably a valid one. If it were real—if any of this were real—Derek certainly wouldn't be willing to settle for something as weak as the smell of his shampoo in Stiles's hair. He'd be in there now, running his mouth over slick, water-beaded skin and soaking it with the scent of him, of them. His marks darkening that pale throat; the scent of mating worked in so deep that Stiles would never get it out.

With a deep breath, he turns his attention to dressing, instead. The dinner and mixer tonight is a semi-formal event; Derek has no idea what the hell that even means, but when Lydia had declared that a coat and tie were not optional, Boyd had dragged him out to buy something suitable, no pun intended.

“*Dress for the pack reputation you want, Derek,*” he can still hear Erica saying with mock-seriousness as they'd left the house, “*not the one you have.***

Only the knowledge that it was more than just his ass on the line had him playing along, though he'd drawn the line at wearing a tie without undergoing actual torture beforehand. Lydia had studied the photos Boyd had snapped on his cell phone and declared that Derek was lucky he had the bone structure to pull off the open-collar look; Derek had questioned how he'd gotten to the point in his life where a five-foot-three, hundred-and-ten pound human girl had more authority over his own wardrobe than he did.

He'd packed the suit, though.

“I don't know if you need the mirror in there for anything,” Stiles calls out behind him, and Derek turns to find him walking back into the room, stripped down to underwear and a tank-top and backed by a cloud of steam worthy of an eighties power-ballad video. “But it's probably not gonna clear up in there until . . . hey.” He pauses in scrubbing a towel over his hair, staring a little bit as he looks Derek slowly up and down. “You look . . . really nice. Is that, um. Is that new?”

“This old thing?” Derek asks sardonically, spreading his arms so that the soft grey jacket pulls lightly across his back, and Stiles snorts.

“Lydia?”

“Boyd, but he was on orders.”
“Figures. You know how when you're little,” Stiles says, crossing to the closet, “and your parents get pissed off if you go out without brushing your hair or something, because how you look is supposedly a reflection on them? I think it's like that.” He pulls out a hanging bag of his own, shaking it for emphasis before he hangs it up again. “Exhibit B.” He rakes a glance over Derek's outfit again. “She must've already seen yours before we went out.”

“If you tell me we have matching suits I'm not leaving this hotel room.”

Stiles laughs and unzips the bag, halfway inside the closet as he starts to pull it out. “Not matching, no. But we sort of, like . . . coordinate, I think. I'm pretty sure she deals with the drabness of academia by acting out her fashion editor fantasies on the rest of us.”

“It's good that she's got a hobby, I guess.”

“Easy for you to say; you're not the one who spent six hours with her playing Werewolf Symposium Ken. She even made me get the thing tailored, which means there's no way I can take it back after the weekend's over.”

“I'm guessing that was at least part of the point.” Derek moves to the mirror over the dresser to check his hair one last time, and blinks in surprise at the way his shirt—linen, according to the tag, dyed the soft, faded green of old money—makes his eyes stand out. “She takes her work seriously.”

“Sure, but where the hell am I gonna wear this again? Not a lot of formal affairs in graduate work; it's mostly just trying to get idiot freshman to listen to you, and neglecting your thesis in favor of World of Warcraft. Hey, do you think I can get away without wearing the jacket?”

“Only if you don't mind suffering Lydia's wrath.”

“Yeah, but.” Stiles steps around the closet door, tugging his sleeves into place. “The vest makes it sort of formal on its own, don't you think? 'Cause we're gonna be down by the pool, and I don't wanna overheat.”

Derek turns slowly to face him, aware that he's staring but entirely unable to make himself stop. Stiles's suit is shades and shades darker than his, charcoal instead of ash; the shirt isn't quite white, and Derek suspects that if they were to hold the two together, they would find that it's a paler copy of his own.
As he stands there, fiddling with the cuffs of his shirt, Stiles is thankfully unaware of the way Derek’s eyes trace the lines of the fitted waistcoat he’s slipped on over the shirt. It fits him like a second skin, emphasizing the narrow taper of his waist, the stretch of a chest that's wider and more solid than Derek has allowed himself to realize until this moment. Derek watches in a sort of dazed horror as Stiles leans back into the closet, straightening again with a tie as red as fresh-spilled blood in his hand.

“You're going to cause a fucking riot.”

“Yeah?” Stiles grins, wide and delighted, as he loops the tie around his neck. “Thanks, man.”

“I'm serious.” Derek steps forward, ready to press his point. “You—” He stops, mind gone suddenly blank at the scent that hits him like a punch to the gut. “You smell like me,” he finishes stupidly.

“Uh.” Stiles is looking at him in open concern, frowning as he finishes with his tie. “Wasn't that the point?”

“Not my shampoo. It's . . .” He drifts forward another step, pulled in by an irresistible gravity. “You smell like me. You smell more like me than you did before you got in the shower; how . . .?”

“I, um. Okay, I should've asked, probably. But you left the tank top you wore to the gym on the bathroom floor, and even I could tell it had your scent all over it; it was pretty pungent. So I just . . .” He shrugs. “It seemed . . . efficient? To just sort of.” He gestures at his chest. “Wear it. You look like it's sort of freaking you out, though; should I take it off?”

“No. No, it's . . . fine.”

Something dark and warm is unfurling in Derek's chest as he takes another absent step forward. Though it's likely only his imagination, it seems like he can see the shape of it beneath Stiles's clothes, a barrier between them and his bare skin. It smells like Derek; like his sweat and frustration, and the clean sweetness of released endorphins. There's a spot near the hem where he'd wiped his mouth after chugging half a bottle of water, a patch of fabric that's resting now against the soft skin of Stiles's stomach.

“Is something . . . you're sure you don't need me to take it off?” Stiles's words are anxious and uncertain, eyes wide, and Derek lets his gaze drop to the base of his throat.
“Your tie is crooked,” is all he says. “Here.”

Stiles's Adam's apple bobs on a heavy swallow as Derek reaches up, tugging the knot loose. The tie is slick and smooth between his fingers; silk, he thinks absently, knowing Lydia. Stiles's pulse is thrumming rapidly in his ears, distracting even without the sight of it fluttering in his neck, inches away from Derek's fingers.

“Are you really that nervous?”

“It's just. I know this is important.” His eyes are fixed firmly somewhere over Derek's shoulder, hands open and fidgeting aimlessly at his sides. “For the pack, I mean. We've gotta make a good impression, you know? Make sure people know you can't be pushed around, just because the pack is kinda small. There's a lot riding on this.”

The warmth in Derek's chest spreads through his body, sweet and intoxicating.

“You'll do fine,” he says, smiling softly.

He doesn't realize what he's doing until he finds himself already leaning in, ready to drop a quick, reassuring kiss onto Stiles's lips. As if it's a perfectly natural thing for him to do; as if he has the right. Derek leans quickly back again, snapping back to himself and frowning down at the messy knot beneath his hands.

“I, uh. I think I made it worse.” He steps away. “Sorry. You should wear the jacket, I think.”

“Sure.” Stiles looks like he might say something else, but in the end he simply lets out a breath and tugs the tie loose again, offering Derek a crooked smile. “Let me fix this real quick and we can head down.”

The plan for the evening is dinner and cocktails, innocuous enough if Derek didn't already know two things: first, that the bar was stocked with enough wolfsbane liqueur to get the entire population of attendees smashed out of their minds, and second, that this was the very event that had ended with Laura being asked to leave the conference during her one and only attendance.
Stiles is right; there's a lot riding on their performance tonight. This is the night that ninety percent of the networking between packs gets done; making a good show of himself might very well mean the difference between securing alliances with other powerful packs and being shunned by them for another ten or fifteen years. If he'd come to the conference unattached, he'd have had something to bring to the table—he'd likely hold some appeal as breeding stock, if nothing else. As it is, he has nothing but his merits to impress the other alphas, and he's going to need all of his wits about him.

Which makes it all the more worrisome when he realizes that they're finished with their meal, and he can barely even remember how they got there.

From the time they leave their room, he can't quite seem to settle. Stiles is too close and too far away all at once; Derek needs his hands on him, needs his hands as far away as possible. He settles for resting one against the small of Stiles's back as they walk; brushing his fingers lightly over his shoulder when they find their seats; pressing their knees together beneath the table. Everything feels tangled inside his head, jumbled and jangled at the way their scents are mingling together. Stiles's fingers brush over his where they're resting between their plates, and Derek turns his hand automatically into the touch.

“—really excited,” he realizes Stiles is saying, only when his fingers squeeze tightly around Derek's hand. “It's gonna be the first baby anyone in the pack has. Erica's doctor says there's no way to be sure, really, how it'll turn out; since they're both bitten, you know?”

“There's a pretty good chance it'll be a wolf, like them.” The older woman sitting across from them—Susanna, Derek remembers after a moment; Stiles had introduced them when they sat down—takes a sip from her wine glass as a waiter clears her plate. “It's not a guarantee, but the chances are much better than when a werewolf and a human mate.”

“Yeah. Well.” Stiles laughs nervously, cheeks turning a splotchy pink. “That's not really an issue for anyone in our pack. Lydia was saying the other day that sexual reproduction is just a massive cosmic punking, and she doesn't want any part of it.” He squeezes Derek's hand again, harder this time, and gives his knee a pointed nudge.

“Isaac hasn't settled down yet,” Derek says, taking the hint to join in the conversation with what he hopes is reasonable aclarity. “He might find a nice human girl and decide to procreate.”

“You make it sound so romantic,” Stiles sneers. “Anyway, I hope you're paying attention, Scott,” he adds, and cackles as he dodges the roll that wings his way from the next table over.

“I told you,” Scott calls out, loudly enough for Stiles to hear, “Allison's not pregnant.”
“It's good to see a human adjusted so well to pack life.” Jake Fennelly, the alpha of one of the mid-sized packs whose territory runs along the Olympic National Park up north, is staring at Stiles with an expression of stark suspicion tinged with grudging admiration. “Not many can accept us for what we are.”

“Don't judge everyone else by your own pack's inability to manage interspecies relations,” the woman seated next to Susanna snaps, angling her body into a subtle barrier between her and Jake. Rebekah Metting, Derek deduces, though he's probably been introduced to her, as well; he needs to get his fucking head in the game. Meanwhile, Susanna rolls her eyes and cuffs her wife lightly on the shoulder.

“Stop that. No posturing before cocktails. Besides, he has a point; not everyone has it in them to deal with the realization that Grandma might just be the Big Bad Wolf.”

“You owe a dollar to the Fairy Tale jar when we get back home.”

“Spoilsport.”

Rebekah leans in to nudge her nose against Susanna's jaw, smiling faintly when she turns her dark brown eyes on Stiles. “Jake's idiocy aside—”

“Still sitting right here.”

“—it is impressive to see how well you fit. Susanna said you weren't brought up in a pack?”

“Not even a little bit,” Stiles laughs. “Werewolves were just bad makeup effects and really bad CGI until I was about sixteen.” He nods towards the table behind him. “That's when Scott got bitten, and . . . well, things got real pretty freaking fast after that.”

“You never exactly seemed to have trouble adjusting your world view,” Derek says, arching an eyebrow. “I seem to remember a certain Hardy Boys wannabe interrogating me in the back of a cop car barely a week after Scott was turned.”

“I'm resilient, okay?” Stiles shoots back. “Besides.” He trails his thumb slowly over Derek's. “I had
good reason to make the effort.”

“Ugh, they're revoltingly adorable.” Rebekah eyes them, gaze soft with something that Derek can only describe as nostalgia. “Were we that bad when we were first married?”

“We were worse, actually,” Susanna smirks. “I'm pretty sure we would've been making out on top of the centerpiece by now.”

“And on that note.” Jake pushes back from the table, rolling his eyes in annoyance. “I'm going to see if they've started serving drinks out there yet.”

“He's a little bit on the touchy side right now.” Carmen, the last member of their table, looks up from her phone once Jake's left. “Just went through a bad breakup.”

“Also, he's an asshole,” Stiles adds, earning a bark of laughter from Rebekah. “He spent the entire hour and a half of that interspecies relations panel this morning being an obnoxious troll.”

“You didn't say anything about that,” Derek frowns. “Did he—”

“Easy, babe.” Stiles's grin is wide and easy, and something settles in Derek at the sight. “He just made some stupid jokes under his breath; nothing I couldn't handle.”

“He may lack social niceties, but his pack's territory is one of the best in the state. Ugh.” She wrinkles her nose as the waiter returns, balancing a tray covered in small dishes of ice cream. “I think I'll skip dessert.”

“You don't like ice cream?” Stiles is staring at the dish that's set in front of her with undisguised longing, though he knows better than to try to reach for it. “That's tragic.”

“I like it fine, but it's the same crap here every year, and it's always freezer-burned. Pass.” She stands, smoothing down her dress and smirking just a little as they all stare at the way it clings to her curves. “I'm going to follow Jake's lead, I think. Not all of us are lucky enough to have already found that special someone, you know.”
“She's snarky.” Stiles nods, scooping up the last of his own dessert. “I like her.”

Derek huffs out a laugh and reaches across the table, snagging the ice cream she's left behind and depositing it in front of Stiles.

“Or maybe she's just incredibly wise. Soulmates, man, you and me,” he says gleefully, and digs in.

“So what took the two of you so long?” Susanna asks, resting her elbows on the table. “Stiles said you've only been together a few months, but you've known each other since he was fifteen? What was the hold-up?”

Derek hesitates. He's never been able to master the art of keeping his cool at times like this, of keeping his heartbeat steady under the pressure of a spur-of-the-moment lie, and a room full of alpha werewolves is hardly the ideal place to practice the skill. He can already feel his pulse speeding up, and it's only the feeling of Stiles's hand sliding down his back that keeps him from panicking altogether.

“We, ah . . . we didn't get along too well when we first met, actually.” A heavily-edited version of the truth should do on his side, he thinks; Stiles has gotten remarkably good at lying under pressure, and Derek has no doubt that he'll be able to keep up. “He got me arrested for murder.”

“Not just me!” Stiles protests.

“Hey!”

“The truth hurts, Scott!”

Derek smiles. “Things were unsettled when I first got back to Beacon Hills. I wasn't in any sort of space to think about a relationship with anyone, much less the obnoxious kid who was apparently hell-bent on ruining my life.”

“Who kept saving your life, you mean,” Stiles snorts.

“That, too.” Derek tosses his napkin on the table, sitting back with a shrug. “It just wasn't the right
time for us. Plus, his dad is . . .” His eyes dart over to Stiles, uncertain.

“The sheriff.” Stiles is smiling now, too, clearly amused at Derek's reluctance to say the word when he isn't trying to warn Stiles off. “Can you believe it, with all the other shit we had standing in the way, he was still worried my dad was gonna haul him off in cuffs for dating his son.”

“ Dating his under age son,” Derek reminds him. “And yeah, not wanting to get arrested again was a consideration.”

“Not anymore, though.” There's something in Stiles's eyes that Derek can't quite read, but his mouth is curved in a soft, private smile that Derek can't help but want to taste.

“Such a shame,” Susanna cuts in with a melodramatic sigh. “Leslie would just love you, Stiles. Tell you what, I can give you my card, and if you two ever break things off—”

The growl escapes before Derek can stop it, bubbling up in his chest and spilling out before he knows what's happening. Susanna and Rebekah both turn to stare at him, startled; for a split second Rebekah's eyes flash red, her lips pulling back into a matching snarl.

Then Stiles begins to laugh, choked and muffled for a moment before he finally lets loose in an explosive burst. Susanna and Rebekah take up a few seconds later, and as heads turn at the commotion they're making, Derek schools his face into a sheepish grin instead of the slack-jawed horror that's trying to overtake him.

“Oh my god.” Stiles is wiping actual tears from his eyes, leaning against Derek's shoulders for support as he winds down into breathless chuckles. “Oh my god, that was awesome. Good to know you care, babe.”

“It looks like the migration is in full effect now,” Rebekah says, rising to her feet and helping her wife with her chair. “Come on, kids, let's go get the party going.”

“What the hell,” Stiles hisses in his ear as they're standing to follow the older couple out of the ballroom. “I mean, don't get me wrong, that was hilarious, but—”

“I don't know; it just came out,” Derek grits out.
“That’s what she said. Oh, please, you **had** to know I’d go for that.” Stiles says, unrepentant in the face of the glare that Derek shoots him. “Well, the good news is that now Rebekah seems to think that you’re adorably territorial, and based on how she acts around Susanna I’m guessing she considers that a good quality in a mate. Are you okay, though? I mean, you’re not having, like . . .” His eyes dart around nervously. “Control issues. Are you?”

“Because of the others?” Derek takes a deep breath, letting Stiles’s scent soothe him and swallowing past the realization that he can’t put off for any longer. “No.” He lets his hand rest on the back of Stiles’s neck for just a moment, just enough to drink in the heat of his skin. “I’ll be fine.”

There are a couple dozen people already milling around with drinks when they reach the atrium, and Stiles manages to snap a handful of pictures on his phone before they’re separated, pulled into different discussions and pulled apart. Not far, though; never far, not with Derek’s skin all but humming with awareness of Stiles’s scent, his voice, the shape of his movements out of the corner of his eye. Derek is oriented towards him like a compass pointing North, drawn towards him even when he’s standing still. He doesn’t know how it happened, can’t begin to imagine how so much could have changed without his consent, without so much as his awareness. How he could have tied himself to Stiles so completely that he’d never even noticed that he’d found a new anchor.

He’s working on his second drink, feeling the beginnings of a buzz sweep through his blood and trying to focus a discussion of land rights between three alphas from eastern Washington, when Stiles’s voice catches his ear again.

“—still so new, I don’t think either one of us are thinking about that yet.”

“You shouldn’t worry.” Derek can make out Rebekah’s voice even before he turns, finally spotting Stiles twenty feet away or so with a group of older men and women, alphas all. “Strict biological inheritance of status hasn’t been an issue for generations now; not among civilized packs, in any case. You may not be able to have children with him, but—”

“Oh, no, that’s not even—I mean, by *may*, you mean *absolutely can’t*, right? That’s not, like, a thing I have to worry about, is it?”

Derek hides his own smile behind his glass as laughter rings out from the alphas. “No, sweetie,” one of the women says, still chuckling. “Mystical werewolf pregnancy isn’t something you need to worry about. I’m guessing overconsumption of bad fantasy porn might be, though.”
“Ha-hah. Just checking; I've seen a lot of weird shit over the years, I'm done ruling things out just because they sound insane.”

“Have you thought about adoption, though?” A handsome older alpha that Derek doesn't recognize by name is standing just a little too close, sipping at his martini like the world's worst seduction cliché. “Your pack isn't large, but it's established with a fairly decent reputation. There are people here who could pull some strings, if that's something that interests you.”

“Actually . . .” Derek can hear the hitch in Stiles's voice, smell the change in his scent as a flush begins to spread over his skin, and something seems to catch and tug behind his navel. “I have. Thought about that. I was wondering—in one of the seminars today, there was some speculation about maybe reforming some sort of disbanded werewolf council, and I was thinking . . .” Stiles takes an audibly deep breath. “Derek doesn't like to talk about what happened to his family, but I know that he and his sister didn't really have anyone to take them in. After. And as long as there are hunters, that's something that's gonna keep happening: kids whose families are gone, who don't have any connection with other packs, trying to survive on their own. Shouldn't there be some sort of . . . I don't know, like a placement system, maybe? Packs agreeing to foster each other if something terrible happens? You can't just use regular social services, not with freaked-out werewolf kids whose pack is suddenly gone. They'd need other wolves, people who could understand what they're going through and help them keep control of themselves. People who won't be freaked out when Junior shifts for the first time.”

“So you're suggesting . . .?”

“I don't know, a . . . a werewolf adoption network?” Stiles lets out an awkward laugh. “Some sort of system. Something to give those kids a safety net. And I know we're young, and probably not ready right now, but we're got a pretty good setup in Beacon Hills. Big house, lots of territory, ins with local law enforcement. I think . . . yeah. I think I'd like to have kids. Someday, you know.”

The sincerity in his voice rocks Derek to his core, and he's moving before he gives his feet conscious permission. He needs to be near Stiles; needs to feel the warmth of his body, to make sure there's no doubt in anyone's mind about Derek's claim on him. With Stiles's back to him it's the others who see him first, and the smiles on their faces make it clear that they know exactly what's on his mind.

“Well, look who's finally torn himself away from business,” Rebekah says, and Stiles turns to step practically into Derek's arms.

“Woah! Hey.” There's a flush still riding over his cheeks, turning them a splotchy pink as he laughs. “Didn't see you there.”
“You're lucky you found him first, Derek.” Rebekah eyes the two of them over her glass, trying and failing to hide a smirk. “He's got a sharp mind; I'd be trying to steal him away for my pack if I thought I had a chance in hell of pulling it off.”

Stiles groans, hooking an arm over Derek's shoulder. “Why are you trying to cause trouble?”

“No trouble,” Derek says, his arm snaking around Stiles's waist. Stiles leans in and presses up against Derek's side, trusting and easy, and everything inside of Derek seems to turn over and sigh.

It's the most natural thing in the world, then, to dip his head just slightly and bring their mouths together. He sinks into the kiss, head spinning as Stiles's lips parting softly beneath his. His hand splays out against the small of Stiles's back, pulling him closer and sucking his bottom lip briefly between his own. In the grand scheme of things it's an easy sort of kiss, no longer or deeper than the one that Stiles had given him on a rest stop sidewalk, a day and a lifetime ago. When he pulls back, however, Stiles is staring at him in a daze, eyes half-clouded and a fresh flush riding high over his cheeks.

“I—” He clears his throat when his voice comes out thready and broken, smiling weakly. “Hey, Sourwolf. What do you say we get out of here?”

Chapter End Notes

As ever, please feel free to follow me on Tumblr, where you can get teasers, see me fill prompts, watch me have breakdowns over all the things I want to write, and participate in general fandom shenanigans!
Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

Those of you who follow me on Tumblr may be aware that the past several months have involved some major life changes for me, which have cut into my fic-writing time. Apologies for the very large delay in posting this chapter, but please enjoy it excessive length and also porniness. If you thought this fic was self-indulgent before, YOU AIN'T SEEN NOTHIN' YET. I have zero regrets.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Derek keeps his hand at the small of Stiles's back all the way across the lobby for appearances' sake. The second the elevator doors close, however, Stiles moves out of his reach, and Derek doesn't try to stop him. He feels sick, unmoored; everything feels nauseatingly hyper-real, from the lingering warmth of Stiles's mouth against his to the sharp, unpleasant note that his scent has developed. Derek finds himself desperately trying to wake up, hoping that this has only been a nightmare, that if he just tries hard enough he'll open his eyes and find Stiles still curled warm and trusting against him, early-morning sun filtering through the curtains.

That's never going to happen again, though. There's not an ounce of ambiguity in the set of Stiles's shoulders or the tight line of his jaw, and Derek honestly doesn't know if Stiles can possibly be any more furious or disgusted with him than he is with himself. They had one groundrule for physical contact, one, and Derek's just trampled straight past it when Stiles was in no position to stop him.

Stiles tries three times to get the door unlocked before fisting his hands in his hair in frustration; Derek moves forward cautiously and Stiles lets him, backing away to let Derek carefully slide the keycard in until the light flashes green and the handle gives way. A sort of terrible calm has settled over him, the kind of empty detachment he thought he'd left behind years ago; he watches quietly as Stiles storms into the room and tosses his jacket towards the table with Derek's book still sitting on its surface, watches him pace and shove his hands through his hair again until its stylish disorder is wrecked all to hell. Finally Stiles turns to him, face flushed, and lifts his arms only to drop them in a helpless gesture.

“You wanna tell me what the actual hell, man?”

“I'm sorry.” He's aware, distantly, that there's still shame and panic clawing at his gut, but his voice is steady even as his jaw tightens. “I shouldn't have done that.”
“Yeah,” Stiles says on a disbelieving little laugh, “no shit.”

Despite everything, despite knowing its truth perfectly well, it's still a surprise just how much the confirmation hurts. It's easy to fall back into bad habits, to let his arms cross and his face crease into a glower before he takes a deep breath and swallows down the urge to be combative, defensive. He has no right to act like the injured party here, not when all Stiles has done is tell him the truth.

“We can leave in the morning.” He scrubs a hand over his face. “Hell, we can leave right now, be back in Beacon Hills by morning.”

“Are you out of your freaking mind?” Stiles half-yells. “We're not leaving, not when we're on the verge of actually securing some allies here. Which, in case you've forgotten, is the whole reason we came to this thing in the first place. For 'the good of the pack' and all that bullshit, right?”

“Since when is any of that bullshit?” Derek demands.

“I don't know, maybe since you decided that your fucking embarrassment is more important than any of the connections we've been making all weekend! Look, you fucked up, and that . . . it sucks, okay, believe me I get it. But you can't go crawling off with your tail between your legs just because —”

“Well, so much for that truce, I guess.”

“What are you even—shit. Sorry, I didn't mean . . .” Stiles sighs, deflating. “You're kind of an asshole,” he says flatly, before giving a smooth, rolling shrug of his shoulders. “But I don't really have a lot of room to talk there, and you know, 'mutual jackasses' has always sort of worked for us, so. I know you wish you hadn't . . . done what you did, so let's just agree to put it behind us and try to, like, just move on. Like the adults we supposedly are. There's still that breakfast tomorrow, and it's gonna look shifty as hell if we take off now.”

Derek nods, crossing his arms again without caring how it looks this time. “You're right. I'll just.” He nods towards the table. “I can sleep in the chair.”

“What?” The incredulous look is back on Stile's face. “Come on, seriously? You don't think that's taking things a little bit far?”
“I know I’m an asshole,” Derek glares, “but I’m not going to insist on you sharing a bed with me after that.”

“Oh my god, is it possible for that martyr's cross to be jammed any farther up your ass?”

“Everything about this trip was a terrible idea.” It's Derek's turn to pace now, though he hardly makes it more than three steps before Stiles rolls his entire head and reaches out to snag his arm.

“I'm not some delicate freaking flower, okay?” he says, pulling Derek around to face him again, his eyes bright and intensely determined, and for a moment Derek hates everything in the entire world. “I'm not going to freak out on you—any more than I have already, I mean, though I think that's understandable given the extenuating circumstances. Anyway, the point is, I can handle sleeping next to your majestic and terrible beauty without having some sort of existential crisis about it.” He looks down at his hand, still gripping Derek's arm, and abruptly lets go to cross his arms defensively. “I've been fine about it so far, haven't I?”

Derek flushes, remembering again the feeling of Stiles pressed against him from hip to shoulder. “That was before I—” He cuts himself off, clearing his throat. He can be mature about this; has to be mature about it. He owes Stiles that much. “I don't want you to be uncomfortable.”

“Dude.” Stiles's smile is a little brittle around the edges, but he swings an arm out to clap Derek on the shoulder. “I'm like, the long-reigning world champion at dealing with rejection. I'm good.”

“Rejection.” It feels like the world has just tilted slightly to the left, and although Derek's heart is trying to pound its way straight through his rib cage, things are falling unexpectedly into place. “Stiles, what exactly are you pissed about?”

“Why—you're kidding, right?” He's getting angry again, warning clear in his eyes as he stares Derek down. “You kissed me.”

“At the risk of sounding juvenile, you kissed me first.”

“Not like that!” Stiles bursts out, flinging his arms in the air and nearly catching Derek in the chest. “And don't even try to tell me that you aren't fully aware that you crossed a line, because you came up here looking like you'd just accidentally run over your puppy, okay? Just—don't.”
“So you're not angry that I kissed you.” Derek edges closer, eyes darting down to the pulse hammering in Stiles's throat. “You're angry that I kissed you like I meant it.”

“You are not going to pretend you don't—I've made it humiliatingly clear that I was interested, and you shut me down every single time.”

“You made it clear that you were interested in sex,” Derek says sharply, watching Stiles with careful attention. “I wasn't willing to settle for that, not with . . . I'm still not.”

“Derek.” Stiles sounds wrecked with just that one word, his eyes gone huge and uncertain. “Don't fuck with me here, I swear to god I—”

“What if I did mean it? What if I . . .” Derek takes a fortifying breath. “What if I did?”

“You are such an idiot,” Stiles says, wide-eyed and breathless, and then his hands are cupping Derek's jaw as he kisses him, lips on his between one breath and the next. It's warm and relieved, the soft curve of a smile briefly breaking the contact before he crowds into Derek's space, nearly rocking him back and briefly off-balance before he steadies himself. His own hands come up, tentative in a way that Stiles's touch most certainly isn't, as they slide over Stiles's sides to rest lightly against his lower back.

“I'm an idiot?” he says, breathing the words against Stiles's mouth, unwilling to pull away.

“Yeah.” Stiles presses another kiss to his lips, softer this time as his hands slide around to the back of Derek's neck, fingers toying with the short strands of hair at his nape. “But I am, too, so really, we're pretty well-matched.”

Derek tries to laugh, but it comes out as little more than a puff of air before he's pulling Stiles in again, his hands fistling in the back of his vest. The sense of being caught in a dream hasn't faded, but now he doesn't want to wake, and he's holding onto Stiles like an anchor; like his anchor, as he has been since long before Derek could even admit it to himself. He wants to lose himself in Stiles, in the feel of long-fingered hands clutching at the back of his neck and deep, eager kisses, to drown in the taste of his tongue and the hammering of his heartbeat.

“So, okay, I don't want to seem like I'm pushing you or anything,” Stiles eventually pants out, his voice breaking on a moan when Derek angles his head to mouth along the line of Stiles's jaw. “I
know you maybe haven’t had as much time to process this as I have, and I don’t—Derek, would you just . . . oh. Oh, fuck, you’re really good at that,” he breathes, tugging Derek’s head closer and canting his head to one side in blatant fucking invitation.

“I want you.” Derek lets his mouth angle down, just barely skimming over the top of Stiles’s neck. “I’m trying to think of anything you could suggest that I wouldn’t say yes to.”

“Yeah?” Stiles runs blunt nails over Derek’s scalp until his hips jerk forward helplessly at the sensation, grinding against Stiles’s and making them both groan. “How’s that working out for you?”

“Coming up a little short.”

“Thank god, because that whole ‘not having an existential crisis over how hot you are’ thing? Total smokescreen.”

“Stiles.” He has to pause, struggling to breathe, to keep himself under control when all he wants is to take everything Stiles has, to give everything he is back in return. “I’m not going to be able to be casual about this.”

“Dude, I agreed to spend the entire weekend snuggled up in simulated wolfy marital bliss.” Stiles leans in, rubbing his nose against Derek’s temple. “I think it’s fair to say I’m not really looking for casual.”

Derek’s fingers dig hard into the small of Stiles’s back. “Do you even know what you’re doing right now?” he asks, hating how wrecked he sounds from nothing more than a couple of kisses, and absolutely helpless to do anything about it.

“My best friend’s a werewolf. Hell, let’s be real, about ninety percent of the people I know are werewolves.” He nudges his nose against Derek’s temple again, and the soft drag of it against his skin nearly takes his legs out from under him. “Yeah. I know what I’m doing.”

It’s more than he can take, and Derek finally gives in, burying his face in Stiles’s neck and pulling in great, greedy lungfuls of his scent. Stiles laughs, stumbling back a little in surprise; it’s Derek’s turn to follow this time, nosing along the line of his throat as he lets his lips, parted and wet, drag across the faintly stubbled skin there. There are hands carding through his hair, soft and encouraging, and Stiles’s head drops back even farther. Derek lets out a helpless groan, closing his teeth lightly, carefully, over the cords of muscle above his collar.
“Do you have any idea how much easier my life would be if you didn't smell so fucking good?”

“I don't know, like . . . thirty-five, forty percent easier?” His hands slide down, dipping beneath Derek's jacket to start pushing it off of his shoulders. “Am I in the ballpark?”

“You're actually horrible.” Derek reaches up to slide his fingers into the knot of Stiles's tie, tugging it loose enough to nudge his collar aside and feel the hammer of his pulse against his tongue. “I don't even know why I—” He moves his mouth up to Stiles's ear as he swallows back whatever he was about to say. “What do you want? Just tell me.”

“Fuck, dude, that is an extremely long list.”

“So start at the top,” Derek says, taking Stiles's earlobe gently between his teeth, “and work your way do—”

“I want you to fuck me.” It makes them both freeze, Stiles's hands fisted in his collar and his breath a series of unsteady gasps against his ear. “Wow. That was . . . well, that was a little bit blunter, maybe, than I'd planned.”

“I wasn't exactly expecting this.” He almost can't get the words out; he's already so hard it aches, and the thought alone is almost enough to snap his control completely. “I don't have anything.”

“I do.” Derek slides his hand into Stiles's hair, tugging him back until he can see his face. His face is flushed, his lips red and swollen, but there's no hint of insincerity in his eyes. “I keep some supplies in my toiletry bag,” Stiles says defensively. “Just in case.”

“Supplies.”

“Yes, supplies! Okay? If it makes you feel any better I also packed a flashlight, a bowie knife, a package of wolfsbane bullets, and a bag of mountain ash. What?” he demands when Derek simply stares at him. “I like to be prepared, is that a crime?” He sighs, stroking a hand down the side of Derek's neck. “Look, if that was just an excuse, it's fine. We don't have to do that, obviously; it's just that the last couple of people I've been with, you know, it wasn't really their thing, so I just—”
“Shut up,” Derek finally manages to say, wrapping the end of Stiles's tie around his hand. “God, just shut up and take your clothes off.”

He hauls him in, licking and biting at his lips until Stiles opens for him on an eager moan. Derek finally lets himself sink, abandoning everything but the warmth of Stiles's mouth and the clever twisting of his tongue, his hands darting indecisively between tugging at Derek's clothing and his own. He can hardly keep his own hands on task, sliding them beneath the soft silk of Stiles's vest as soon as he gets it open, distracted by the shift of muscles in his back as he yanks at Derek's belt.

“Stop being so freaking delicate.” Stiles sinks his teeth into Derek's bottom lip like he's trying to demonstrate, and Derek couldn't stop his broken, helpless groan if he tried. “We've been taking this slow for almost eight years, I think it's time we took off the brakes.”

“I don't want to ruin your suit.”

Stiles leans back to stare at him, disbelieving. “Don't tell me you're actually afraid of Lydia. Seriously, I'm pretty sure you could take her if it came down to it.” He hesitates. “Probably.”

“I wouldn't bet on it, but this isn't about her.” Derek slides his palms over Stiles's ass, pulling him in until his hands are trapped between them, knuckles dragging against Derek's erection. “I want you to wear it later when it's your turn to fuck me.”

“You—” Stiles drops his head against Derek's shoulder. “You are a freaking menace,” he says, words muffled against his shirt. “Okay.” He leans back again and pulls away, his face but determined. “New plan. You, take care of . . .” Stiles waves a hand at Derek's clothes. “I'll get the—stuff. Okay?”

Derek finds himself smiling, wide and genuine, despite his body's protests at the distance. “Okay.”

He gets distracted one or twice—five times, if anyone were keeping count—watching Stiles quickly strip, hanging the pieces of his suit carefully over the back of a chair before pausing to dig through his bag. Down to nothing but a pair of—

“Wonder Woman briefs?” Derek's face feels like it's about to split in two as he shucks off his own underwear and climbs onto the bed. “Really?”

“Lydia is not the boss of my underpants,” Stiles says, turning with lube and condoms in hand. “Don't
tell her that, though, I don’t want to—oh.”

He stares, open-mouthed, ridiculous underwear doing absolutely nothing to conceal the interested twitch that his dick gives at the sight of Derek stretched out on the bed. Derek smirks and Stiles makes a strangled noise, tosses the tube and box on the bed, and flings himself on top of Derek hard enough to knock the breath out of both of them.

“Sorry,” he says, nuzzling along Derek's collarbone. “Sorry, I just . . . do you have any idea—fuck, I just have to . . .” His mouth is streaking down before Derek can even respond, trailing down over his chest and stomach, murmuring, “—take my time with you later, I swear—” before settling between Derek's legs and dragging his tongue up Derek's dick in a long, slow lick.

“Oh, fuck,” Derek groans, and falls back against the pillow.

Stiles says something, but since he's already pulling Derek into his mouth it comes out as nothing more than slurried sounds and vibrations that make Derek's toes curl in helpless reaction. As he starts to move, Derek levers himself up on his elbows to watch. He reaches out, thumb skimming over the curve of Stiles's lip, the stretch of his mouth as he sinks back down. Stiles hums low in his throat, and Derek does it again. He can't tear his eyes away from the flutter of Stiles's eyelashes as he moves, the furrow of concentration between his brows, the splay of his hand low over Derek's stomach.

It's every ruthlessly repressed fantasy come to sudden, Technicolor life; every thought he'd ever refused to entertain after a long night of research with Stiles's scent still lingering in his apartment. Stiles in his bed, rubbing himself against Derek's leg as he moans around the dick in his mouth like it's one of his own wet dreams come true. After years of trying not to imagine this every time he caught himself staring a little bit too long at Stiles's mouth, it's almost too much. Derek can feel familiar tension begin to build at the base of his spine and he slides his hand into Stiles's hair.

“Stiles.” The only response is Stiles reaching up, pressing Derek's hand harder against his scalp as he dips even farther down, taking Derek in almost to the back of his throat. “Shit, St—god. Stiles,” he tries again, tugging lightly at Stiles's hair this time, and Stiles moans, grinding hard against Derek's leg. “Fuck, Stiles, if you keep going I'm not going to be able to—”

Stiles whimpers but pulls off, panting against the crease of Derek's thigh. “Okay. Right, sorry.”

“Do you still want—”
“Yes.” Stiles's lifts his head so quickly that Derek gets dizzy just watching, and he crawls up the bed until he can slant his mouth down over his. “Yes, yes, absolutely yes.”

Derek slips his hands inside Stiles's briefs, giving his ass a quick squeeze before snapping the waistband against his hip. “You should get these off, then.”

“Mmm. You don't think they add a certain something?”

“I think they're gonna get in the way in a minute here.”

“Yeah, you know, you make a pretty compelling argument,” Stiles says, clambering up to peel them off. Derek sits up, moving back until his back is braced against the headboard, and Stiles is grinning when he climbs back onto the bed. “Like this, huh?”

“Just like this.” Derek warms the lube between his hands, wetting his fingers as Stiles positions himself on his lap, knees bracketing Derek's hips. “I want to be able to do this,” he adds, and leans in to press an open-mouthed kiss to the base of Stiles's throat.

“Works for me.” Stiles tilts his head back and Derek grins against his skin before he scrapes his teeth against the hammer-point of his pulse, reaching around to slide one slick finger against Stiles's hole. “Definitely . . . definitely works. Fuck.” He hooks his arms over Derek's shoulders and buries his hands in his hair again, tugging lightly at the strands between his fingers. “You're smiling.”

“Mmm.” Derek pushes his finger slowly inside, drinking in the catch of Stiles's breath, savoring the feeling of his moan echoing against his tongue. “Am I not supposed to?”

“No, it's—good, it's good,” Stiles says, his words strained, as Derek begins to pump his finger in and out. “Really good. I like your smile, you should smile all the time. It's just that you usually don't; you know, I'm pretty sure you—yes, fuck, give me another, I'm good, I—oh god, I love your hands.”

“Pretty sure I what, Stiles?” It's hard to concentrate with Stiles starting to rock back onto the stretch of two fingers now, his dick hard and leaking and dragging against Derek's stomach with every shift of his hips. Watching him try to haul his mind back on track is worth it, though. “What were you saying?”

“That you're a jackass.” He doesn't seem to mind, though, pressing their foreheads together so that
every hard breath sends a warm puff of air against Derek's mouth. “Who doesn't smile as much as he should. Pretty sure you've done more of that in the last half hour than I've seen in a year.”

“I cannot hide what I am,” Derek says against his lips. “I must be sad when I have cause and laugh when I am merry.”

“Oh my god,” Stiles says, jerking back and inadvertently shoving his hips hard down onto Derek's fingers, a strangled moan ripping its way out of his throat as he stares in disbelief. “Oh my god,” he says again, “you did not just bastardize Shakespeare while fucking fingering me.”

“You realize what a terrible pun that was, don't you, considering the character I was quoting?”

“How the fuck are you even real?” Stiles mutters before diving down to kiss Derek hard, deep and filthy.

Derek gets lost for a while, swept up in the feeling of Stiles on top of him, surrounding him, the way he swears elaborately when Derek pushes in with three fingers, the insistent shake of his head and the rise and fall of his chest as he adjusts. It's not long before he's moving again, riding Derek's fingers like he can't keep himself still. He makes a high, desperate noise when Derek closes his other hand around his dick, and shakes his head frantically; when Derek releases him and reaches down to cup his balls, however, it triggers a volley of filthy, eager encouragement, trailing off to broken sounds when Derek skims his fingers over the soft skin behind them. Derek thinks he could probably get off on nothing more than this, on the sounds that Stiles is making and the taunting, teasing brushes of his groin against Derek's, and it's relief and disappointment both when Stiles finally grips his shoulders tight, dragging them both to a stop.

“I'm good, I'm ready, let's do this.” He leans over, reaching for the condoms. His body twists around Derek's fingers still inside of him, and Stiles has just snagged the box when he stiffens, clamping down so hard that Derek loses his breath for a moment. “Shit,” Stiles pants, one trembling arm braced against the mattress. “God, don't pull out yet, just let me . . . just a second, let me . . .”

He manages to get a condom out and open, and for a moment he just stares down at the little circle of rubber. Derek is about to say something, some crack about the instruction sheet that comes in the box, probably, when Stiles looks up again. His eyes are wide and uncertain, but whatever he's thinking makes his cock jump against Derek's stomach.

“So, it's totally okay to say no. Obviously.”
Derek raises an eyebrow. “I'm not going to say no to fucking you, Stiles, if you're worried.”

“No.” He laughs a little bit nervously, but he's smirking when he tightens around Derek's fingers just to make him groan. “I got that memo, thanks. I've just always sort of . . . wondered . . .”

Derek follows his eyes when they dart down to the condom in his hand again, and his heart gives a hard, heavy thump. “Oh.”

“I mean, I never have before, I'm always really careful, it's just. I don't want to take any stupid risks, but I've thought about—” He looks up again, flushed from the top of his head all the way down to his chest. “Too much, right? I mean, it's not a deal breaker or anything, I probably shouldn't even have mentioned it—”

“I'm clean,” Derek blurts out, biting down hard on the inside of his cheek against the effect that the suggestion is having on him, against the urge to pull Stiles onto his dick right then. Stiles grins, blindingly bright.

“I know.”

“You know?”

“Dude, you're biggest, most self-sacrificing martyr I've ever met in my life. There's no way you'd be down for getting all pelvic with anyone if you weren't sure it was safe for them.”

“Pelvic, Stiles? Seriously? And you can't know for sure—”

“I trust you,” Stiles says seriously, and Derek forgets, for just a moment, how to breathe.

“Okay.” He leans in, taking Stiles's lips in a quick, soft kiss.

“Yeah?”

“Get up here.” Derek pulls his fingers out slowly as Stiles tosses the condom aside, stroking his hip
through the shudders that follow the sudden sense of emptiness. He kisses him again, deeper this

time. “Lube,” he says when they break away, and Stiles doesn't need any more encouragement than

that.

“Me too.” Stiles is spreading the slippery liquid over Derek's dick in long, perfect strokes, his fist just

shy of too tight. “I don't have documentation on me,” he says, teasing, “but I got checked at my last

physical, and—”

“I trust you, too.” The words aren't as hard as he'd thought they'd be; they're almost easy. And when

Stiles smiles, kissing him as he moves up to position his hips over Derek's, it feels like he's said

something else altogether.

He's never done this before either, skin to skin with nothing in between, and he hadn't been prepared.
Stiles is warm and soft around him, a little tight still and perfectly slick as he sinks down. Derek's
world narrows down to that one point of connection, only vaguely aware of his hands bracing
Stiles's hips, of their chests scraping slowly against each other and Stiles's fingers flexing on his
shoulders. Then Stiles lets out a low, guttural sound that Derek has never heard from him before and
he realizes that his mouth is fixed on the pale, smooth column of Stiles's neck, sucking and biting a
massive purple bruise into the stretch of skin bracketed by a pair of dark moles. He's stared at that
exact spot on more than one occasion, imagined his mark there, but—

“Sorry,” he gasps. He's buried as deeply as possible in Stiles's body now, and he runs his hands over
his back in trembling apology. “I'm sorry, I didn't mean to—”

“I swear to god,” Stiles grits out, “do not try to apologize. Unless the next word out of your mouth
was going to be 'stop'. That,” he says, lifting up and dropping back down quickly enough to have
Derek's hips snapping up in reaction, “is definitely something you can be sorry for.”

“You don't mind?” he asks, grasping the swell of Stiles's ass to help him move.

“Told you.” Stiles leans down, fixing his mouth over Derek's throat, and bites down hard. “I've got a
list.”

The last of Derek's control shreds, and he starts moving Stiles in earnest, guiding the roll of his hips
and surging up to meet them. He chases the sweat from his skin, filling his lungs with the scent of
sex, of the two of them together. His teeth find Stiles's neck again, his shoulders, the dip of his
collarbone. The bruises that he leaves behind pulse in time with the beat of Stiles's heart and Stiles
reaches up to grip the headboard for leverage, leaving himself open and vulnerable to Derek's mouth.
“I need,” he finally pants, grinding down with a frustrated groan. “Harder.”

Derek doesn't answer; he isn't sure that he could. Words seem to have deserted him, lost in the *slide scrape pull* of Stiles moving against him. Instead he grabs Stiles's wrists, winding them around the back of Derek's neck, and flips them over so that Stiles's back lands against the mattress in an abortive bounce. Reaching down, he wraps a hand around the back of Stiles's thigh and hitches it up before he thrusts in again. Stiles shouts, loud and wordlessly triumphant.

“Good?” Derek manages. Stiles's answer is a garbled mess of sounds as he gives another hard, sharp thrust, and Derek's smile edges towards vicious. “Good.”

He wants to shout, as well; wants to *howl*, to mark Stiles inside and out, to leave no doubt as to exactly whose mate he is. Something coiled tight inside of him is starting to unfurl, spreading through his veins in a haze of heated possession. Derek grinds his hips against Stiles's ass and feels himself thickening, feels a tightness building in his groin, and the shock of it has him stuttering to a halt despite the nails digging into his ass, urging him on.

“Wait. Wait.” Derek stops completely, though all he wants to do is keep moving, keep thrusting, keep burying himself inside of Stiles again and again. He drops his head to Stiles's shoulder and struggles to steady his breathing. “I'm going to . . .”

“Come?” Stiles wriggles his hips, whining in high-pitched protest. “Isn't that the *point*?”

“Not . . . not exactly. *Damn it*, Stiles.” Derek bears down, pinning Stiles's hips to the mattress. “I just need to—just give me a minute.”

“Dude, I'm not gonna think any less of you if you come first.”

“Are you gonna think less of me if my dick gets stuck in your ass?” Derek snaps, and immediately wants to die.

“Oh.” Stiles loosens his grip, cautiously sliding his hands up Derek's back instead. “I, uh.”

“Sorry,” Derek grits out. “I didn't think I'd—”
“No, it's not—I just didn't realize that you, you know.” He clears his throat. “Some of the women at the panel yesterday were talking about it. In really, really graphic detail, actually, because it turns out that middle-aged women put high school boys' locker rooms to fucking shame. But I didn't think it happened, you know. Every time.”

“It doesn't.” Derek can't lift his head; can possibly never look Stiles in the eyes again. The only positive part of this hideous conversation is that it's killed the urge that nearly took him over a minute ago, though apparently even humiliation isn't enough to completely distract his dick from the fact that it's still buried balls-deep in Stiles's body. “It's just instinct,” he says eventually. “You were talking about adoption, downstairs, before I—it must have triggered . . . something.”

“Are you serious?” Stiles sounds gleeful, and Derek discovers that he's fully capable of looking at him after all. “Oh, no,” Stiles gloats when Derek lifts his head to glare at him, “no, you're the one whose mating instinct or whatever got all hot and bothered thinking about the pitter-patter of little werewolf paws, I am totally allowed to think that's adorable as shit. It, uh.” He clears his throat, shifting his leg into a more comfortable position and making them both choke off a groan. “I mean, you can't actually mate me though, right? You're not gonna impregnate me with magical werewolf sperm or anything?”

Derek squeezes his eyes shut. “I can't believe I'm in bed with someone who just used the phrase 'magical werewolf sperm'.”

“That's not a no.”

“No, Stiles. You're thinking of bad sci-fi, not reality.”

Stiles snorts. “Says the werewolf.”

“Just—” Derek sighs, trying to pretend that he isn't arching into the slow, soothing strokes of Stiles's hands up and down his spine. “I just need to take a minute.”

“Sure. Hey, it's fine. But.” His deep breath brushes his chest against Derek's. “What if you didn't?”

Derek freezes. “What?”
"I mean, if it means jumping straight into wolf cub adoption and joint bank accounts we probably shouldn't skip the fifty or so steps in between, but." He presses himself further into the mattress, leaning back as best he can to catch Derek's gaze. "But I don't think it does."

"It means something," Derek says slowly. "But if you're asking if I can marry us with my cock, the answer is no."

Stiles snickers, burying the sound of it in Derek's shoulder. "Good to know, big guy."

Derek takes a deep, careful breath, closing his eyes as he tries to pretend that the words he's about to say are easy. When he opens them again Stiles is staring back at him, all warm-honey eyes and swollen, curving red lips, and the pressure in Derek's chest begins to ease.

"I want this," he says, and Stiles beams.

"Good thing we lost the condom, then." He surges up, kissing Derek breathless. "I don't think it'd be up to the challenge."

Derek eases off of him, letting Stiles stretch a little before settling him on his side, left knee curled up towards his chest as Derek curves his body around him and presses in again. With one arm curved around Stiles's ribs he can hold him close, back to chest with just enough room to accommodate the slow roll of his hips. Stiles sighs when Derek's mouth brushes over the nape of his neck, down to the juncture between his neck and shoulder to suck lightly at the mark he's already made. And Derek can watch Stiles reach down, wrapping his hand around his dick and stroking himself back to full hardness. He wants to tell him how good he looks, how good he feels, how a part of him still can't believe he gets to have this, but his words have deserted him. All he can do is try to speak through the way he traces a scattering of moles with his mouth, the press of his hands and the ragged rush of his breath against sweat-damp skin.

Slow and careful only lasts so long. Hunger is building again, needy and insistent, urging him to take, to claim, to mate, and Derek moves his hand from the intoxicating thrum of Stiles's heart beneath his palm to splay low over his stomach, holding him in place as Derek's thrusts grow harder, faster. Stiles reaches back, threads a hand through Derek's hair and bares his neck, moaning in shameless encouragement at the growl that Derek can't quite suppress. He wants to stay there forever, safe in the nest of sweat-soaked sheets and air that's thick with the scent of Stiles and sex. When he feels himself start to tighten this time he doesn't fight it; he pulls Stiles tighter against him and with a handful of short, helpless snaps of his hips, lets the base of his dick swell as he empties himself deep inside of him.
“Oh god,” Stiles whimpers between ragged, panting breaths. There's an edge of pain to his voice, but when Derek moves his hand down it's to find him still hard, arm moving frantically as he tugs and pulls at his dick. Derek adds his hand to Stiles's, slippery with sweat and lube and the precome that's leaking steadily out of the tip. It takes less than a dozen slick, sticky strokes before Stiles tightens around him, making them both cry out as he comes in messy ropes over their joined fingers.

“Fucking . . . hell,” Stiles slurs eventually, and it's not until he leans more firmly back against Derek's chest that Derek is aware of his own trembling, of the way he's rubbing the filthy mess of his hand over Stiles's stomach and clutching helplessly at him. “'re you okay?”

Derek's voice doesn't much want to work, but he nods as he buries his face in Stiles's neck and tries to breathe.

“Okay,” is all Stiles says for a while. He leans his head back, resting against Derek's shoulder, and slides his fingers lazily over Derek's forearm. “Not that I'm complaining,” he adds after he's gotten his breath back and Derek feels slightly less ready to shake apart at any moment, “but how long does this usually last?”

“I don't know.”

That has Stiles craning his neck, shifting just enough that they both feel it where they're still joined together. Stiles curses softly and Derek stills him, stroking the soft line of hair leading down from his navel. That earns him a distracted sigh, and Stiles settles again.

“What do you mean, you don't know?”

“I know what you know: anywhere from fifteen minutes to half an hour, I think. But I've never . . .”

“You've never done this before?”

“It's not a casual thing.”

“Dude, nothing about you is casual.” Stiles goes back to petting Derek's arm. It's strangely soothing. “I'm glad,” he says quietly.
Derek noses at the nape of Stiles's neck again, breathing deep. “There are things we should talk about.”

“Yeah.” Stiles lets out a heavy breath. “I might fall asleep, though.”

“We've got time.”

“Mmm.” Stiles's body starts to sag back against him. “You're in charge of cleanup, whenever this is finished.”

“Sounds fair.”

“And be ready to roll over.” Derek can hear his heartbeat slowing, his breathing deepen. “Cause I'mma spoon the fuck out'f you.”

Derek feels light just thinking about it—Stiles's arms around him, his body surrounding him. In Derek's bed, in his life, because that's where he wants to be.

“If you insist,” he says, and buries his smile in Stiles's hair.

Chapter End Notes

Derek is quoting Don John from "Much Ado About Nothing". Don John is Don Pedro's illegitimate brother. He's a bastard. That's it, that's the joke.
Epilogue

Chapter Notes

Just a quick little addition, because Stiles's BFF needs to know about this major development in his life, wouldn't you say? Also a little bit more of Derek reveling in no longer being touch-starved, because I'm sappy like that. POV switch for this last part on account of how I felt like it.

Thank you SO MUCH to everyone who's stuck around through this fic's snail-like progress, and as ever, an extra-special shoutout to the beautiful, brainy, glorious ninjaboots for the donation of her betaing prowess.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Stiles.” Scott wraps a hand around Stiles's arm, smiling vaguely at the alpha from the Eugene territory as he tows him away. “Sorry, I just need to borrow him for a—dude,” he hisses, as soon as it seems like no one's paying attention to them anymore. “You look like you got mauled.”

“Yeah.” Stiles can't see his own expression, but if Scott's face is anything to go by, his smile is absolutely revolting. “I know, right?”

“You . . . oh my god!”

“Shh!” Stiles looks around, hoping no one's paying too much attention to Scott's outburst, or the open-mouthed delight on his face. “Inside voice, Scott.”

“You and Derek totally got it on!”

“Yeah, as per usual,” Stiles says significantly, though he can't keep the goofy smile off of his face. “But yeah, last night was . . . definitely a new level for us.”

“Oh my god!” Scott says again, right before he smacks Stiles in the shoulder.
“Ow! What the hell! That's gonna leave a mark.”

“Like you'd even notice another bruise. And that's for mooning over Derek for like six years,” Scott hisses, “and making me promise not to say anything. Meanwhile, you finally get your shit together and don't even bother to tell me! I had to prep all kinds of bullshit in case he asked why you were so pissed off when he kissed you last night, and that's time I'm never gonna get back now.”

“Okay, first of all, these are fun bruises, don't even pretend you don't know the difference. Second of all, what you do on your own time is your business; I'm not responsible for it. And third—”

“Ow!”

“Dude, there's no way that actually hurt.”

“You hit me!”

“Because you . . .” Stiles lowers his voice. “You never told me Derek was into me, too!”

Scott goes completely, damningly still. “I, uh. What makes you think I knew about that?”

“Because you'd be way more incredulous if you hadn't. Remember Kelly Landers? Freshman year?”

“Dude, she was practically engaged, there's no way anyone would have—”

“Not the point, Scott! You totally knew about Derek.”

“Yes, okay, yes! I knew!” Scott says. “I found out yesterday, and I would've told you, but he made me promise not to.” He raises a pointed eyebrow. “Kind of like my best man made me swear on my wedding ring not to tell Derek about his giant, weepy crush on him.”

“Okay, I was not weepy—”
“Neither of you are ever making me your romantic confidant ever again.”

“Oh come on, Scotty.” He slings an arm around his friend's shoulder, grinning widely. “One more thing.”

“No, no way,” Scott protests. “Come on, stop.”

“Stop what?”

“That smile.”

“Oh, what, I can't smile now? I can't be happy?”

“I know that smile.” Scott is shaking his head, holding his hands up like he's trying to warn Stiles off. “That's your 'about to over-share' smile, and I'm not—”

“What? I don't over-share.”

“I do not want to hear about your sex life with Derek!”

“Come on, you don't even want to hear about how far we made it down the list?”

“What? No, dude, come on,” Scott groans, trying to squirm away even as he's unable to keep from laughing. “You told me you burned that!”

“It's not gonna scar you, we only made it to—”

“No details!”

“Do you two need a mediator?” They look up to see Derek staring at them with a wry tilt to his eyebrows. “Or a time out?”
“Honeywolf!” Stiles lets Scott go and slips an arm around Derek's waist instead.

“I will give you a hundred dollars to never call me that again,” Derek says at the same time that Scott groans, “Oh come on.”

“So how'd it go?” Stiles asks, ignoring their protests. “Did they say yes?”

“I told Susanna to call Boyd so that they can go over the details.” Derek's hand slips down to rest over his hip, pulling him a little bit closer. “We'll see what it would take to set up a fostering contingency between our two packs, and if it works, we can use it as a template for agreements between any others that might be interested.”

“You are so freaking sexy,” Stiles murmurs, and leans in to kiss him.

“Okay, you two are on your own.” Scott is already backing away when Stiles looks over, his expression torn somewhere between happiness for his friend and ugh, please don't make me look at that. “I've gotta go talk to . . . a guy.”

“What guy?”

“An important Alpha guy!” Scott's laughing now, waving as he moves off. “I'll see you guys back home.”

“Spoilsport,” Stiles sniffs, and turns back to Derek. “Hey. Rebekah told me she's glad we made up.”

Derek frowns. “Made up?”

“Apparently we seemed like we were trying too hard earlier. She assumed we were fighting, y'know, the way young couples sometimes do.” He smirks. “We seem way more natural today, I guess.”

“You do seem pretty relaxed.”
“Mmm. You too.” Stiles reaches up, sliding a finger over the trio of bruises just beneath Derek's jaw. “Am I gonna have to redo these every morning?”

“I can't stop them from healing when I'm asleep.” Derek smiles, small but real. “I don't mind if you want to keep trying to make them stick, though.”

“Good to know.” Their hands meet, fingers tangling together, and Stiles looks down at where his thumb is trailing slowly against Derek's. “So, uh. We're gonna be heading home in a couple of hours.”

“That's the plan,” Derek says carefully. His face is wary when Stiles looks back up, edging towards careful blankness, and Stiles gives his fingers a tight, reassuring squeeze.

“It's just that, well, I can be kind of . . . handsy,” he says quietly, stepping closer and lowering his voice to just the barest whisper. “During normal, day-to-day relationship stuff. I know we have to be like that here, and it's kind of been a great excuse, but—”

“Stiles—”

“I mean it, dude, I'm gonna be like, all over you pretty much all the time,” Stiles says urgently, trying to pretend that his throat hasn't gone tight with nerves. “More than I usually would, even, because you're . . . well, you, so if you're not into PDA or like, excessive snuggling, things like that—you need to tell me pretty much right away, all right, because—”

“Stiles.” Derek draws him in. Their joined hands are pressed between their chests, and Stiles can feel the steady beat of Derek's heart. “Believe me,” he says, smiling as he murmurs against the shell of Stiles's ear, “I'm not going to mind.”

THE END
ANOTHER WIP FINALLY COMPLETED, YAY! As ever, please feel free to follow me on Tumblr for assorted shenanigans!

End Notes

As ever, please feel free to follow me on Tumblr at hungrylikethewolfie. Enjoy Sterek, assorted attractive people, flailing over fic tropes, and general shenanigans!

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