The First To Fake Is The Last In Line

by AgnesBlue

Summary

High school AU in which Derek is the popular jock, Stiles is the lowly nerd. Derek is dared to dupe Stiles into a fake relationship.

Notes

Some of you may remember this fic I posted awhile back. I had made the absolute brilliant decision not only to do alternating POVs between Derek and Stiles but also alternating tenses for the two, and this had the unfortunate effect of driving me (and a lot of readers, I assume) up the wall. I started hating the entire thing so much that I ended up taking it down with the idea of fixing the tenses, but only recently got around to doing so. I did go through it a few times, but may have missed a few things here and there, and apologize in advance for any mistakes.
Chapter 1

Derek

*This is going to be so easy,* was Derek’s first thought.

He glanced over his shoulder to where Jackson was watching him with eyes practically sparkling with mirth, then back at the kid who was pulling books out of his locker, looking as if he was lost deep in thought.

Nerd-boy Stilinski, with his tennis-ball cropped hair, and that dopey wide mouth people wanted to staple shut the moment he started talking.

*Easy prey,* as his grams used to say when she caught the whiff of a crippled animal nearby and was about to go in for the kill.

*Alright, let’s do this,* he thought, as he adjusted his shirt, lips twitching when he heard Jackson sniggering behind him. *Circle your calendar, loser. I’m going to make your day.*

Stiles

Stiles Stilinski was indeed lost in thought. He was generally that way, lost in a hundred consecutive thoughts at one time, like a stick figure moving its rapid, never-still way through a flip book. He was thinking that he wanted to call his dad, just to hear his voice and say hi and think *I love you* all throughout the conversation, and then on the heels of that came the question of what he should have for dinner. Leftover lasagna from Sunday? Or pasta salad from that box pushed deep into the pantry that was soon about to expire? All he would have to do was dump in the seasoning packet and some olive oil. Sprinkle in some pepper for some extra heat. But what he was in the mood for was some good old fashioned grilled cheese. Which reminded him, he needed to do the laundry and go to the store and buy a bottle of detergent.

He turned around and was startled to find someone standing behind him, just an arm’s reach away. Close enough to touch, and if he took one step forward, close enough to kiss. And that someone was Derek Hale, who was looking at him. Stiles immediately flushed in embarrassment and tried to act nonchalant, as if he hadn’t just jumped a foot into the air like a Pogo stick.

“Sorry,” he said, although he wasn’t sure what he was apologizing for. He would have scurried off like a spooked mouse, but the warm voice that spoke was superglue, melding his feet into place.

“No, wait. Wait. Don’t go.”

“Huh?” Stiles said, like some goober.

“Can we talk? Is this a bad time?”

It was so hard, lifting his head up to meet those eyes and keep it there. Nope, he couldn’t do it. Looking at that face was like looking into the sun. It burned, it stung, it blistered his retinas. Stiles’ eyes slid down a few inches and stopped somewhere between the second and third button of the grey Henley. But looking at that broad, muscular chest was also torturous, so he slid his eyes down a few more inches, which was where Derek's crotch was... so he slid his gaze even farther down and opted to stare at Derek's shoes.
“Yeah?” he mumbled. “What do you want?”

“Are you doing anything tonight?” Derek said.

Was he doing anything tonight? Scott had a date with the Amazing Allison (what else was new under the sun?) so Stiles was going to go home and play video games and then do his homework. Eat a slice of the leftover pie he had been thinking of since first period. Feed Herbert, his guinea pig.

“No, nothing.”

“So you’re free.”


Derek shifted on his feet and Stiles thought he looked almost shy. Shy? Derek Hale? The Derek Hale who wore a leather jacket as black as Stalin’s heart and once told a teacher to go fuck herself? But whatever it was, it was a good look on him. His face turned soft, almost boyish, almost golden, and Stiles felt his heart just…hitch.

Stop it. Stop it. Because Stiles knew Derek was two seconds away from asking (no, ordering) him to do his homework for him, or to help him cheat on Mr. Arturo’s exam next week or quietly follow him to the restroom so he could dunk Stiles’ head into the toilet and flush the water down…

Come on, Stilinski, don’t make this harder than it needs to be, Derek would say. Then again, maybe not, because it was highly possible Derek didn’t know his name.

“There’s a movie that looks good over at the theater.”

“Huh?” Stiles said. Why was Derek telling him this? “Okay.”

“I could pick you up at around seven. What do you say?”

“What? What do I say to what?” Stiles said. He realized how so very dopey he sounded. Huh? What? Wait? Huh? (why didn’t you drool as well while you’re at it, Stilinski?) but his brain had been replaced with spaghetti and marinara sauce. None of this was making sense. “Pick me up? To go with you to this movie at seven?”

“Actually, the movie starts at nine. We’ll go eat first.”

“Are you… are you asking me out? Like on a date?” Stiles said, gobsmacked. I need to get my ears checked. I need new ears.

A part of him thought that Derek would laugh right in his face at that, like that butt-faced bully on the Simpsons – haw haw – but Derek’s smile was a mix of bashful and ‘now he gets it’ playful.

“Yeah, I guess I am,” Derek said.

And boy, if that didn’t make things even more confusing.

Derek Hale had spoken to him only once before today in the two years they had gone to school together. Stiles remembered it well, as if it had been yesterday. The hard clap of a hand on his shoulder and when he twisted his head up in surprise and a little bit of pain, Derek’s irritated, mean, all-twisted-up face glowering down at him, thick brows tight in displeasure.
“You guess you are?” Stiles said. He gave his head a shake. There was no reason on earth for Derek to be asking him out. “No, seriously. What do you want?”

“I’m asking you out. I didn’t think I can make it any simpler than that,” Derek said, voice like honey poured over warm pancakes.

“Ha ha,” Stiles said flatly, because he hadn’t been born yesterday. He wasn’t stupid. Why didn’t people get that? “Funny. Is this some kind of joke?”

“What kind of person would ask someone out as a joke? Why would you even think that?”

“Because - ”

Stiles glanced around helplessly. The bell began to ring then, just as Stiles was about to explain exactly why he would think this was a joke, and really, did that even need explaining?

“I’d like to get to know you better, that’s all,” Derek said. And that was a first. Get to know him better? Stiles could honestly say that no one had ever said that to him before, ever.

“But you’re dating Jennifer Blake,” Stiles said in protest.

“We broke up a week ago. She wasn’t who I wanted.”

“She wasn’t?”

The noise of the hallway faded into the background and it was almost as if it were just the two of them left in the entire building, maybe the whole world.

“She wasn’t. Please say yes.” Derek leaned in, his eyes green and warm. His breath tickled Stiles’ ear. And Stiles didn’t know why he kept thinking in food similes, maybe he was hungry, but his heart melted like a pat of butter on hot toast. “What do you say?”

Derek

“What did he say? Did he say yes?” Jackson asked impatiently, keeping his voice low.

Derek ended up being a few minutes late to class. It majorly pissed him off, that Stilinski took so long to fucking answer that Derek had to endure Harris’ stink eye as he slunk in through the door and found an empty desk. But the anger quickly gave away to smugness.

He smirked in reply. He was almost offended that the question was being asked of him; the Stiles Stilinskis of the world did not reject the Derek Hales of the world.

“He said yes.” Jackson laughed into his hand and whispered, “This is awesome. Holy shit.”

Awesome, indeed. Derek felt invincible, drunk on the knowledge of having someone completely under his spell.

“Oh, man. Dude. This is going to be hilarious,” Jackson wheezed, riddled with laughter he was trying hard to contain.

Derek had already decided to go all out, pull out all the stops. The whole nine yards. Just go for it. He was going to make it good. Legendary. Something about nerd-boy bugged the crap out of him.
Always had. So yeah, it was going to be epic.

Stiles
It was almost six.

Stiles stood in front of the mirror, staring at his reflection in immense dissatisfaction.

He glanced towards the bed, where he had tossed out all the acceptable shirts and pants he owned from his closet and drawers. So this was what his mom had meant when she used to say she didn’t have anything to wear. It had made absolutely no sense at the time, but now, he finally got it.

He had nothing to wear.

He didn’t have date clothes; there had never once been a need for them. And now, the dateless wonder for the past 16 years was going out on a date with the Derek Hale. This was enormous. Front page news. And he was scared shitless.

He wriggled out of the third pair of pants he had tried on and kicked them to the side. He didn’t even know why he was bothering to try on every single article of clothing he owned when he already knew he was going to end up wearing his favorite jeans and his favorite t-shirt.

He wished Scott was here with him. He would have been good moral support as Stiles’ sole cheerleader for the past ten years. But Scott was with Allison, queen of unicorns and rainbows – and Stiles wasn’t bitter, not really, he just missed having his best friend around, having someone to talk to – and Stiles was willing to bet his left eyeball that the two were making out right about now, tangled together like earphones inside a pocket. Kissing. Fondling. Hands up each other’s shirts. The works.

His mind screeched to a stop as a sudden thought clunked into his head. Kissing. Fondling. Would he get to do that stuff with Derek? Did Derek want to do that stuff with him?

“I can’t believe I said yes,” he muttered. Now that the enormity of the whole thing was hitting him full-force, the impulse was there, as it had been the moment he started getting ready, to call Derek and cancel. Lie and tell him that something had come up. He was angry with himself, that he had gotten himself into this mess.

He looked into the mirror, again with dissatisfaction. He wished, not for the first time that day, not for the first time that month, or that year, that he was easier on the eyes, more likable, less of a loser, more… everything. Someone who would look good hanging from Derek’s arm. Someone who could keep Derek’s interest. He had the unhappy suspicion that even if he were to possess all the clothes in the world, none of them would make him look particularly… sexy.

The doorbell rang and his heart swooped like a paper airplane spiraling to the ground and his hands went clammy. He didn’t think he could do this. He stood there frozen, mind in a scrambled panic.

The bell rang again merrily. Ding-dong!

He wanted to duck and hide in his room until Derek went away, but then, like a remote-controlled robot, his feet began to move on their own, taking him along the hallway and down the staircase.

He opened the front door, and there he was. Derek Hale, replete in his trademark leather jacket and stubble. He looked magnificent, framed in the golden glow of the front porch light, and Stiles
saw then – really saw – why he had been voted hottest guy in school three years running.

“Hi,” Derek said, his easy, smooth voice a sharp contrast to the snakes coiling in the pit of Stiles’ stomach. “You ready?”

_Say no. Say you can’t do it. Say you have a stomachache. Tell him you need to stay close to a toilet all night._

“I am,” Stiles said, although it came out in a little squeak, and he stepped outside and locked the door behind him.

**Derek**

It was funny, because he could tell Stilinski had spent the last few hours leading up to his arrival getting all glammed up, and yet he looked exactly the same. He was no Cinderella, there was no makeover magic happening here, none of the Hollywood ‘dork turned into prom prince’ thing going on. Derek wouldn’t have to deliver him by midnight, because there was no spell to be broken.

Back in the driver’s seat, Derek turned on the ignition and pulled out of the driveway.

“How was your day?” Derek asked.

Stiles shrugged. “It went well.”

“You had chemistry today, right?” Derek said, just to show off the fact that he had been keeping an eye on Stilinski and knew a thing or two about his “crush”. Acting the part of the besotted idiot.

And just as he expected, Stiles looked timidly pleased and a little wondrous.

“How did you know that?” he asked, as if finding out someone’s schedule was rocket science.

“I know a lot of things about you,” Derek said. It was a smarmy line, one that tasted like a burp of castor oil as it left his mouth, but he guessed a small dollop of smarminess wouldn’t hurt.

Besides, it was fun being a little slimy. Slipping into a character that wasn’t him. He needed to watch it, because the last thing the pack needed was another Uncle Peter, but still… Derek was beginning to understand why Peter was the way he was: suave, smooth, a playboy and player, dropping cheesy pick-up lines that would never have worked for anyone else. Because they were wolves, in more ways than one. And playing with people’s hearts was fun. A power trip like none other.

But Stiles’ shy grin dimmed slightly at that. “Like what?” he said. “What do you know about me?”

He was nervous, and Derek knew why. Because most of the things people knew about Stilinski wasn’t all that flattering. He was Beacon Hill’s resident goofball, the loser, and guys like that always had one or two embarrassing stories stuck on them like gum on the bottom of a shoe.

Derek hadn’t ever bothered to figure out if the rumors were lies or not, but it was high school, and sometimes being funny was more important than being accurate. Derek knew that if anyone had asked him about Stiles Stilinski two days ago, he would have laughed and said, “Him? Do you know that he ate a dead worm in seventh grade, just because a pretty girl told him to?”
“Nothing bad,” Derek said, trying to sound warm and reassuring.

Stiles nodded quickly, almost as if relieved, almost as if he didn’t want to know what people were saying about him.

The next few minutes went by in silence. Derek was bored already and trying not to think of the other myriad of enjoyable ways he could be spending his time. Small things about Stilinski annoyed him and the list only kept getting longer as the minutes ticked by.

Derek couldn’t help but notice the way moles were scattered all over his face like someone had stabbed him repeatedly with a brown marker, or how goofy-looking he was, how weirdly his mouth moved each time he spoke.

Four hours later, they were back in front of Stilinski’s house. The burgers at Flip were good as always; it was the only place where the cook was irresponsible enough to send out the meat as rare as Derek asked for, practically uncooked. The movie was good, full of explosives and hot semi-naked girls running around, watermelon-huge tits bouncing all over the place. He’d bought a huge tub of popcorn. Derek didn’t get the point of movie theater popcorn – spongy and stale, over-priced and topped with neon-yellow chemicals that passed for butter – but he had gone out often enough times to know that it was just something boys did for girls at movie theaters; they bought them disgusting popcorn.

The date had gone well, he thought. If he said so himself.

Now they were sitting in Derek’s car, surrounded by the evening darkness. The street was postcard pretty, shrouded in darkness, with hazy circles of golden light haloing the lamps and the flowering bushes spilling out over the iron-wrought fences.

Derek turned to the other boy sitting beside him.

“Did you have fun?” Derek asked.

Stiles nodded, picking at his knuckles. He was uncharacteristically silent, and while Derek would have liked to simply think it was because he was nervous around Derek, something told him that wasn’t the case.

“Did you have fun?” Derek asked again, because he needed to hear the words to parse out whether they were true.

“Yeah, sure,” Stiles said, and while the answer came quickly enough and his voice was steady enough, Derek narrowed his eyes. The little fucker was lying. He couldn’t believe it. For the past twenty minutes, ever since the movie ended, he had been agonizing over whether to kiss him? don’t kiss him? how far should I push it? but he now realized that was pretty much moot. Despite his response, Stilinski hadn’t enjoyed the date.

“Would you like to go out again?” Derek asked carefully, gauging the other boy’s expression. Normally he wouldn’t have asked, just told the girl when and where, and voilà, she would be waiting for him at that exact time and location. But Stilinski was trickier.

“Sure,” Stiles said, still looking at his hands.

Another lie.

Annoyance burst through Derek in spades. And this time, there was that frisson of alarm as well, in addition to dismay, because pulling off this entire dare hinged on Stilinski not losing interest in
him.

He opened his mouth, although he wasn’t sure what he was about to say, but Stilinski was turning away, reaching out for the door handle.

“Thanks for tonight.”

With that, Stiles slipped out and firmly shut the door. With that, he was fucking gone. Like a hologram that blinked out of existence right before his eyes.

Derek stared at the empty seat, dumbfounded. He could practically feel Jackson’s Porsche driving away from him. It felt like a huge middle finger.

Stiles

He stepped out of the bathroom, wearing only his sweatpants, a damp towel slung over his bare shoulders. His dad had returned home sometime during his shower, and Stiles could hear him downstairs, most likely enjoying a well-deserved craft beer and some quiet time to himself. The faint, familiar sounds of a football game drifted up to the second floor. One of the players must have fumbled the ball just then. His dad muttered lowly in displeasure and Stiles found himself smiling, fondness curling around him like a warm blanket.

“Night, dad!” he hollered down the staircase, and “You too, son!” was hollered in return.

Stiles went to his room and shut the door. It was late, he was exhausted, and all in all, glad that the day was over. He was more than ready for bed.

He sat down on the edge of the bed and stared at his toes like Ariel in the Little Mermaid, wiggling them about. He sighed like a leaky balloon. So, his first date. His very first date with Derek Hale…

There was a series of sharp raps from behind him. He whirled around, swallowing a shriek, and eyes grew wide when saw the dark shape outside the window. Shit. Shit. He was going to get murdered tonight. His dad was going to find his lifeless body tomorrow morning. He was…

Wait a second…

The fist pounded again, impatient and demanding. He tugged open the window, and before Stiles could so much as invite him in, Derek Hale was plunging inside.

“You – how the hell did you climb up here?” Stiles yelped. “Did you actually climb up here? You couldn’t have come to the front door like a normal person?”

“Your dad was home,” Derek pointed out.

“So? And you thought this was the next best idea? I know you have a cellphone. You could do a lot of cool things with it, like call other people who have cell phones. Leave text messages or voicemail. Or maybe you could have waited until the next day, again, like a normal person. That was what I would have done. Who climbs through someone’s window on the second floor?”

“God, you talk a lot,” Derek groused.

Stiles realized he had crossed both arms over his bare chest like a girl who actually had anything worth hiding. He quickly snatched up his ratty t-shirt that he used as a pajama top and pulled it over his head, wriggling his arms through the sleeves. When he pulled his shirt collar down, he
saw that Derek was staring at him, and he wrestled down the weird urge to cover his nipples again.

“What are you doing here? What do you want?” Stiles said.

“What was wrong with the date?” Derek said.

Stiles raised his brows, taken aback by the unexpected question. “Huh?”

“What was wrong with the date?” Derek demanded. He sat down hard on the edge of Stiles’ bed, right on the spot Stiles’ had been sitting not two minutes ago, and there was the angry crunch of bed springs.

“What was wrong with the date? You climbed into my room to ask me that? You want a review of our date,” Stiles said incredulously.

“Yeah. Tell me. What did I do wrong?” Derek said.

“Nothing. When did I say you did anything wrong?”

“You didn’t have fun.”

“I had fun,” Stiles insisted.

“Stop lying to me.”

“How do you know I’m lying?”

“I just know,” Derek said. Stiles waited for more, but that was all Derek would say.

“I mean - ” Stiles sighed. It didn’t seem that Derek would leave without an answer. He sank down into his swivel chair. “What do you want me to say?”

Derek crossed his arms over his chest obstinately. “The truth. I want the truth.”

Stiles stared at Derek uncertainly, then sighed. “The truth? Okay. You’re…” He spread his arms out, “kind of a jerk.”

“A jerk. I’m a jerk,” Derek glared.

Stiles shrugged helplessly. “Yeah, kind of.”

It seemed as if Derek was struggling with the concept. “How so? Is it because I didn’t let you choose the movie?”

“I mean, yeah. You could have asked where and what I wanted to eat and what I wanted to see. That would have been considerate. But that wasn’t even the real issue, since, you know, some people apparently have a thing for that… that Neanderthal, caveman mentality.”

Derek gritted his teeth. “Go on.”

Stiles scratched his nose, then came to a decision. He wasn’t so sure this was a good idea, because there was the possibility that Derek would be strangling his scrawny neck by the time he was done, and his dad would find his lifeless body tomorrow morning… no wait, the day after that, because he didn’t really check on Stiles before he left for work at six, so his death would go undetected for at least 48 hours, and honestly, that was a very long period of time for a father and teenage son to go without seeing each other –
“Any day now,” Derek said.

“Fine! You asked for it. Here goes. You were rude to our waiter. You were rude to the ticket guy at the theater. Then you were rude to the guy who stepped on your foot in the theater when it was clearly an innocent mistake and you could have let it go. You were acting like he pulverized your toes. You were nice to the girl at the concession stand, but I’m kind of guessing that had more to do with the fact that she was hot and had big boobs and was flirting with you, and you eat that stuff up.”

Derek opened his mouth.

“And that isn’t all,” Stiles continued and Derek snapped his mouth shut. “You drive like a maniac, like traffic laws don’t apply to you, like there’s some magical force field around your car. I hate that. I hate it. Do you have any idea how much danger you’re putting yourself and other people in? Then you flipped off a woman for driving too slow. And she had two little kids with her, who saw you do that. You’re more than a jerk. You’re a douchebag.”

“A douchebag,” Derek repeated.

“Yes, a douchebag. I can’t believe I actually thought this might have been a prank of some sort. No one with half a brain would have put so little effort into a dare.”

At this, Derek scowled at him. Stiles scowled back.

Derek gave a hard shrug of his shoulders. “Fine, I’ll stop being a jerk.”

“That’s an excellent idea! Be nicer to people. You shouldn’t go around treating them the way you do, just because you’re hot and popular. It’s inexcusable.”

Derek opened his mouth to respond, but instead he abruptly went stock-still. Stiles was about to ask what was wrong, when he heard the faint creak, creak of the floorboards. His dad was upstairs, having finished his beer and game, and was heading to his room to get some sleep. Stiles also went rigid as a plank, eyes going saucer-wide.

"Goodnight, Stiles!" John said loudly, making every part of him go tense.

He struggled to remember how to use his voice. "Yeah, night, dad. We already did this, remember? Five minutes ago?" Stiles called back, hoping he sounded normal, and not like he had a Chippendales dancer in his room.

"Well, good night again! Don't let the bed bugs bite!" his dad said, making Stiles grimace at the corny nursery rhyme. He hoped his dad wouldn't barge in for some impromptu 'how are things at school, meet any nice girls recently?' conversation. He usually didn't, but Stiles had lived long enough to know that life generally operated under Murphy’s Law, and the one time Derek fricking Hale was in his room, the horrible idea to talk to his son would be planted into his dad's brain and he would get the impulse to follow through. And then all hell would break loose.

Stiles hastily switched off the wall light, and the room went dark. Hopefully his dad would get the hint. "Yeah, sure thing. I'm in bed. Really tired, Dad, long day," he said, a bit frantically.

"Calm down," Derek hissed, tilting his head to the side. "He isn’t going to come in."

"How would you know?"

"I know," Derek said.
Right. Of course.

They both waited for a while, neither of them saying anything. Stiles stared at Derek's face absently, because it was the only thing he could make out as his vision slowly adjusted to the darkness. He wondered if this was par for the course for the other boy. Sneaking into girls' bedrooms and dodging parents for a steamy make-out session. Only Derek wasn't here to make-out with him. Derek would probably never want to talk to him again after tonight. He and Derek would go on with their separate lives, his chest clenching up in anguish and misery each time they passed by each other in the hallway, while he didn't even register as a blip in Derek's radar. He'd blown it.

There was the loud snick of a door closing, and Stiles released his breath, legs going wobbly.

“I'll do better next time,” Derek said, resuming the conversation as if nothing had happened.

Stiles halted, wondering if he was hearing right. “Wait. What? What does that mean? We're going out again?”

“Yes,” Derek said.

Stiles stared at him, mouth hanging open. Not that he had a problem with that necessarily, but...

“You make it sound as if I don’t have a choice.”

“You don’t. You can’t just call me a douchebag and drop me without giving me a second chance.”

“I can’t?”

“Where do you want to go?”

“I don’t know. I mean,” Stiles said, hastening to explain when Derek started to look thunderous again. “I really don’t know.”

Derek stalked over to his desk and snatched up a notebook. He flipped it open.

“Hey! That’s my math notebook! Don’t -”

Too late. With a loud rip, Derek tore a blank page out. He snatched up a pen from the desk and Stiles stared, confused, as Derek dragged the pen down the middle, creating two columns and scribbled angrily on the top.

When he was done, he slapped it on Stiles’ chest, making him wobble half a step backward.

“Here. Fill in both columns, five things each.”

Stiles had to put it to his face and squint to read the words. Even then he could barely see what Derek had written.

“Things I want to do. Things I want to eat,” Stiles read aloud. He looked up at Derek indignantly. “You’re giving me homework?”

“Have it for me by Monday!” Derek hissed. He hooked a long leg outside the window and was gone.

Derek
Derek heard the parting shot as he darted across the Stilinski’s back lawn, and that only added fuel to the fire. He was fuming.

He dashed recklessly through the backyards and gardens, darting between trees and bushes, too angry at the moment to care that humans might see him. Dogs started barking, snarling and snapping, going into a wild tizzy behind their fences, and he barked back at them to shut the fuck up.

He was sure of only one thing at that moment: he was going to come on top of this dare even it fucking killed him.

It wasn’t even about winning driving rights to the Porsche for a week, although that had been the impetus for accepting the dare. The bait dangling from the hook, so to speak. But seeing the dare through? No, it was more than that. He simply couldn’t tolerate the thought of Jackson fucking Whittemore laughing at him for failing. Sure, they were best friends, but beneath their friendship, there had always been a tense Godzilla vs. King Kong type rivalry between them since… since he could remember. They were frenemies… or whatever.

The gossip-girly term raised Derek’s hackles, but he supposed it was a good word as any in describing what they were. It had been a pride-grinding competition since day one. Seeing who could win more points in lacrosse and lead the team to victory. Seeing who could score with the best-looking chicks. Material things didn’t really count, because Derek had accepted that he would always be at a disadvantage in that regard, since Jackson’s dad was loaded and had no problem spending money on his son like there was no tomorrow.

Besides, Jackson didn’t have the pleasure of being a motherfucking werewolf, which was like the coolest, sexiest thing on the planet to be. The Porsche had been something so unattainable, so out of the realm of possibility, that it hadn’t even bothered Derek. Well, not that much. But the captain’s position going to Jackson… Derek had been stunned speechless. And coach Finstock taking him aside and telling him that Jackson deserved it, had won it fair and square, telling him to be a man and get over it… that had been a knife to the heart.

So for that reason alone, he had to see this stupid dare to the end, if only because Jackson was the one who came up with it and rubbing it in that jackass’ face was all Derek cared about. He wanted control over Jackson's most prized-possession, his "baby", even if it was just for a week. And yeah, the dare was ten kinds of stupid, like something out of a lame-ass chick flick Derek wouldn’t watch unless his life depended on it, but hey, Jackson wasn’t nothing if not a TV high school, rich-kid cliché.

Which brought him back to the matter at hand.

Seriously, a douchebag? Him? Derek had always associated that unappetizing word with guys like…well, Jackson. Guys in their pristine Lacoste shirts with upturned collars and their stupid loafers, guys who were born with silver spoons in their mouths, coasting through life doing whatever they wanted, their rich lawyer dads using money to mop up the mess they left behind. And Jackson made a lot of messes.

So yes, Derek had always thought that particular insult was exclusive for the Jackson Whittemores of the world. No one had ever accused him of being one before. It was a slap in the face, if Derek were being honest, and it stung. It stung horribly, all the more because loser Stilinski was the one who said it and fuck him for making this harder than it needed to be instead of just being grateful that Derek Hale was willing to give him the time of the day and -
Okay, okay, shut up. Shut the hell up and get your shit together. You can fix this, it’s not the end of the world.

He ran the rest of the way home, leaving the neighborhood dogs yapping in his wake.

Stiles
Mondays were horrible and Stiles hated them.

He shuffled into school, blearily rubbing his eyes. No one greeted him as he passed by through the hallway. He was used to it by now. In front of his locker, he dropped his backpack off his shoulders.

Stiles yawned, then yawned again, wishing he could get one more hour of sleep; he would have been happy to curl up in the corner of the school library if they’d let him.

He closed the locker door, and jumped, because there was Derek Hale, standing right next to him.

“Hand it over,” Derek said. He looked as sleepy as Stiles felt, his eyes hooded and lethargic as he leaned against the wall.

“My lunch money?” Stiles said hesitantly. “I don’t have any. I pack my own lunch.”

Derek’s nostrils flared. “No, the list,” he said.

“What? The list thing? I didn’t do it,” Stiles said, hefting his textbooks into the crook of his elbow.

Derek jerked up straight, not looking as sleepy as before.

“Why not?” he demanded.

“I dunno. Because it’s stupid and there’s no purpose to doing it.”

For a moment, he wondered if Derek was going to punch him. He certainly looked like he wanted to, his eyes narrowing into slits and expression darkening.

“It doesn’t matter, okay?” Stiles said. “I’m not complaining about where we go. It’s the quality of the company you’re with that matters.”

Derek peered at him as if discontent by Stiles’ words. And yes, Stiles was not so subtly reminding him that Derek’s company did not quite cut the mustard. So there.

Derek rubbed the side of his face. “Give me your books. I’ll carry them for you.”

“They aren’t very heavy,” Stiles said.

“Give me your books,” Derek said, in a tone of voice that indicated he would snatch them away if Stiles didn’t hand them over immediately.

“All right. All right. Geez,” Stiles said. He eyed the biceps encased in the sleeves. “Gotta give those muscles something to do.”

They walked, shoulder to shoulder, both of them quiet. Even after a date together, and then unloading on Derek the way he had last night, Stiles was bashful around him. It seemed as if the entire school was staring at him, although that had to be his imagination.

But a few of them were staring, and a few of them were whispering, making his skin prickle with
embarrassment even though he couldn't make out what they were saying. He could guess easily enough, though, based on how incredulous they looked. He supposed he couldn't blame them; it wasn't every day that Derek Hale would give someone like him the time of the day.

“Alright. This was where I go in. You can go now,” Stiles said, making shooing gestures when they were at his classroom.

Derek looked like he wanted to say something, but simply handed over his books and left.

At lunchtime, Stiles was sitting in the cafeteria eating his bagel when someone hurled themselves into the seat across from him, making the rickety plastic table quake. Scott, wild-eyed and out of breath. He flattened himself against the table, voice hushed.

“Dude!” he hissed. “Why is everyone saying you and Derek Hale went out on a date together?”

Stiles poked at his carrot sticks. “Because we did, I guess.”

“You guess? Did you or didn’t you?” Scott said.

“We did. He asked me out. Last Friday. And I said yes,” Stiles said, amazed at how nonchalant he managed to sound about it.

“Are you serious?” Scott said in astonishment.

“Yeah,” Stiles said.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” Scott said.

Stiles was about to say something sarcastic – that Scott’s interest was only piqued because he’d had his fill of Allison during the weekend and he was sated enough that the rest of the world around him was finally entering his vision – but he swallowed it down. Scott would get that woebegone look in his eyes, and he would be sorry and he would apologize, but he wouldn’t get it, not really, and it would only happen again.

“Just needed time to process it,” he said lamely. “You know. It’s Derek Hale.”


“Why did he ask me out?” Stiles repeated.

“Yeah. Why did he ask you out? Did he say he likes you or something?”

"He said he wanted to get to know me better.”

“Oh,” Scott said. “Huh.”

The "huh" said it all. Obviously, Scott thought there was more to it than that.

And although that had been the very first thought to pop into his mind, and it was still there, that nagging suspicion that maybe this was some elaborate gag designed to humiliate him, it hurt that Scott would be thinking along the same line.

Stiles didn’t bother to say that things far more implausible had happened, like Allison being attracted to Scott, because that was way below the belt. And it wasn’t true. Scott was a great guy. He just wasn’t being a great friend right now.
“I need to go,” Stiles said, pulling himself up from his seat and grabbing his bag, trying to ignore that feeling he got every time his low worth was confirmed.

"But I just got here," Scott said, bewildered. "And I have pizza rolls. You always eat my pizza rolls."

"I need to go do something," Stiles said.

"Do what?"

"Something."

He left before Scott could say anything else, tossing his lunch bag into the trashcan.

Derek was waiting for him after the final bell. “Hey,” he said.

"Hey," Stiles said, a trifle wearily. It was still incredibly bizarre, being around Derek and having conversations with him, when 24 hours ago, they had been complete strangers. Or to be more precise, he had been a complete stranger to Derek. Students milled about around them, and he had to withdraw his elbows from getting in the way.

“You okay?” Derek asked.

“Uh, yeah. Why wouldn't I be?”

Derek looked at him for a moment before shrugging. “How does Rudy’s sound?” he said.

“Actually,” Stiles said slowly, unable to believe what he was about to say next. “I’d rather not.”

“Okay,” Derek said. “Have any other place in mind?”

“No, I mean. I didn’t want to go anywhere,” Stiles said. “To another restaurant, or a movie, or whatever. I mean, don’t get me wrong, I appreciate you asking me out and taking all that stuff I said last night into consideration instead of ripping my head off. But this is all very new to me and it’d be nice if we could, maybe…take it slow.” He cleared his throat nervously, hating himself for doing this. He snuck a look at Derek, scared of what his reaction would be. “Is that okay with you?”

“Yeah,” Derek said. “Of course.”

“Really? You’d be okay with that?”

"Stiles," Derek said gently and his heart fluttered.

They were looking at each other now.

“I’m sorry about the crappy date and for acting that way last night. That's not who I am. And I'd just be grateful for the chance to make it up to you," Derek said. "So yeah, whatever you're comfortable with."

He spoke so earnestly that Stiles was momentarily speechless.

"Okay?" Derek said, with a smile.

And despite himself, Stiles found himself smiling back. "Yeah, I'd like that."
Chapter 2

Stiles

Derek was as good as his word. He didn’t pester Stiles for another date.

For a day or so, he left Stiles so utterly alone that Stiles worried, despite himself, that he had chased Derek away. That he had killed any fledgling, feeble chance he had been gifted by the universe to finally, finally get a second glance from the other boy. And he realized, contrary to his bravado and his ranting and his telling Derek off to grow up and his own denial that he didn’t give a damn, the fact of the matter was that he did care. One bad date hadn’t been enough to extinguish the fluttery feelings Stiles had harbored for Derek all throughout the years.

He wanted Derek to like him. For Derek to know that a human being named Stiles Stilinski existed. To think of him as more than a nameless, faceless extra character that was there to fill up space in the movie of Derek Hale’s life. And Stiles desperately wanted a relationship with him, to be good friends, if nothing else; although the very thought of being 'just friends' made his heart sting.

To make things worse, he heard his classmates gossiping loudly, as if he weren’t sitting right there and was able to hear every single word (because what was he going to do, kick their asses?) that of course, one short date was enough to make Derek sick of him.

But then, one morning before class, he found Derek waiting for him in the hallway, looking like a wet dream in his leather jacket and 5 o’clock shadow. He held out something white and cylindrical, and Stiles recognized it as a large Starbucks paper cup.

“Here,” Derek said.

“What’s this?”


“Yeah, I know, but what’s it for?”

“I heard you had to stay up all night writing a paper and studying for an exam.”

Yes, Stiles had complained to Scott of just that. “Yeah. Yes, I did,” Stiles said, a little dazed. "How did you - "

“Good luck on your test,” Derek said.

Then he was striding away before Stiles could thank him or say anything else.

Stiles went to his next class so giddy that it seemed as if he were rolling along a bed of clouds. At his desk, he cracked open the tab and drank in small sips, savoring the roasted bitterness on his tongue.

In the following days, Derek would surprise him with thoughtful…well, surprises. He would show up out of the blue, just to say hi and ask him little things that had happened during Stiles’ day. Stiles would come to his locker and find Derek standing there to walk him to his next class, or after school, to his Jeep. He would drop off little bags of chips and chocolate bars. Then once, during lunch time, he suddenly came up to the cafeteria lunch table, making Scott go wide-eyed with fear, and slid over a plastic tub filled with a huge block of lasagna.
“You’re not turning me into your culinary guinea pig, are you?” Stiles joked.

“My mom made it. Best lasagna you’ll ever have,” Derek said.

"Oh, wow. Thanks," Stiles said, a little touched. It had been years since he’d had homemade lasagna. He was the main cook at home because his dad was crap at it and he didn’t want them to subsist on microwave meals, but lasagna from scratch was one of those dishes that seemed too time-consuming to even attempt.

“Eat that instead of your crappy sandwich,” Derek said. He pointed a finger at Stiles in warning. “That's for you. Don’t share it with anyone.”

Stiles would have laughed, but he realized Derek was dead serious so instead he nodded. “Yeah, no, I won’t. Got it. This is all for me.”

Satisfied, Derek left without another word, and Stiles and Scott stared at each other.

“He really likes to feed you, doesn’t he?” Scott said.

“Yeah,” Stiles said, mystified. Derek seemed to instinctively know when Stiles was hungry. Of course, Stiles was a growing boy, and hungry most of the time, but still...

"Think he’s a chubby chaser? Or whatever it’s called?” Scott said.

Stiles actually gave it some thought, then shrugged. "Who cares, free food."

"You'd take candy from one of those trench-coat perverts," Scott said.


"Guess he’s really into you," Scott said, after a quiet pause. "If he’s bringing you stuff from home."

God, Stiles hoped so. He really, really hoped so. Just the thought of it made him want to wiggle in happiness.

He unclasped the lid, and picking up his fork, took a large bite. “It’s really good,” he said, and proceeded to eat the entire thing.

Stiles would have been lying if he said he didn’t feel somewhat vindicated by hearing Scott acknowledge the possibility that Derek Hale didn’t have ulterior motives for being nice to him. But the thing was... contrary to popular belief, Stiles wasn’t stupid. Many people thought he was, but he wasn’t. He had common sense, he simply chose not to exercise it as frequently as he could have. He knew he wasn’t everyone’s cup of tea; or maybe he wasn’t anyone’s cup of tea. Not that any of this was the point.

The point was... he was annoying – sometimes he was mega annoying – and he was smart enough to know it. He wasn’t one of those kids who went around perpetually baffled, pondering the age-old question ‘why doesn’t anyone like me?’ It was perfectly clear to him why people didn’t like him. Crystal clear. He had accepted early on that he would never have that many friends, much less join the upper echelons of the pretty and popular. And that guys like Derek Hale, who was the hottest, most coveted guy not only at Beacon Hills High school but perhaps the entire town, would never be interested in him.

So he knew just because Derek Hale was acting like he liked Stiles, it didn’t necessarily mean he actually liked him. There were far more logical scenarios to consider. Like the possibility that an
alien parasite had taken over Derek's brain cells. Or Derek was working for a secret government organization that wanted to overthrow the sleepy town of Beacon Hills and had decided that the best way of taking down the sheriff was through his idiot son.

Only, the joke was on them, because Stiles wasn't stupid. He was still skeptical, he was still cautious, he still refused to wholeheartedly accept that Derek Hale was into him, mom's lasagna or no.

But he was also just a teenage boy, already intensely lonely, insecure and suffering from low self-esteem, a boy who had utterly convinced himself that no one would ever find him lovable enough to call him their own. And because of this, he was defenseless in the face of Derek's sweet, unwavering attention, rough around the edges though it was. And though he knew, logically, that it made more sense that Derek was fried on drugs or something, against his better judgement, he began to dare to hope that Derek’s alleged feelings for him might be genuine, and that opening up to Derek might not end up in a spectacular tragedy, his heart dashed to a million pieces.

Derek
He was annoyed. Super annoyed, as Cora would say. Hella annoyed, as Laura would say.

Derek had been a boyfriend several times. Five, to be exact, starting with Paige when he was in the seventh grade. It had been syrupy-sweet and they had been stinking adorable together, cute in a pre-burst of color Pleasantville sort of way that made old ladies coo and pinch their cheeks.

The blush of first love, when everything was beautifully innocent and innocently beautiful. They had sat on playground swings at night, stargazing, and had gone to school dances together. Then Paige had moved away to the other side of the country and Derek had moped around for a while, but it hadn’t been the end of the world. Haley swiftly took her empty space and that had been when things graduated from petting and kissing to more “interesting” things, and Derek had officially been able to join in on the heavy-duty bragging in the boy’s locker room. Then Kate, the first girl with whom he went all the way and lost his virginity to, and things with her had been scary intense.

Then Elisabeth, a fellow Were, snooty and frigid and business-minded as hell, thinking they’d been the furry, canine version of John and Jackie Kennedy. By then, the thrill and shine of being in a relationship had long since worn off, and he was seeking variety rather than stability. Then had come Jennifer and she was tolerable.

So yes, Derek had been a boyfriend a few times, although the length and intensity had ranged from two weeks to six months, from tepid to set things on fire explosive.

But he had never been an attentive boyfriend before. A gentlemanly boyfriend. One that carried books and held open doors and bought flowers and teddy bears and cooed poetry and strummed ballads on a guitar and walked in slow-mo while flower petals danced in the air around his head and… Derek didn’t even know what. Not even with Paige, when he was at his most innocent, had he been that way. Not even when Kate had him pussy-whipped had he been that way. He had always been the bad boy. The black leather jacket wearing, perpetually scowling, rough and tough bad ass. That was his MO, it had always worked like a charm, none of the girls had ever complained before, and he had always been a big believer of if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.

And now… here Stilinski was, this weirdo of a freshman expecting him to be nice and mannerly and drive under the speed limit and shit, and Derek had no idea what he was doing. Girls had always jumped at the chance to go out with him; no one had ever made him work for it before. It was absurd, the number of hoops he was jumping through, like some fucking circus poodle
instead of the wolf that he was. He was spending a lot of time eavesdropping on Stiles' and dork-face what's his name's conversations, gathering intel like he was the KGB and the entire thing seemed pointless, a colossal waste of his time and effort.

And for what? It wasn’t like he was going to get laid, he didn’t even want to get laid if it meant Stilinski was going to be the one on the end of his dick, and fuck Jackson for choosing Stilinski as the recipient of this dare. This was starting to get far more tedious than he had initially thought it would be and he wondered why he agreed to it in the first place.

“What do you mean a month?” Jackson snapped, when Derek brought it up. “No fucking way.”

“Yeah, a week isn’t going to cut it. Stilinski isn’t worth the effort.”

“Dude, are you fucking nuts? It’s a Porsche. Most people don’t ever get the chance to sit inside a Porsche, much less drive one for a week.”

“Not worth it.” Derek said again, because Jackson seemed to have difficulty getting that one critical fact through his thick skull.

Jackson scoffed. “Don’t tell me you can’t get a loser like Stilinski to like you.”

“Oh, I can get him to like me. I’m just saying I need something more substantial in terms of payoff. The trouble I’m going through far outweighs the reward.”

“What do you want, then?” Jackson said. “You’re not keeping my car for a month. That much I can guarantee. That option is not even on the fucking table.”

“Three weeks,” Derek said, willing to negotiate.

“A week and a half.”

“Two,” Derek said. That was reasonable enough.

Jackson mulled it over and relented. “Fine. You dump Stilinski in front of everyone and I hand you the keys to my car for two weeks. You lose, you call me captain and be my personal servant for the same amount of time.” Jackson smirked in that way Derek hated. “I think I’ll start off by having you kiss my feet.”

“I’m not going to lose,” Derek said. It was just not going to happen. He’d started off rocky but he now had Stilinski wrapped around his little finger, he was sure of it.

But he knew he needed to step up his game.

Stiles

The next time Derek asked him out on a date, Stiles couldn’t for the life of him find a reason to refuse. He didn’t particularly want to refuse. As a matter of fact, he had been desperately hoping Derek would ask again. And so he said yes, and when Derek smiled and told him he would pick him up that night before walking off, Stiles had to stick his face into his locker to hide his grinning face, a flush of glee coloring his neck and cheeks red.

He congratulated himself for being calmer this time around as he got ready. But the moment he saw Derek, the butterflies came fluttering back with a vengeance. Inside the car, Stiles was grateful that Derek couldn’t hear his heart pounding away; it was beating so hard and so fast that he was sure Derek would have thought he was having a heart attack if he were able to hear it.
Derek took him to the Mexican place Stiles had been wanting to try, and they ordered nachos and fish tacos. They bonded over the horrible service and good food. Unlike the last time, Derek wasn’t a jackass to the incompetent waiter.

Derek had asked him if bowling sounded good, and Stiles said that sounded great, but when they got there, a huge bachelorette party had booked all the lanes solid and it wasn’t possible to get in. So instead, they ended up in the arcade a few doors down, where Stiles was trounced by Derek in a shooting game. Then he stood to the side and watched in admiration (both of Derek’s superior athletic prowess and his biceps) as Derek played a game of hoops, swishing balls neatly into the net one after the other until the buzzer sounded and a line of tickets twice the length of his arm slid out of the machine.

Several girls had stopped to watch as well and were checking Derek out vigorously.

“Wow, you’re really good,” one of them said.

Stiles grew slightly apprehensive, because they were more than pretty and interested, and clearly didn’t think he and Derek were on a date. Why would they? Any sane person would look at Derek and look at Stiles and assume they weren’t on a date. It only made sense.

But Derek paid them no mind other than to give them a quick nod in thanks. He snatched up the tickets and led Stiles away.

“You okay?” Derek asked.

“Yeah. I am,” Stiles said, realizing he must have been far too quiet all of a sudden.

“Jealous?”

“What? No,” Stiles spluttered, as if that was the most outrageous thing he had ever heard. “Of them? Course not.”

“Don’t be,” Derek said and the warm way he looked at Stiles made him blush and look down at his feet.

Derek further endeared himself to Stiles when he gave the tickets to a little kid nearby, who received them with a shy smile.

Derek drove him home and walked him to the door. This time, when he asked if Stiles had a good time, Stiles said yes, he had, and meant it from the bottom of his heart. He couldn’t remember the last time he’d had so much fun.

“Better than last time?” Derek asked with a teasing yet shamefaced grin.

Stiles scratched his temple sheepishly. “Sorry about all that. I didn’t know what came over me - ”

"No. No," Derek reassured him. "It was good. I needed to hear it. I don’t want you tiptoeing around my feelings, Stiles. I want you to be yourself."

"Oh?” Stiles said, the word coming out as a soft exhale.

"That’s what I like about you."

"Oh?” Stiles said again, mainly because he couldn't very well say "you must be off your meds," which was what he was really thinking. There was absolutely no way Derek was telling the truth, people fucking hated him because of the way he was, but God, he wanted so much for it to be the
truth. To have someone to like him, just the way he was...

"Yeah," Derek said softly.

For one breath-stopping moment, Stiles thought Derek was going to lean in and kiss him, give him his first kiss ever, and his heart began to twitter-patter anew. He was so nervous he was afraid he might faint. He licked his lips unconsciously.

But Derek simply nodded. "You better go inside. It's getting cold out here."


"See you tomorrow," Derek said. And before Stiles knew it, Derek was walking back to his car, leather jacket gleaming under the moonlight. He gave Stiles one final wave and then drove off.

Back upstairs in his house, Stiles stood in front of sink mirror and stared at himself and his burning cheeks. Shit. He was so head over heels for Derek that it wasn't even funny.

He quickly washed up, then went straight to bed, where he imagined Derek lying beside him, his body warm and musky and pure hard muscle, kissing him senseless and other things, until the final moment he drifted off to sleep.

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**Derek**

It was Friday afternoon, and Derek was sitting by himself in the employee lounge of the public swimming pool. He had spent the past few hours sitting on a lifeguard's chair, yelling at kids to stop running, and pulling dumbass YOLO-minded teens out of the water like seaweed. What fun.

He was done for the day but couldn't clock out for another ten minutes. A bullshit rule, but one he had to abide by nonetheless. The vending machine hummed nearby, and he listened to it vacantly as he drummed his fingers on the table, waiting for it to turn seven.

The door opened and closed with a creak. Moments later, Jennifer slid into his lap, all toned muscle and tiny waist and large breasts, and wrapped around him like a scarf. She didn’t work here, but came over to visit him from time to time, and to fool around if no one else was there.

She was done with her waitressing job, apparently, and reeked of tomato sauce and balsamic vinegar. He tucked his nose against her shoulder, the place where her sleeve was rucked up and a patch of bronzy-tanned skin was visible. She smiled, satisfied of the hold she had on him.

"Hey, babe," she said.

"Hey."

They spent a few minutes kissing and when she gave one final lick into his mouth before pulling away, he was rock-hard.

“Glad to see me?” she said with a smirk, and lowered herself on her knees to take care of him.

“You want to come over tonight? My parents went to a conference in Las Vegas and won’t be home until Sunday,” she asked when she was done. She carefully tucked him back inside his jeans.

A tempting proposal, but he remembered that he had a prior engagement. “No, I can’t. I have to meet with him,” he said.
She knew instantly who he was talking about. “Sounds like fun.”

“Yeah, loads of fun,” he said sarcastically.

"You're with him all the time these days," she mock-complained. "I miss you."

He had told her to stay away from him at school and public places until this was all over, because being seen together could end it all. She was more than willing to play along; if anything, she seemed be getting a kick out of pulling the wool over Stilinski's eyes.

"You know why I'm with him," he said, brushing a thumb over her pout. "I'm doing it for you."

And just like any other hot girl who was used to a lifetime of fawning guys willing to carve their nutsacks off for her, she accepted that explanation readily, without question.

"Don’t fall in love with him,” she said, kissing the bone of his cheek, her hair tickling his skin. “That’s what always happens in the movies.”

“That ever happens, you have my express permission to kill me,” Derek said. "Seriously, bash my head in with a rock. It’d be a mercy killing.”

“Stop being silly,” she admonished, tugging on his earlobe playfully. “He isn’t that bad.”

“Then you spend time with him. Everything about him is stupid, starting with his name. And his face.”

“He's not that bad to look at.”

“He looks like a donkey's ass,” he said, just to be mean.

"You think you can win this thing?"

"I know I can."

“Yeah, you pretty much have it in the bag,” she agreed. She wriggled playfully in his lap. "So, where are you going to take me, once you win?"

He tried to come up with a place and came up blank. “Who says we have to go anywhere?”

She quirked an eyebrow and smiled. "I've always wanted to do it in a high-end luxury car."

Derek supposed Jackson was going to give him a massive list of guidelines along with the Porsche, and one of them would most likely would be no sex inside or on and around the vehicle, but whatever, what Jackson couldn’t see or smell wouldn’t hurt him.

They went back to kissing.
Chapter 3

Stiles

He was sitting at his desk, thumbing through a book and nibbling on a chocolate bar he had discovered stashed in a drawer when his cellphone rang. When he saw the name on the screen, his heart leapt and he had to compose himself before answering.

“Hey, it’s me.” Derek said. He was outside, voice echoing as if he were speaking into a large cup. “You busy?”

“No, not really. What’s up? Is practice over?” Stiles asked.

“Yeah, it’s over. Hey, sorry to do this to you, but I’m at Veterans Park right now. My car broke down and car service is telling me it’ll take them about three hours to get here. They’re slammed because of that concert over at Town Square. I’m sorry to do this to you, but could you come pick me up? I’d walk, but I have a bunch of crap to carry.”

“Naw, sorry,” Stiles said. “I don’t wanna.”

There was a pause and then Derek’s voice came back, a little surprised, a little dismayed. “Oh?”

Stiles grinned. “Dude, I’m joking. I’ll be there in a jiff. Hang tight.”

He dashed around the room, gathered his wallet and keys, tugged his shirt up to his nose to give it a sniff, deemed it fresh enough, and bounded out the door.

In the garage, he tossed out the ratty, dried mud-encrusted pair of emergency sneakers he kept up front of the car and the crumpled brown bag that had held his lunch. It wouldn’t do to have the inside of his car look like a pigsty.

“Jiff?” he mumbled to himself as he smacked crumbs off the seats. “Ugh. Who uses that word anymore?”

He started the Jeep, eager to get going. The roads heading to the park were mostly empty at this hour and he drove, singing along to the radio. He made good time and twelve minutes later, he was passing through a wide-open pair of iron gates. Tall halogen lamps flooded the park fields with mellow light. Stiles could make out a lone figure standing under the roofed rest area and he pulled up to the curb. The sight of Derek alone by himself like a little kid waiting for someone to pick him after everyone had left choked him up slightly. He was grateful that Derek had thought of him in his time of need.

“Hey, I’m here.” Stiles said. He looked down at the humongous duffel bag Derek lifted up onto his shoulders by the strap. “What’s with the murder burrito? You have a dead body in there?”

“Team equipment. I need to get it back to school next week,” Derek said as he went around the back of the car. He added dryly, “Per the captain’s orders. Mind if I put these in the trunk?”

“Go for it.”

Derek did just that, then climbed into the front.

“Thanks for coming to get me,” Derek said as he closed the door. “I stayed behind to clean up and everyone was already gone by the time I was done.”
“Not at all. Glad to be of service.”

Derek sighed unhappily, rubbing his face. “Stupid car. Just went dead on me.”

“Hey, shit happens,” Stiles said philosophically, because Derek was looking disillusioned by the betrayal of his vehicle. “My dad once said old cars were like old people.”

“They fart a lot?” Derek grumbled.

Stiles grinned. “No. They do what they want.”

Derek snorted. “That’s true.”

“Anyway. Where to?” Stiles said, then answered his own question. “House?”

“House,” Derek said.

“Home, James, and don’t spare the horses,” Stiles declared, making Derek glance at him in confusion. “Never mind.”

The jeep rumbled off the premises. The afternoon was waning, and the sun was a brilliant orange on the horizon.

“Crap, it’s been a long day,” Derek muttered to himself, leaning tiredly back against the seat. He had showered and changed from his uniform, and he smelled nice, like clean bed sheets hung out on a balmy day.

Stiles managed to drive without talking for a few minutes, thinking that Derek wanted some peace and quiet.

“Hey, hey,” Derek said suddenly, pointing. “Take a left. Over at that stop sign.”

Stiles did as instructed, thinking that they were heading towards Derek’s house. But a quarter of a mile in, he saw that the road petered off into a dead end.

“This isn’t where you live,” Stiles said doubtfully. “Is it? I mean, I’ve heard that your house was smack dab in the middle of nature, but is this where you live?”

“No, dummy. Pull up over there,” Derek said.

Stiles did so, scanning their surroundings as he did. He stopped the car next to a wooden sign welcoming them to Silver Rock Garden and turned off the engine.

“So. We’ve gone from one park to… another park.”

“Did you have dinner?” Derek said, fingers on the handle of the door.

Stiles thought of the chocolate bar with some guilt. “Yeah. A little. Well, no.”

“Come on,” Derek said. “I’m hungry.”

They both climbed out of the car.

The other park had been a park in name only, several fields connected together where teams came to play organized sports and that was all it was good for, really. This was a real park, with huge carpets of grass and sidewalks winding through, and clusters of trees and bushes, where people
came to walk their dogs and play Frisbee.

And eat hot dogs.

Derek ambled up to a hot dog cart with a huge yellow umbrella, pulling out a wallet from his jeans back pocket.

“Get whatever you want,” he told Stiles. Stiles read the menu, eyes following the dotted line to match item with the price. The Tweedledum vendor waited patiently, flabby chin resting on his neck like a mound of moist dough.

“I want to get naked,” Stiles said, then briefly closed his eyes. “The naked. The naked hot dog.”

“No, you don’t,” Derek said.


“Come on. You think an extra three dollars will actually break my bank account? Get whatever you want,” Derek said.

Stiles hesitated, then said, “Okay, if you insist. The sauerkraut, then.”

They waved a large black fly away from their faces as they waited, watching the vendor pull out dripping angry-colored sausages from a tub of greasy water. The humid waft of boiled meat was both disgusting and delicious. He was hungry, Stiles realized, when his stomach gave a mighty growl. He had a tendency to not eat properly when his dad wasn’t there, opting for quick meals that wouldn’t keep him long at the table. He hated eating by himself.

Their orders came out on disposable paper trays. Derek had ordered two grilled bratwursts that were brown and plump with juice. Stiles knew Derek wouldn’t bother with the bottle of ketchup or mustard or relish set out for the customers, and he was right.

They slowly began to wander away from the cart towards a pathway, tilting their heads to the side to take bites.

“These are so bad for you, but you got to have one once in a while,” Derek said.

The toppings kept dribbling off the bun and onto the tray and it was messy to eat, but tasty. Stiles couldn’t remember the last time he had bought hot dogs from a vendor. There was a certain nostalgia to it that he couldn’t put into words. It brought to mind picnics on summer days and colorful kites soaring up high up in the clouds. Family. Togetherness. Things he had missed since his mother’s death years ago.

“You give me a lot of food,” Stiles said. It seemed that every other day Derek would bring him something to eat.

Derek shrugged. “Food is important.”

Stiles briefly debated whether to say it or not, then thought the hell with it. “Scott thinks you’re a chubby chaser.”

Derek snorted. “No, because one, you actually wouldn’t qualify and two, that’s not one of my kinks. So tell Scott he’s full of shit.”

Yes, he might just do that. He was curious as to what kinks Derek did have, then decided it was too early to ask.
“So… what? You just like watching me eat?” Stiles said. He bet there was a fetish for that, too. Just watching people eat.

“I like knowing that you’re not hungry,” Derek said.

And something about the simple, matter-of-fact way he made that statement made Stiles feel as if there was a balloon being blown up inside him and he could float up towards the sky and touch the stars.

They were walking now, having gotten the hang of moving and eating at the same time. A woman in a gray sweat suit chugged past, ponytail swishing from side to side, pushing a baby stroller in front of her. She held up a palm in greeting, and they nodded back at her.

“Are you cold?” Derek asked, and Stiles said he wasn’t.

The evening was pleasant. It had been growing chilly the past few days, but today wasn’t that bad, and a few minutes of walking had warmed him up. He tried not to think of the way Derek had paused, hand going to the flap of his jacket as he asked the question, as if he had been intending to take it off for Stiles to wear. He wondered what it would be like to wear Derek’s trademark jacket – that infamous black leather jacket – his own scrawny arms encased in the leather sleeves.

“How was practice?” Stiles said.

“The same as always. A lot of running, a lot of screaming and cursing at each other.”

Yeah, Stiles had witnessed a lot of that on the field, where there always was an overload of testosterone. “You have a game coming up, right?”

“Yeah,” Derek sighed. “It’s going to be non-stop practice until then. Finstock hates the other coach’s guts. It’s getting really personal. We better win or he’s going to tear us a new one.”

“Do you enjoy playing lacrosse?” Stiles said.

Derek shrugged as he sucked juice off his thumb. “It’s okay. I enjoy the running around. Helps me release steam. My parents are happy about that. They say I have too much energy as it is.”

Stiles wondered if that would help with his ADHD. “Scott and I were thinking about trying out,” he said. “Next year.”

“Yeah?” Derek said. “You two are best friends, huh?”

“Yeah. I don’t know what I’d do if I didn’t have him.”

He knew he was essentially confessing to Derek, who had scads of friends and followers that he was a basic loser, but it wasn’t as if he was ashamed of it. All he needed sometimes in life was one good friend who’d be there for him through thick and thin, and Scott was exactly that.

The trees in this part of the area were the color of steamed spinach. There were crickets everywhere, unseen yet filling the night with their song.

“You know, I’ve heard the sound of nature is basically the sound of millions of animals, birds, and insects desperately trying to get laid,” Stiles remarked. “Profound, huh?”

Derek let out a snort of amusement. “Great,” he said. “Now that’s all I’ll be able to think about now when I go out into the forest.”
They stopped at a pond where some brown ducks were quacking and paddling about, trailing circles of water behind them. One of them had ducklings, and six little balls of fluff followed behind what Stiles assumed was their mother in a single line.

The lake rippled, like one large mass of mercury, and Stiles was lulled by the rhythmic sloshing and slopping of water over the large stones.

Derek had most of his bun remaining, and passed half of it over to Stiles. Together, they tore off little pieces of bread and tossed it into the lake. Stiles watched in delight as the birds quickly bobbed over.

“Hey, don’t fight! There’s still plenty to go around,” he called out. He grew a little frustrated when the larger ducks managed to get there first, no matter where he threw the morsels, and he tried to feed the smaller ducklings.

Derek handed Stiles the rest of his bread. Stiles kept feeding them, tearing the pieces off into smaller pieces so the bread would last longer, until finally there was no more left. “Alright. I’m all out. Sorry, guys,” he announced, brushing crumbs off his palms. “No más.”

It was darker now and all that were visible were the shapes of the trees, the wind rustling the leaves like maracas. They left the lake and began to walk back to the car. Neither one of them said anything. The silence between them was pleasant and Stiles was no longer stressed out with the worrisome thought that he was boring Derek to death.

The silence was broken when Stiles’ left foot sank into something squishy and he let out a yelp. “Ohshitohshitohshit!” Stiles said, bounding away.

“What?” Derek said, alarmed. “What is it?”

“I stepped on a frog! I stepped on a frog!”

“Stiles!” Derek made a grab for him, but missed as Stiles kept bouncing around in a blind panic.

“I stepped on a frog!”

“You didn’t!”

“I did! It exploded under my foot! It was just sitting there, minding its own business, waiting to catch some flies and have a nice, quiet dinner, and I turned it into a frog pancake!”

He was close to wailing.

“Stiles! Stiles! For fuck’s sake – ” Finally, Derek managed to catch him, practically snatching him out of the air. “Okay, okay, you need to calm down. You didn’t step on a frog.”

Derek’s hands were warm and heavy on both shoulders, anchoring him down. Stiles stared at him, stricken.

“Shit,” he breathed out.

“Stiles, it’s okay. Calm down.”

Stiles suddenly realized that they were standing very close together.

Derek must have realized the same thing. He abruptly released Stiles. “Wait here,” he said, then
began to walk back the way they had come, peering down the path as he looked for a smushed frog. Then he stopped.

“Is it dead?” Stiles asked in dread. It was too dark for him to make out what Derek was looking at.

“It’s not a frog. Someone left behind a sock and it got soggy from the rain. That’s all. That’s what you stepped in,” Derek called out.

“You’re lying.”

“T’m not. Come here.” Derek pulled out his cellphone and turned it on. Light emanated out from the rectangular screen and he held it downwards so that light pooled around the gravel. He sighed when he saw that Stiles was too fearful come look. He went back over to Stiles. He took Stiles’ wrist, encircling it with his larger hand, and brought him closer to the spot.

“See?”

Stiles reluctantly squinted at where Derek was directing the light. He could make out the front of their battered sneakers, and just as Derek had said, a lone, wadded up sock.

“Yeah, you’re right. Shit, that scared me,” he said.

“You okay?”

Stiles nodded. “Who left one frigging sock in the park?” he said vehemently.

They stood together quietly, side by side, just blinking down at the sock, then Derek snorted, his shoulders shaking with mirth.

“That was hilarious,” Derek said.

“Oh, man. It isn’t funny, though. I accidentally stepped on a frog once when I was a kid and it was traumatizing. That horrible sensation of having something burst under your foot. Something that used to be alive.” Stiles made exploding motions with a hand. “And I felt so bad about it. I had nightmares for days, where frog and toad monsters dropped from the skies and swarmed the house, trying to avenge their fallen brother. Not that I have any idea whether the frog I killed was a guy frog, but that was the gender I assigned it. It was like Hitchcock’s *The Birds*, but with amphibians.”

“I’m pretty sure there a story with raining frogs.”

“But yeah, that was embarrassing,” Stiles said, chuckling. His cheeks were still red and he was glad it was dark. Derek was quiet and Stiles hoped he wasn’t thinking how dumb Stiles was, mistaking a wet sock for a frog and running off squealing like a baby. He wasn’t expecting Derek to say what he said next.

“I ate a frog once.”

Stiles glanced at him. Derek’s profile was strong and sharp in the darkness, and Stiles could make out a faint smile.

“Like frog legs?” Stiles asked.

“No, I accidentally ate a live frog,” Derek said, and Stiles was instantly gleeful.

“You did?”
“I was out in the woods after a run, and it just hopped into my mouth and went down my throat.”

“What? Were you lying down on the ground? How on earth did that happen?”

Derek shrugged. “Weird shit happens when you live in the forest.”

“Did it taste like chicken?”

“No, it tasted nothing like chicken. It tasted like boogers. And I genuinely freaked out, thinking it was going to hatch eggs in my stomach and there would be an entire colony of frogs living inside me.”

Stiles cackled. “Oh man.”

They headed back to the car, chatting quietly.

The mood was lighter as they drove, as if some unknown wall of ice dividing them had been shattered. Derek gave him instructions on how to get to his house. They reached a single road that winded up into a heavily wooded area.

“Holy crap, this is some advanced wilderness,” Stiles said, trying to peer through the darkness.

Derek seemed to find that hilarious. “Yeah, it is.”

“Isn’t it scary, living out in the middle of nowhere? I’d be scared shitless to even be alone in the house at night. My dad would have to work part-time to keep me company.”

“We’ve been living out in the forest for generations so I’ve gotten used to it. At this point it’d be weird living in a proper neighborhood,” Derek said. “One of my uncles on my dad’s side, he’s even worse. He lives with his wife and four children in a bunker-style cabin off the grid, and is all self-sustaining. Lives completely off the land.”

“Really? That is both fascinating and horrifying at the same time.”

Derek nudged him. “I guess, but hey, if there's ever a zombie apocalypse, he’s the man you want.”

“If that ever happens, you’ll put in a good word for me, right?”

"It depends. What survival skills do you have? I mean, if you're not going to be an asset...” Derek said, feigning seriousness. "There's not much point letting you join if you're just going to drag us down and use up all our resources."

"Right, no, that makes sense. Hmm," Stiles pretended to think. "What can I bring to the table during a zombie apocalypse?"

"What can you do? Can you make fire? Purify water? Set up solar ovens?"

"No to all of those, but I can make ice-cream in a Ziplock bag."

"Are you serious?"

"Yep. First thing I learned how to do when I went camping."

"Of course it is. Okay, you're in."

"Just like that?"
"Oh, yeah, ice cream is important."

They laughed together until Derek suddenly said, “Hey, you know what? This is good. Drop me off here.”

“I can take you all the way to the house, if you want. It isn’t a problem,” Stiles said. The road ahead was lengthy and it seemed Derek would have to go up quite a bit to reach his house. “And you have all that stuff to carry.”

“No, I can manage, it's not that heavy. There aren't any streetlamps up here and the darkness can get a little overwhelming if you're not used to it.”

“What about you?”

"I'll be fine, don't worry about me,” Derek said. He had retrieved his items from the trunk and was peering in through the lowered window. "Thanks for coming out to get me."

“Not at all,” Stiles said. He was glad Derek had called him to ask for help. “See you at school.”

Derek stood there watching as Stiles turned around on the road, and gave him a wave goodbye.

Stiles went straight home. His dad was still at work and the house was empty. But for the first time, Stiles was free of that hollow loneliness he felt so keenly each time he took his first steped through the front door and groped around the unlit hall for the light switch, and there was nothing but the cold hallway to welcome him inside.

In his room, he sat in front of his desk and tried to finish his homework, but half his attention was elsewhere. His hand kept creeping over to his cellphone until he finally gave in and picked it up. He stared at the screen, wondering should he, shouldn’t he? then flung caution to the wind.

“Did you get home safe?” he tapped out. Not a particularly exciting conversation starter, but he didn’t know what else to write. He waited with bated breath, worrying his lower lip with his teeth. He had never before texted anyone from high school who wasn’t Scott. He waited, then waited some more. Finally, just as he was about to give up, a text message popped up.

『yes』

While he was elated that Derek had texted back at all, the short length bummed him.

“Better than the dreaded “K,” I suppose,” he muttered. He waved his thumbs over the keypad, agonizing over what to write next. Nothing witty came to mind. Derek didn’t seem inclined to talk. Hopefully he was busy, in the bathroom or with an assignment he needed to finish by tomorrow, and not simply ignoring Stiles. He was about to get the hint and send one last message telling Derek good night, when another text popped up.

『sitting outside listning to mass orgy right now』

Stiles blinked, then laughed when he understood what Derek meant.

『guess you’ll never look at nature the same way again』

『you ruined it for me』

Tee-hee, Stiles thought. What he wrote was, 『sorry』 He hoped Derek knew him enough by now to know he didn’t mean it, not one whit.
And with that, Stiles was grinning broadly like a loon, cheeks bunched up so hard under his eyes it would soon start to hurt.

"Must be beautiful out there tho"

"it is. no light pollution. tons of stars"

Stiles wished Derek would mention how he wanted to bring Stiles to the woods to see the stars together. Or at least be thinking about it. Stiles certainly was.

What he got instead was: "my uncle killed a deer"

“Okay,” Stiles muttered.

"wow. Is he okay?"

"fine"

"did he hit it with a car????"

"No. Old fashioned way"

He was wondering what the old-fashioned way was, and was imagining a bearded man in a loincloth and spear stalking his way through waist-high grass, when Derek texted him again.

"made backstrap. will bring you some tomorrow. Don’t pack lunch"

“Okay, no idea what that is, but again with the food,” Stiles muttered. “Not that I’m complaining, mind you, but if I get fat, you don’t get to utter a peep about it.”

"backstrap? sounds like a boot"

They texted back and forth for a few more minutes, until Derek said he had to go do some chores.

"backstrap? sounds like a boot"

Stiles quickly found a picture online and sent it. Then he set his phone to the side and grinned into the pillow like a giddy schoolgirl.

He couldn’t remember being this happy in a long time.

**Derek**

Derek looked down at the phone in his hand, at the last image Stiles sent. Kermit the frog was staring back at him with his contemplative, frog button eyes. Underneath was the caption ‘good night.’

Derek flipped back over to the screen where he had been texting with Jennifer.

The conversation had stopped with her last message ten minutes ago: "Der? Whered you go?"

"he texted me"
Her response was instant.『What did he say?』
『stupid stuff』
『did you ask him for a ride?』
『yes』
『bet that made his world』

He stared at the words, until another text came in.
『want2 talk? Can I call u?』
『no going to sleep』 he typed, even though he didn’t plan to go to bed for at least another few hours.

He received another text from her, then another, and then another, but didn’t bother to read any of them. Instead, he flipped back over to Stiles’ chat, where the frog was still gazing at him. He chuffed quietly to himself, remembering how Stiles had bounced around thinking he'd squished a frog, before heading back inside the house.

**Stiles**

Venison backstrap was marinated deer meat wrapped in a slab of thick bacon before being grilled until crispy on the outside.

“The hunter’s filet mignon,” Derek told him, as if that was supposed to mean something to Stiles.

Derek had ambled over to the lunch table once again. This time, he sat down, much to Scott’s great displeasure. He had even brought a knife and fork for Stiles, wrapped neatly in a paper napkin, the ends taped together.

“Dude, never mind filet mignon. You had me at bacon,” Stiles said. Derek had brought him a hefty amount in a glass container, little brown pucks of juicy meat that smelled heavenly. And they tasted just as good.

“Your uncle needs to open a steakhouse,” Stiles said, after he had thoroughly chewed and swallowed the first bite.

Derek looked satisfied that Stiles was enjoying it. “Well, he has the worst people skills in the world, so no. He’d scare off all his customers and be out of business before he even started.”

“Can’t possibly be worse than mine,” Stiles said. And yeah, it was bizarre, eating chunks of grilled steak in a school cafeteria with silverware, but man, this was good.

“You would think so, but no.”

“Haha. Funny,” Stiles said.

The meat was melt in his mouth tender. He pierced a morsel on the tines of his fork and offered it to Derek. He meant it as a joke, expecting Derek to balk and was delighted when the other boy obliged. They both ignored his flushed cheeks.

“You can give your friend one,” Derek said magnanimously. “Just one.”
Stiles pierced another morsel and turned the fork forward, dangling it near Scott’s mouth. “Dude, you have to try this,” he said. “Come on, say *ah.*”

“No, I’m not swapping spit with both of you.”

“Say *ah,*” he insisted.

As he was enticing Scott to try it, he noticed a girl sitting a few tables away, watching them grimly.

Jennifer Blake.

She sat with her usual group of friends, her fork stabbed into a plastic container of salad. Was that a look of longing she was sending Derek? Anger?

He hadn’t given much thought to Jennifer Blake, he realized. He knew Derek wasn’t cheating on her, since they had broken up weeks ago, and there wasn’t anything Stiles had done wrong – it wasn’t as if Stiles had stolen Derek away, it wasn’t as if he could – but the sudden, vicious sting of guilt was there.

He didn’t know much about her, only that she was a member of the super popular clique that ruled high school as if it were their own little kingdom. She was very pretty and had been Derek’s on and off girlfriend for the past few months. It had always seemed that she liked Derek far more than Derek liked her. Stiles wondered how the split came to be, if it had been amicable and mutual, or if Derek had dumped her without a second thought, discarding her like last week’s newspaper.

The way she was looking at them made him uneasy. He wondered if she was now going through the same intense ache Stiles himself had endured whenever he saw Derek together with someone.

Their eyes met and Stiles was the first to glance away.

Later, when school was over, Derek walked with him to the parking lot.

“Can I ask you something?” Stiles said.

“If I say no, will you not ask?”

Stiles rolled his eyes. “Short of supergluing my lips together, no. The probability is slim.”

“Go ahead,” Derek said. “I’m all ears.”

“Why did you ask me out?”

“Why did I ask you out?” Derek repeated.

“Yeah, you know. It wasn’t like we’ve spoken until a few weeks ago.”

*Like you knew I existed,* was what he was thinking. Derek had said seven words to him until that point. *Get the fuck out of my seat* and Stiles was willing to bet his right hand that Derek didn’t even remember.

“I…” Derek hesitated. "Uh...

Stiles’ heart sank. Derek was stalling.

“I don’t know. I just did.”
“You just did.”

“You just did.”

“Oh,” Stiles said, deflating slightly. “So you just woke up one day and thought, hey, I’ll just ask that weird kid out?”

"You're not weird."

"I'm a little weird."

"Yeah, I guess you are," Derek agreed, then smiled and grabbed Stiles' finger when Stiles tried to poke him in the side.

Derek squinted at him. “You really want to know?”

Stiles laughed. “Yes, I’d like to know. That’s why I’m asking.”

“The truth is…” Derek said, then paused. “I’d always found you really annoying, to be honest.”

“Oh.” He would have been hurt, but Derek was grinning crookedly, taking the edge off the words and putting him at ease.

“Hear me out,” Derek protested.

“Okay, not a promising start, but go ahead.”

“Yes, I’d always found you annoying -"

"Yes, you've established that."

"Let me talk. See, this is why you're annoying," Derek said, eyes crinkled around the edges, and Stiles mimicked zipping his mouth. "I know we’ve never had much interaction before but you've always grated on my nerves. Everything about you. Your voice, your endless talking, the way you would make stupid jokes with your friend. You were like this bug flying around my head -"

Not getting any better, Stiles conveyed with his upraised eyebrows.

"Then one day I realized that these feelings I had for you, it wasn't annoyance, it was attraction. That's why you were constantly on my mind. That's why I always knew where you were. It just took me a very long time to figure it out."

"Oh," Stiles exhaled softly.

"And then, after I figured it out, it only made sense to ask you out a date. Which, I kind of blew on account of me being a dick, but I’m grateful that you gave me another chance. This has…this has been surprisingly fun."

Stiles had never heard Derek talk so much before, or so earnestly, and he was blushing furiously by the end of his words.

“Are we, ya know…” he said, then clamped his mouth shut. He arranged and rearranged the sentence in his mind, wanting it to sound the least stupid possible he could manage. Derek waited for him to say what he wanted to say. “Are we dating? You know. Like, dating dating?”

“I like to think so,” Derek said.
“So… official? Exclusive? All that jazz?”

Derek smiled. “Yeah, we’re dating,” he said.

There was a curious feeling of relief that came along with the flip-floppy, heart-squishy giddiness, hearing Derek say it out loud. Confirming it and turning it into fact. Stiles needed to hear it out loud, because despite them getting along so well these days, despite it being so comforting and fun being around Derek, there had been no indication that this was something beyond a platonic relationship. They were dating. Bona fide boyfriend and boyfriend. Derek had said so.

“How’ve you not gotten sick of me yet?” Stiles said.

“Believe it or not, no, not yet,” Derek said. “You’re okay.”

Stiles smirked. “Cool.”

**Derek**

It was the end of the week and Jennifer wanted to go out. He wasn’t keen on it, but she kept nagging until he caved.

He nixed her suggestion of karaoke, because he would rather have pulled out a fingernail with pliers than sing in front of a bunch of strangers, but reluctantly agreed to the movie theater. He traded his leather jacket for a non-leather one, and showed up with a non-descript cap donned firmly over his head like a serial killer waiting in the shadows to drag someone off into the bushes. He was jumpy until they went inside the building and sat in his seat with his neck hunched like a turtle until he was hidden by the relative safety of the darkness that fell over the room as the lights blinked off.

The film Jennifer chose was one he was already seen before with Stiles, but he suffered through it quietly. Not five minutes in, his mind began to drift. He found himself remembering the exact places in the movie where Stiles laughed or scoffed in disbelief or pulled closer to Derek to whisper some wisecrack about how dumb the character was being with his life choices, all the while cramming popcorn into his mouth by the handful.

Derek had realized early on, pretty much from the start, that watching a movie with Stilinski meant that you’d having a running commentary on everything that was going on, as if you weren’t watching the exact same fucking thing at the exact same fucking time he was. It was annoying as hell. And the way he couldn’t even sit still, always fidgeting and squirming around like a little kid with a rock inside his underwear, his hands flapping around like birds in flight…

He wondered what Stiles was doing now. Stiles loved movie theater popcorn, disgusting as it was. Maybe he could buy a large tub to go and stop by at Stiles’ place on his way home. No. It’d get soggy. And Jennifer would ask who it was for and he would have to make up some elaborate excuse that wouldn’t even make sense.

But it’d be nice if he could get Stiles something...

“Derek?”

He glanced up and saw that the lights were on, the movie was over, and Jennifer was staring at him.

“Huh?”
“I said, the movie’s over. Let’s get out of here.”

Afterwards, they ended up at her place. Her house was empty, but that was no big surprise; her parents were local lickspittles and they were never home, too busy schmoozing it up with the mayor and other assorted petty city council members that Derek had always viewed with derision. It was Beacon Hills, for fuck’s sake. Advanced suburbia, where the smell of cow manure wafted about on windy days. Being a politician here was like winning a 100 dollar lottery, as far as Derek was concerned. He couldn’t wait to leave this humdrum joke of a town. After graduation, he was going to fly out of here like his ass was on fire. Go to a huge city like New York and carve a life for himself.

Jennifer had redecorated her room since the last time he had been in there, a few months ago. She was going through a bohemian-hippy phase and free, flowy fabric was draped over everything.

He watched as she stripped down. She had recently gotten a Brazilian wax at a salon and she took his hand and guided it down there, proud at how baby-butt smooth her mons pubis was.

“Nice, huh?” she said. “Doesn’t that feel so nice?”

“Yeah, it’s nice.”

“Janet did such a great job.”

“Yeah.”

They fucked twice, once with her straddling him and bouncing on his dick like it was a trampoline, then with her on all fours as she screamed into a fluffy pillow. When he was done, he collapsed and rolled on to his back.


He kept still as she pulled the condom off him, carefully wrapping it in a square of tissue before tossing it into the wastebasket.

Over the mingled scent of their sex, he could detect hints of pumpkin and cinnamon from the candle she had been burning over in the corner, and a whiff of weed. She wiped herself between the legs with tissue, then joined him on the bed. She knew he wasn’t a cuddler, and that he didn’t appreciate being touched after they did the deed, not when they were both unpleasantly hot and sticky and stinky, and kept a few inches between them.

“How long is this thing going to last?” Jennifer asked. Despite the ambiguity of the question, he knew what she was talking about.

“I don’t know,” he responded.

“Has to be over soon, though, huh?” she said. “This won’t take that long?”

“I don’t know,” he said again.

“I mean, he’s totally gone on you. Like, fucking gone on you,” she said with a snicker. “You can practically see the aura of love glowing from him whenever he’s in your presence. A blind dog can see it from a mile away.”

He wished she would quit talking about Stilinski.
“It’s pathetic, the way he makes goo-goo eyes at you all the time.”

“Yeah,” he said absently, staring up at the ceiling. He started counting the number of star decals stuck on the plaster, little five-pointed stickers of gold scattered like a mini galaxy. “It is.”

She propped her head up on her hand, her dark hair tumbling around her bare shoulders. She was lying on her side now, and her curves became more pronounced, a sloping valley, where two hills came to meet at the dip of her waist. “Are you going to have sex with him?”

“No,” he said. “That’s disgusting.”

“Really?” she said, curious. “What if he throws himself at you? He looked like he was ready to hump your leg in the hallway.

“No,” he said again. “I wouldn’t touch him with a ten-foot pole.”

“I bet he wouldn’t say no to you fucking him in front of everyone at school.”

He didn’t answer.

“I bet he’d be so bad in bed,” she said, shaking with laughter and flopping back down. He brushed aside a wisp of her damp hair off his cheek and wished she’d fall asleep. “You can just see it on his face.” She tapped a finger along the expanse of her forehead. “I. Am. A. Virgin.”

“Hey,” she said suddenly, getting his attention with a light smack to his arm. “You should have him help you with your assignments.”

He glanced at her, not understanding what she was talking about.

“He’s such a know-it-all nerd. You might as well benefit by getting a free tutor out of all this. Get him to write a report or two while you’re at it. I mean, it’s only fair that that he helps you out as, you know, like, payment, for you spending your time with him. I bet he would jump at the opportunity to be your homework bitch.”

He waited until her breathing went heavy, with a touch of snoring to it. A Hello Kitty doll stared down at him with its soulless eyes from atop a bookshelf. As far as Derek was concerned, Freddy Fazbear had nothing on Hello Kitty in terms of creepiness. He had always hated that cat.

The moment he knew he was safe to move, he slowly climbed out of bed and reached for his pants and shirt. He carefully tugged the blanket up to her neck so her breasts weren’t exposed. He slipped out through the window, leaving her asleep on her bed.

Parking in her driveway had been too risky, and he walked a few blocks to where his car was waiting for him on the side of the street. The night was cold and the moon was a dented coin of pale yellow.

He wondered again, as he drove out of the neighborhood, what Stiles was doing right now. It was almost eleven; he would probably be sleeping. No, Derek amended himself. He’d probably be on his laptop, soaking his brain with the weirdest information on Wikipedia or Google after derailing spectacularly while looking up something for his homework. Yeah, that was what he would be doing.

At a stoplight, his hand went to his cellphone. They’d texted during the past few days. He’d receive little remarks on what Stiles was doing at the moment, humorous observations about something or other, maybe a funny joke or a funny picture. Derek wasn’t very good at texting; his fingers weren’t as nimble and he found it to be a laborious process with very little reward, and he
had always considered texting as something two guys didn’t regularly do with each other.

But even so, he was disappointed to see that he hadn’t received any new messages from Stiles.

His fingers hovered over the keypad and he chewed on his lower lip. But as he was trying to make up his mind, the light blinked from red to green.

He set the phone away and concentrated on driving.
Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

Sorry about the later than intended update, it's been a bit of a hectic week for me. Hope you enjoy and many thanks to everyone who's still with me up to this point!

Stiles
When his phone rang in the morning, Stiles was still sleeping. He had valiantly attempted to read everything he could on haunted locations, and had fallen asleep sometime around three in the morning. He patted around the blankets where the music was coming from and wiped his mouth on his pillow.

“Hello?” he mumbled, then realized he needed to accept the call first. And maybe have the phone screen facing his way. He tried again. “Lo?”

“Hey, what are you up to?”

“Hey,” Stiles slurred.

“Hey,” Derek said.

Derek, his voice a glide of warmth in Stiles’ ear. It was better than a cup of coffee. It was better than a warm bath on a cold day, better than...

“Stiles?”

“Mmm?” Stiles said, blinking awake, realizing that he had started nodding off and Derek was waiting for him to respond.

“Say that ag – crap.” The phone slipped out from his slack fingers and plonked to the floor. Stiles groped around, trying to retrieve it. “Sorry. Dropped it.”

There was a smile in Derek’s voice. “Were you still sleeping? Did I wake you up?”

“No, s’fine,” he said. He stifled a yawn and adjusted his grip before the phone could slide off a second time. “You need another ride?”

“No. I was wondering if you’d like to have breakfast with me. Well, brunch, I guess, or whatever it’s called.”

A glance at the clock told him that it was nearly ten. Stiles smiled drowsily and scratched at his chest. “Yeah, that sounds good.”

“Can you get ready in about thirty minutes? I’ll come pick you up.”

Stiles said that he could and they hung up. He crawled out of bed and hurriedly washed up and changed out of his pajamas. He was sitting on a wicker chair out on the front porch, the humid breeze pleasant on his skin, when Derek’s battered Toyota Celica pulled into his driveway.

He felt giddy as he climbed into the car and greeted Derek with a grin. How this had become the
norm for him, spending his weekend with Derek Hale, he didn’t know. He must have saved the universe in a past life and this was karma’s way of thanking him.

Derek took him to a little restaurant Stiles hadn’t even known existed in town. It had started drizzling on their way over and they dashed inside.

The interior was cramped yet quaint, the shelves replete with vintage decorations that added to the old-fashioned hominess of the atmosphere. The waitresses bustled about merrily, two middle-aged ladies who looked almost identical with their permed mop of hair that sat on top of their heads like gray loofahs and black vests tucked around their dumpy, potato-shaped torsos. There was a mixed crowd of young and old, and families with toddlers waving crayons and infants that banged on the tabletops with their spoons as they sat bound to their high chairs.

“It’s nice here,” Stiles said, taking in the décor. They were sitting in the corner, away from the hustle and bustle. Derek had taken off his jacket and hung it over the back of his chair, and Stiles tried hard not to peek too often at his biceps.

“Yeah, my parents come here often,” Derek said, flipping through the menu. “This place was around when they were in college.”

“Oh, that’s nice,” Stiles said wistfully. He tried not to dwell on how lonely his dad became at times; the way he grew quiet when he saw old couples walking hand in hand, or sitting together at restaurants.

One of the waitresses came to take their orders, her face a riot of wrinkles and dimples. Stiles asked for the butterscotch sticky buns, Derek the – surprise, surprise – bacon and ham platter.

“Excellent choice. I’m partial to the buns myself,” the waitress said as she collected their menus. “You two boys out on a date?”

“We are,” Derek said, and it took all Stiles had not to grin like an idiot.

Once she had fluttered away, Stiles said, “Did your parents both attend BHU?”

“No, actually. My dad was attending a school up in New York. He was visiting a friend in Beacon Hills his sophomore year and that was when he met mom. He transferred the very next year because he couldn’t handle the distance.”

“He switched schools just so he could be with her? That’s so romantic.”

“Yeah. My grandpa was pissed. But he got over it. Since being mates trumps everything, in their book.”

“Oh, wow,” Stiles said, a little amazed. “Your granddad believes in soulmates?”

Derek paused for a second. “Uh, yeah. Soulmates.”

“That’s sweet,” Stiles said earnestly. “Apparently, all my granddad believed in was stifling the government and giving sons weird names.”

Derek frowned. “What’s your dad’s name? I thought it was pretty normal. James? Josh? John?”

“Yep, John. He had it legally changed to John from something with an excessive amount of vowels that I have no idea how to pronounce.”

“Huh,” Derek said thoughtfully, drawing out the word.

“No, I wasn’t,” Derek said.

“Liar,” Stiles said. “You totally were.”

Derek laughed then. Stiles had never heard him laugh before, not with him, not with anyone else, and something in his chest tingled at the sound.

“Okay, you got me.”

Stiles laughed. “Stiles isn’t my real name. My grandfather named me and my dad went along with it. Family tradition, apparently, and Dad didn’t want to rock the boat. One day, I couldn’t stand it anymore and decided that I wanted to be called Stiles. Which may be funny, but it’s still a thousand times better than what it used to be.”

“Why Stiles? Why not something more common?”

“It’s a nickname from my mom. Something she made up for me when I was a little kid and...” Stiles shrugged. "...I like it, unusual as it is. It's my way of keeping her memory alive."

"Oh," Derek said quietly.

"Yep."

“So what is your real name?”

“That particular information, I am not passing out to anyone. Maybe I’ll tell my spouse. Maybe. After we’re married and the ink is dry on the certificate and a few years have passed.”

“It can’t be that bad.”

“Whatever you think it is, it’s a hundred times worse.”

Derek chuckled. “I’m really curious now.”

“Guess the only way to find out is if you marry me,” Stiles said, then belatedly realized what he had said. But Derek only nodded, as if that made sense.

They chatted as they ate their food. When they were done, they briefly fought over who would pay, and Derek won.

“You can get it next time,” Derek said, playfully thwapping him lightly on the nose with his credit card.

And Stiles could only smile, happy at the thought of next time.

“Oh, hey,” Derek said, as he was scribbling his signature on the receipt. “I have to drop something off at the post office before it closes. Do you mind if we stop by on the way to your house?”

"What time does it close?"

"At noon."

Stiles glanced at his cellphone. "Twenty minutes left. We can do this."
It was still raining lightly as they left the restaurant and they hurried to the car. They drove over to the post office a few miles away.

"Uh-oh, this doesn’t look good," Stiles said when he caught sight of the building. The lot was completely empty of cars and the windows were dark. "Are you sure it closes at noon?"

"Yeah, pretty sure."

"Well, only way to find out," Stiles said, as both of them climbed out of the car.

And yes, the post office was closed. They had gotten the hours wrong.

"Great, my mom's going to kill me," Derek said miserably. "She asked me to do this a week ago and I fucking forgot."

"What does she need to send?" Stiles asked.

"Cards to a bunch of her friends. She likes to keep in touch."

"My mom used to do that too. She had a cigar box full of pretty cards she collected over the years. We still have it somewhere in storage."

Derek smiled at him sadly as they trudged back to the car.

"Hey," Stiles said, an idea coming to him. "If they’re just cards, buy some stamps and drop them in the post box."

"Where would I buy - shit. Are you kidding me?" Derek let out a sound of frustration. Stiles watched as he started patting at his pockets. "Damn it."

"What is it?"

"Is the door locked on your side? My keys. I don’t have them; they’re in the car."

Stiles went around and tried the door. "Yeah, it's locked. " He hunkered down and squinted. "You left the keys inside? Oh, yeah, there it is."

"I thought I had it in my pocket. It must have slipped out or something, shit!" Derek groaned, then groaned again. "Shit."

"Hey, hey, no biggie. I do this all the time."

"Yeah? You wouldn’t know how to jimmy a lock, would you?"

"Sadly, no. That particular skillset isn’t in my repertoire."

They were now looking at each other through the windows. Stiles smiled, and Derek smiled back. Then Stiles frowned. "Wait. What are you doing?"

Derek had his arm pulled back at an angle, his hand curled tight in what was unmistakably a fist. "I’m going to break the glass," he said, as if that was a reasonable solution.

"No! What? No! Don’t do that! Just call a car-service company like a normal person! Derek! Don’t punch out the window!"

"It’s raining and you’re going to get pneumonia and die."
“I am not!” Stiles exclaimed. “Derek. It’s going to cost you to replace the window and you’re going to have to go around with cardboard and duct tape over that hole and the kids at school are going to laugh their asses off. Don’t ask me how I know.”

Derek didn’t do it, thankfully, but he did smack the side of the car with a grunt of frustration. Stiles raised his brows when he felt the metal vibrate under his palms. Wow, the dude was strong.

“Call car service. It isn’t the end of the world,” he said.

“Yeah, you’re right,” Derek said as he pulled his cellphone out of his jean pocket and began to scroll down his list of contacts. He sighed as he put his phone up to his ear.

Stiles leaned back against the Toyota, knowing this would take a while. The sky was a menace of gray clouds, and the rain was turning sharp and cold. He wiped at his neck before a drop of water could run down his spine.

When Stiles glanced towards Derek, he noticed that Derek was shrugging off his jacket. To his great surprise, Derek came around and draped it over Stiles’ head.

“Derek, it’s okay, I’m not - ”

But Derek was already having a conversation with the person on the other side of the line.

Stiles discreetly inhaled the scent of leather and Derek’s musk, and wow, that was nice. If he could find a way to bottle Derek’s scent, he would make a small fortune on the market. People would come in droves to buy that shit. He fiddled with the end of the sleeves, chest expanding with something so indescribably warm and fuzzy that it was ridiculous.

“Uh, yeah. We’re at the main post office, on Maple Street,” Derek was saying. “Could you hurry? Okay. Thanks.”

Stiles waited until Derek was done talking. "Everything work out?"

“Yes. They’ll be here in ten.”

Stiles nodded. He didn’t mind the situation at all.

“Here,” Derek said, surprising him out of his thoughts. A travel mug was pushed into his handed. “It’ll help warm you up.”

"You left the car with your coffee but not your keys?" Stiles said.

Derek snorted. "I am not the sharpest knife in the drawer."

“Thanks,” Stiles said, wrapping his fingers firmly around the mug. As he lifted it up to drink, it dawned on him that Derek’s lips had been on the rim, and if he put his own lips, right there, right on the opening, that it would be a second-hand kiss… and Stiles couldn’t help but be amused at his own desperation.

Stiles took a long sip, hiding his reddening face. The coffee warmed him up a little. He took another sip, then offered the thermos back to Derek.

“I need a new car,” Derek muttered, looking glumly at the Celica. "God, that thing is a junk bucket."

“How long have you been driving it?”
“Since freshman year. It belonged to my uncle, and he gave it to me. I’ll probably get a new one when I go off to college.”

And there it was, that dreaded word. College. Stiles wanted to ask about what happened to *them* when the time came for Derek to leave, but he was afraid to ask. Afraid to hear the answer.

“What’s your dream car?” Stiles said, in an attempt to change the subject. “A Porsche?”

Derek gave him a curious glance. “Why, do I look like a Porsche kind of guy?”

“Not really,” Stiles admitted. “That’s more Jackson’s style, isn’t it?”

Derek nodded noncommittally. “Yeah. Too flashy for me.”

“He does make it look good, though,” Stiles remarked and earned a sideways glance from Derek.

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, he’s a good looking guy,” Stiles said. He was trying to gather his courage and add something along the lines of “not that he has anything on you”, because seriously, there was no comparison to be had as far as Stiles was concerned, when there was an ominous crack and the strong, overpowering stench of coffee punched his nose.

“Shit!”

Stiles glanced over just in time to see Derek holding his arm away from his body.

The travel mug had splintered and dark brown liquid was gushing out. Stiles scrambled, reaching into his pockets for napkins he didn’t have. Derek brushed off the pool of coffee gathered in the folds of his shirt.

“You okay?” Stiles said. “Did you burn yourself?”

“No, I’m fine.”

“Is your hand okay?”

“It’s fine. I’m fine.”

They both stared at the mug, which Derek was holding out an arm’s length away, still dribbling brown drops that splattered on the cement.

“What the hell happened? How did you do that?” Stiles said.

“The heat must have… melted it,” Derek said.


Before he could examine the crushed mug, Derek quickly went over to a trashcan on the far corner and hurled it away.

“A Camaro would be nice,” Derek said, as soon as he was back, as if nothing had happened.

“Huh?” Stiles said.

“My dream car. A Camaro would be nice.”
“Oh, right. Sweet choice,” Stiles said. Not that he knew much about cars. He tilted his head, visualizing it in his mind. “I can totally see you driving one of those.”

Derek would probably get a black one, something sleek and sexy. He tried not to think of Derek driving around campus, girls flocking around him.

Roadside assistance arrived just then. A huge truck rumbled over, and a grubby man in grubby denim overalls jumped down from his truck.

“You Derek Hale?” he rasped, clapping his hands together. “Alright. What you got for me?”

They took him over to the car and he made short work of it.

Derek thanked him and the man walked off, giving them a wave without turning around.

Derek chuckled suddenly. “He just called me a fucking moron,” Derek said.

“Who did? That guy?” Stiles said. He took in the distance between the two cars. “Right now? You can hear him from over there?”

“I mean, he probably thinks I’m a fucking moron,” Derek said quickly. “Because I locked my keys in the car.”

“...Right.”

“You were saying something about sending the cards through the post?”

“Oh, uh, yeah, the Sip & Zip sells stamps.”

So they headed over to the gas station, and they sat in the car pasting stamps on all eleven cards. They dropped them into the post box and Derek drove Stiles back to his house.

"Sorry about locking us out of the car."

"Don't worry about it. It was fun." He always had fun when he was with Derek.

Derek still hadn't discovered the stamp Stiles had stuck in his hair and Stiles grinned as he waved goodbye.

**Derek**

Monday rolled around again, much to everyone's displeasure.

Derek was sitting in the back of the classroom, half-listening to the teacher as she led a discussion on a book they were currently reading.

He was thinking about Stiles.

He often did these days. These days, his mind was nothing more than a list of Dos and Don'ts, Likes and Dislikes in terms of Stiles Stilinski. He was thinking where he should take Stiles next. He was thinking what Stiles might like to eat and what he might like to do.

He was pondering all this when the smell reached his nose. He stood up from his chair and the teacher stopped talking to raise her head inquisitively in his direction.

“Is there a problem?”
“I need to go to the restroom,” he said.

Her raspy voice called after him, reminding him to take the hall pass hanging on the wall, but he was already out the door.

The smell wafted up from the first floor, a potent, metallic tang.

He went down the steps of the staircase, cut through the atrium, and made his way down the corridor. The restroom had been the easiest excuse to come up with off the top of his head, but it appeared that a restroom was indeed his final destination. He pushed his way into the boy’s bathroom, the smell of pennies bursting around him as the door swung open.

Stiles was standing in front of the basin, his back to the door. He jumped when he saw Derek’s reflection in the mirror.

“Crap, you scared me,” Stiles complained.

Derek went over to him. It was cool in here and there was no one else inside but them. “Well, your face is scaring me.”

The area around Stiles’ mouth was covered in red and he was trying futilely to staunch his nose with a handful of paper towels from the dispenser. A huge mound of used towels was piled up on the corner of the sink, mushy with blood.

Derek scented the pain on him and he struggled to keep his claws in.

“Who did this to you?” he demanded.

“Whoa, big guy. Easy there,” Stiles said, dabbing at his lower face. “I got slammed in the face with a soccer ball during PE, that’s all.”

"By who?"

"I don't know, it was an accident," Stiles said.

Derek didn't believe him, because he was lying, but he also knew it wasn't the time to pry for information. “Let me see. Take your hand away for a second.”

A fresh rivulet of blood dripped down the moment Stiles took the towel away and Derek quickly snagged a fresh towel and pressed it against his nose.

"Last class ended ten minutes ago. You're still bleeding?"

“Niagara Falls, huh?” Stiles said.

Derek ran a finger down the line of the nose, inspecting the bone. Thankfully, it didn’t appear to be broken.

“Were you lured here by my blood? Like a shark?” Stiles asked, his voice muffled.

“Yes.”

“Really?”

“Yeah.”
“I must look so sexy right now.”

“Never mind sexy. Let’s get you to the nurse’s office.” This was a lot of blood, and Derek wasn’t sure how to deal with nosebleeds. He’d never had one before in his life.

Stiles tried to pull away. “Yeah, no, that is not necessary. I can handle it. No problema.”

“You’re gushing,” Derek pointed out. “You’ve used enough paper towels to sink a battleship.”

“It isn’t like she has a magic pill to make it stop,” Stiles said. “Dude, it’s all right. I’ll be fine.”

“So, you started bleeding, and Finstock just, what, told you to get lost and deal with it on your own?”

“Uh, yeah. Pretty much.”

_That fucking bastard._ It was the man's repertoire, but fucking hell. Derek tried not to show how absolutely incensed he was.

“Come over here.” Derek led the other boy over to the protruding ledge by the far end of the restroom. “Sit down. Sit up straight.”

“So bossy,” Stiles said.

“Here, let me…” With two fingers, Derek firmly yet carefully squeezed the soft part of his nose. He tried to remember what Coach did in these situations. Stiles’ brows furrowed in pain.

“Does it hurt?” Derek asked.

“Yes, it hurts! It hurts very much,” Stiles exclaimed. “Dude, we’re not all – ”

“Stop talking. Can you manage to do that for one minute?”

“Hell, no. I don’t have that kind of discipline.”

Fair enough.

“Then at least keep still. Stop squirming.” Derek cupped the back of his head with a hand to keep him from moving. He huffed impatiently. “Stiles, stop moving or I will bite your nose.”

“Kinky,” Stiles said. Although, with his clogged nose, what came out instead was ‘king-ghee.’

“What?”

“King-ghee.”

“What?”

“I said, that was king-ghee,” Stiles repeated, then realized only then Derek was teasing him, gave his side a poke. “Funny.”

“Stop tilting your head back. You’re going to swallow the blood,” Derek said.

“Isn’t that what I’m supposed to do?”

“No, it is not.” He had Stiles lower his chin slightly. There.
“Huh. I’ve been doing it wrong all my life.”

He kept his fingers on Stiles’ nose and his other hand cupped over the back of Stiles’ head. Stiles had a really nicely shaped head, he noticed distantly. It was round, without so much as an indentation, and his short hair felt nice on Derek’s palm.

Just then, the door creaked open and feet shuffled inside. When Stiles tried to peer around Derek’s shoulder to see who it was, Derek held his head in place, earning a scowl.

“Oh!” Stiles waved facetiously at the intruder, swinging his legs like a hyperactive six year old and Derek made him stop that as well.

The guy began to stammer. His voice and scent informed Derek of his identity. Cooper Price. Junior. One of Jackson Whittemore’s third tier minions. “I’m, uh, going to, uh - ”

“No, no, go ahead,” Stiles said, gesturing at the stalls.

“Naw, I’ll find another - ”

“Just fucking piss in here,” Derek snapped.

“Oh, okay,” Cooper said, hurrying inside.

“The first stall’s out of order,” Stiles said helpfully. The guy obediently moved to the next stall.

Stiles’ eyes were large and placid above the paper towel held to his nose, and he glanced up at Derek. “But you should always use the first stall when possible. Did you know that experts found that the stall closest to the restroom door consistently had the lowest levels of bacteria?”

Derek said nothing and glanced down at his watch. The flow of blood had decreased significantly, much to his relief.

“And your keyboard is probably dirtier than your toilet seat, did you know that?” Stiles said, then considered his own words. “Even so, I’d still rather lick a keyboard than a toilet seat.”

“Why would you lick either of them?”

“If I had to, I mean.”

“Yeah? Think about licking things often?” Derek said without thinking, then immediately realized what he was said and what it sounded like.

That wasn’t all he realized. He realized that Stiles’ bony knees were pressed lightly up against his thighs. He was suddenly and painfully aware of the contact. It was as if Stiles’ warmth was pulsing through the fabric of his pants into his skin, deep into the very marrow of his bones. He realized that Stiles had finally stopped talking. His mouth was slightly open and his breath tickled Derek’s palm. A light blush dusted his round cheeks.

“C’mon, c’mon, for fuck’s sake, c’mon,” came the almost inaudible, slightly hysterical voice from the stall.

A few seconds later, a wavy head peeked out. Cooper looked desperate. “Um, I’m sorry, I tried, but nothing’s coming out. Could I please go back to class?”

“Say no,” Stiles whispered to Derek. “Tell him he had to pee before he can leave.”

“You have to pee before you can go,” Derek repeated.
“But, I - ”

“Yeah, you can go,” Derek said and the moment he said it, Cooper dashed out. Stiles bit down a grin and something about his smile just… satisfied something deep and innate within Derek.

After a while, Derek took his hand away. The bleeding had finally stopped, much to his relief.

“Uh, yuck,” Stiles said, wrinkling his face in distaste. “Your shirt.”

Derek looked down at himself. He must have wiped his hand on the lower hem without realizing it.

“Yeah, it’s all gross now. You need to buy me a new one,” he said absently, examining the nose one final time.

“Or you could just go shirtless,” Stiles said, then his face crumpled and he shrunk a little in embarrassment. Derek was willing to bet any amount of money that he hadn’t meant to say that out loud.

“Never mind my shirt. Your face is the problem.”

He wet a towel and wrung it out with one hand, squeezing out the last drop of water. Taking Stiles’ chin with one hand to hold him steady, he wiped the thin, dried smear of blood off his nose and cheeks. The texture of the recycled napkin was rough, and he tried to be as gentle as possible. By the time he was done, Stiles was blushing furiously and stinking of arousal and uncharacteristically quiet.

He stepped back, allowing Stiles room to stand up from the ledge.

“Are you dizzy?” he asked.

“Nope,” Stiles said.

“How many fingers am I holding up?”

Stiles gave him a huffy, disbelieving look that said, “Really?” but Derek kept his hand up.

“Four.”

He was holding up two.

“Seriously, Derek. I’m seeing four. What do I dooo?”

"Come on, smartass. I’ll walk you to your class.”

Stiles rolled his eyes. “I’m not going to faint on my way to class, even with massive blood loss. It’s a nose bleed, Derek. No one dies from a bloody nose.”

“Humor me,” Derek said. He was still not quite sure how the human body worked. He’d seen blood countless of times out on the field while playing lacrosse, but Stiles was…Stiles.

"So who hit you in the face?” Derek said, as nonchalantly as he could manage, but Stiles didn’t bite.

"It was just a stupid accident. You know how it is."
"I still have your jacket, by the way."

"Give it to me when you can, it doesn't matter."

They walked together until they reached Stiles’ class, Derek making sure Stiles wasn’t listing to the side.

“You can go now. Go,” Stiles said, shooing him.

“Let me know if you feel weird.”

“Go,” Stiles insisted as if put-off by Derek's persistence, but his scent was pleased.

Derek expected Stiles to go in, but without warning, Stiles surged forward and pressed a kiss on the corner of Derek's mouth. Before Derek could react, he quickly slipped inside the room and shut the door, blushing furiously. Derek heard Stiles apologizing to the teacher for being late as he hurried to his desk.

Derek returned back upstairs and issued an apology of his own to the teacher. He could still feel Stiles' mouth on his as he finished the rest of the period.

Stiles

It was nice, being with Derek. It wasn’t romantic all the time; actually, it wasn’t romantic most of the time. They were just two high school students who liked greasy burgers and cheese fries, and so-bad-they-were-good movies, and cracked jokes and teased each other. Or rather, Stiles did the cracking of jokes and the teasing, but Derek took it good-naturedly and Stiles liked to think he was growing on the other boy.

He was beginning to realize that Derek did indeed have a sense of humor, muted as it was. More and more often he was seeing Derek smile – the kind where there was teeth and the crinkling of eyes.

Neither of them spoke of the kiss Stiles had compulsively given Derek. Stiles had hoped that it would slowly open the way to more, but nothing changed. Even so, being with Derek was really, really nice. He had no complaints. Dating someone you liked, he was beginning to realize, was as ordinary as it was exhilarating and world-altering and awesome.

The amount of time they were spending together was growing like a slime monster in a B-movie, doubling and tripling in size. It started out with Friday nights, then Saturday nights, and then Saturday afternoons slipped in. Then it was at the library after school, after Derek came to him in a funk and told Stiles he was falling behind in his calculus class. He had bombed an exam, which did not bode well for his final grade.

“Let me see. Maybe I could help,” Stiles said. Derek obliged by rummaging out a wrinkled sheet of paper from his bag and smoothed it out. A C- was slashed viciously up at the very top in red marker, alongside a ponderous frowny face and the words “You can do better than this!!!!!!!”

“Wow, big fan of exclamation points, isn’t she?” Stiles said, then began looking over the exam. He had never considered himself an expert in the ways of mathematics, but he was a maestro of numbers compared to Derek.

“Yeah, math isn’t my forte,” Derek admitted. “My knowledge stops somewhere at the seventh grade level.” He rubbed his temple in embarrassment. “Which isn’t something I should be bragging about, when you think about it.”
“No, dude. It’s totally fine,” Stiles said. “We all have our strengths and weaknesses. I happen to
be the Jar Jar Binks of sports, whereas you are the Julia Child of sports. I would use an actual
athlete’s name for your example, but I can’t think of any off the top of my head at the moment.”

“You’re ridiculous,” Derek told him. Stiles felt something blossom inside him, wondering if he
was imagining the fondness coloring Derek’s voice. He beamed, as if that was the best
compliment ever.

He spent the next few days going over equations and functions with Derek, until there was a
glimmer of hope that Derek was getting it.

“Wow, you’re good at this. You make a good teacher,” Derek told him, and if Stiles preened, who
could blame him, when Derek was looking at him as if he were right up there with Einstein?

“Oh, hey, could you maybe give me a hand with my book report later on?” Derek asked. “It’s due
in a few weeks, and I’m not really good at, you know, words.”

“Hell, yeah, I can take a look at it,” Stiles said. “Book reports are totally up my alley. Books are
my lovers. Reports are my babies.”

“Okay,” Derek said slowly.

Stiles rubbed his hands, slightly embarrassed at his over-enthusiasm. He had been touched at the
way Derek took care of his nose and he was delighted at the chance to help the other boy. “You
get the general idea. We could go over it together. I’d be happy to.”

And Derek smiled at him.

Derek

Practice was finally over after nearly three relentless hours of running around with the afternoon
sun beating down on their heads. They were finally free for the day. Finstock was even more of a
cantankerous bastard these days, hollering at them like there was no tomorrow, constantly on edge
and criticizing every move down to every last detail. He wanted the taste of victory. Well, so did
Derek – who enjoyed losing? – but either way, he was happy that it was Friday and he was free
from the man’s nonstop screaming for the weekend.

Derek was sitting on a bench in the gym locker room, a bag on his lap, sorting out his sweat-
stained clothing, when the door whined open and shut. There was the sticky tread of rubber soles
against tile, and then Jackson sauntered around the corner with the cocky gait of a rooster. Most of
the players had already washed up in the shower and gone home, but Jackson had stayed behind
with Finstock to do hell knew what. Chat about strategy and kiss each other’s asses, maybe.

Their lockers were a few feet apart and Jackson started stripping off his sodden uniform, a bib of
sweat darkening the back and front of the shirt.

This was the time when most of them were too pooped to talk after being run to the ground like
greyhounds at a track and they usually conducted their business in silence before disappearing one
by one. Derek was startled when Jackson’s voice drifted up, echoing faintly along the tiled walls.

“How’s it going?” he asked, as if they hadn’t spent part of an afternoon knocking into each other
on the field.
“It’s going,” Derek said absently. Ugh. This shirt was coming home with him. He didn’t feel like striking up a conversation and hoped Jackson would head straight to the showers without yammering too much.

“Having fun with Stilinski?”

"Yes."

That stopped Jackson short. "Really? Don't want to kill him yet?"

“...He has his uses, I mean,” Derek said.

Jackson being Jackson, sounded highly skeptical at that. “Yeah?”

“Yeah,” Derek said.

“Like what?” Jackson said with a tilt to his head, and if the leering gleam in his eyes was anything to go by, Derek knew his dirty old mind had leapt to a conclusion of the sexual variety. His hand unconsciously went to his mouth, remembering Stiles' kiss.

He didn’t deign to answer. Instead, he said, “You know he wants to try out for lacrosse next year?”

That made Jackson slowly pull himself up straight to stare at Derek in evident displeasure, a dent between his brows.

“Seriously?” Jackson said, his disbelief palpable.

“Yeah, with McCall.”

Jackson let out a short, humorless snort of laughter through his nose, as if he couldn’t believe the audacity of the two for even daring to consider entering the brotherhood of lacrosse players.

“Fuck me,” Jackson said. “Dumb and Dumber fumbling out on the field. Awesome.”

“He’s not dumb,” Derek said without thinking.

Jackson gave him a beady look. “Well, he kinda is if he thinks you’re actually into him.”

Derek fidgeted. “They might not be so bad. You never know,” he said, then wondered why he said it. Of course they wouldn’t be bad. They’d be horrible. Scott, with his lack of confidence, and Stiles, with his ability to trip on thin air.

“Or. They might take the entire team down and turn us into laughingstocks,” Jackson said, summarizing Derek’s worries quite succinctly. “Whatever. They’ll both be sitting out most of the time anyway. And we’ll both have graduated by then. No egg on my face.”

It was quiet for a few minutes, then Derek grit his teeth when Jackson started talking again. He was quite the chatty Cathy today.

“Hey. You want to try out for prom king and queen?” Jackson said with a grin. “You and Stilinski?”

Prom? That stupid event had never failed to interest Derek. He knew Jennifer was fully expecting him to take her when the time came.

“I could make it happen,” Jackson added.
Derek imagined standing up on stage, the lights hitting his eyes as he stood with a gaudy Burger King crown-equie on his head, Stiles radiating nervous energy beside him as a huge crowd stared up at them. “Tempting, but no.”

“How about a sex tape, then?”

Derek paused. What? Had he just heard Jackson correctly?

“A sex tape with Stilinski. You could show off your sex moves,” Jackson said, doing a little gyrating shimmy with his ass and shoulders. “Boom chicka wow wow.”

“No,” Derek ground out.

“Come on, it’ll be fun. I’ll blur your face out,” Jackson said, warming up to his own idea. “I could have someone do that. I will pay to have a professional do it. How about it?”

“What the fuck, are you insane?”

“How about you film him blowing you? You wouldn’t even have to show your face. It’s all in the angle, baby.” Jackson mimed holding up a phone close to his chest, showing what angle he was talking about. “If you film him blowing you, I will let you have my car for a month. Two months.”

“Fuck off.”

“Is that a no?” Jackson said, then stepped back, holding his palms up when Derek glared at him. “Hey, dude. I’m kidding. I’m kidding.”

He wasn’t kidding.

Derek didn’t even know what to say anymore. This was getting ludicrous.

Jackson busied himself for a few minutes. When he was done, he turned his attention back to Derek.

“So, when are you going to…you know, dump him?”

“…Soon, I guess,” Derek said.

“I have to see it happen.”

“I said I got it.”

“Make sure you do,” Jackson said, because his big head would implode if he didn’t get in the final word. He headed off into the shower room. Derek silently hurled a couple of insults at his stinky backside, crammed his bag shut, and headed out the door.
Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

To those who are still with me and haven't lost interest, I sincerely apologize for the late update. Real life and my anxiety/doubts about this chapter got in the way of posting for awhile. But just recently I learned that Stiles has officially gotten together with someone not-Derek in the show, and that is serving as the kick to the butt I need to get this train-wreck started again. So while I know this chapter is somewhat on the short side and not much happens, I thought it might be better than nothing. I promise I won't take so long to post the next one. Thanks again for reading <3

Stiles
He was beginning to realize he had turned into somewhat of a minor curiosity over the past few weeks, having gone from the social equivalent of ugly duckling to swan. Dating Derek did not come without some secondhand perks. People were nicer to him. Much nicer. At the least they left him alone, which had often not been the case BD, or Before Derek, as Stiles liked to call it.

He knew that people still talked about him; he could hear the whispering behind his back, but none of them got in his face any more, and this being high school, that was more than he could have hoped for. He was also not unaware that there was a bet going on as to when Derek would get sick of him and unceremoniously dump his ass, but he couldn’t particularly be bothered to get pissy about it.

He was getting his books when he vaguely noticed two girls walking down the corridor in his direction. Normally, they would have passed on by without a single glance, and he too, would have ignored them and gone about his merry way.

But to his surprise, they came to a stop in front of him.

“Hello, Stiles,” they said in near chorus.

“Hey,” he said uncertainly, confused at their unexpected attention. He knew who they were, but only by name. They had never bothered to speak to him before.

They both gave him matching smiles, coy and friendly and rather flirtatious, revealing rows of tidy white teeth from between pink lips.

“You look really nice today, Stiles,” Monet said.

He was dressed the way he was always dressed. Scruffy shirt that was going to end up in the hamper by the end of the day. Jeans. Sneakers. He looked down at himself to make sure. Yup, same as always. “Uh… thanks.”

They couldn’t possibly have stopped simply to praise his fashion style, but he was still surprised when they continued to smile at him. It was unnerving.

“Are you doing anything next Friday?” Nina said.

At her question, there was a distinct sense of déjà vu. A memory surfaced of Derek leaning
towards him, his eyes warm and green.

"Friday?"

“There’s a party at my house. It’d be great if you could come?” Nina said. She had a way of lilting
the last word of her sentence so that it turned into a question.

“Uh – wow. A party?”

“Yes, it’d be really nice if you could?”

He wasn’t sure what to say. He was perplexed. This was the first time anyone had invited him to a
party. He had been to exactly two since the beginning of high school, and after the initial
excitement had worn off, it had rather been a letdown. He spent most of his time standing there
awkwardly, plastic cup in hand, thinking dolefully that the wallpaper was getting more action than
him.

“Sounds like fun. I’ll think about it.”

“Oh, good,” Nina said earnestly, her thin brows knitting up like the slanting sides of a mountain.
She looked moments away from twirling a strand of hair around her finger. “You should come?”

“I’ll think about it,” he said again.

“And you could bring Derek with you? It’d be nice if he could come with you.”

Oh. Now Stiles understood what was going on. He was on to these girls.

He tamped down on a sharkish grin, more at ease now that he was on equal footing. “I’ll have to
check and see if, you know, our schedule permits it,” he said glibly.

“Have you thought about participating in the school fundraiser next month?” asked Monet. “We
were hoping you could give us a hand. There’s a ton of stuff you could do to help out. It’d be a
blast.”

“A blast,” he repeated. “And you want me to ask Derek too, right? If he can help out.”

They glanced at each other, then exploded into a flurry of giggles. “It would be nice if he could
participate,” said Monet. “It'd help a lot. He'd definitely boost the public's interest and it's for a
good cause.”

“It’d be so nice?” Nina said.

“Uh-huh,” Stiles said. “Well, I’ll talk to him about it. I can’t promise you anything.”

“More than we can hope for. I’ll give you my number,” Monet said, and before he could protest,
she took his phone away from him. He watched as she tapped away on the screen. “Now you
have my mine,” she said. She pushed a button and her phone began to ring. “And I have yours.”

"Thanks."

"Talk to you soon," Monet said.

“... Sure thing,” he said, watching them leave. He had to shake his head in astonishment.

“My stock’s gone up,” he told Derek, when they met up to head to the school library.
“What do you mean?” Derek said.

“Got a girl’s number,” he said, waving his phone in his hand and doing a little yeah, baby jig.

Derek turned towards him. “What?”

“Yeah. Some girl gave me her number. Sweet, huh? They’ve been really digging me since we got together.”

He was jesting, about to add that it was actually Derek they were after, but Derek nodded.

“Nice,” Derek said coolly. “Good for you.”

Stiles faltered slightly, disconcerted by how okay Derek sounded by it, then picked up his pace. The moment to tell him was lost.

Derek opened the library door for Stiles, letting him through first. They went over to the table that they now considered their table and sat down to study.

Derek

A girl stopped to talk to Stiles? And get his number?

Okay… he mused to himself as set his textbook on the table.

This was good. Some good had actually come out of this dare thing. A ripple effect of sorts. What was it called again? The angel effect? The halo effect? Mass effect? No, that was a game. That… that phenomena, where someone looked better just by virtue of being in someone else’s company. He’d learned it in psychology, although the next term was evading him right now.

Derek didn’t have to feel too bad. Stiles could benefit from this. He could practice getting his game on, boost up his image and reputation while he was Derek’s better half, and once Derek put an end to this charade, find himself a nice, pretty girl to cheer him up. Sure, Stiles would be mad at him for a brief while, but he would forget Derek in no time, like yesterday’s news.

Technically, Derek was actually doing him a huge favor with this bet. He’d make up a few nice rumors about Stiles – that he was a great kisser, he was hung like a horse – spread it around, and the girls would flock to him. Stiles would get laid, finally punch a hole in that V card.

Yeah, Derek could do that much for him. It was a small sacrifice on his part. Like charity.

No problem.

Stiles

They had been studying for an hour and Derek was reaching the end of how much he could tolerate. The other boy was now slouched over the table, head resting on an outstretched arm.

“Focus,” Stiles said, tapping the eraser end of his yellow pencil on the squishy side of Derek’s nose. Boop boop boop. He laughed a little at the irony of it. “Never thought I’d be telling anyone that. Focus, Derek. The problem isn’t going to solve itself.”

“Show me how to do it,” Derek mumbled. His eyes were hooded and sleepy. “You’re better at it.”
“Derek,” Stiles said patiently. “I’m not doing your homework for you.”

“Please? Just the rest I haven’t done.”

“Okay, but I’m going to make up all the answers and you’re going to get them wrong. Is that what you want?”

“No,” Derek said. He buried his face in the crook of his arms. “Crap, I’m so tired.”

“You all right?” Stiles said. Derek had been rather peaky these past several days. He brushed a stray strand of hair away from Derek’s forehead.

For one horrible moment, Derek stiffened at his touch. Stiles froze with him, but before he could do anything, Derek slowly pulled away.

“Yeah,” Derek said, acting as if nothing had happened. “I always get this way before the full… match.”

“Yeah?”

“Finstock’s been running us to the ground. He’s threatening to shave off all our eyebrows if we lose.”

Stiles perked up. “I would actually like to see that. Bzzz.” He mimed running an electric razor over one brow.

“I look horrible without eyebrows.”

Stiles resisted the urge to skim the tip of his finger along the bushy brow. He didn’t dare risk it. “Have you shaved them off before?”

“I mean, I’d look horrible without them. Shit, I’m tired. I don’t even know what I’m saying anymore.”

Stiles nodded. “Five minute break?”

Derek yawned. “Sounds good. Wake me up, would you?”

And with that, he buried his face in the crook of his arms. After awhile, having nothing better to do, Stiles started flipping through Derek’s notes in his three-ring binder.

“Man, your handwriting is horrible,” Stiles said. Derek couldn’t have had worse handwriting had he stuck a pen between his toes and scribbled the words down with his feet. “You could be a doctor.”

He was talking to himself, but Derek smiled a little.

“Yeah,” Derek said, murmuring into his arm. “I’m not allowed to write anything on the grocery list. It pisses my mom off, because she can’t make anything out and then she has to call me over to decipher it. And sometimes even I can’t tell what I wrote down.”

Derek picked up his pencil, then tossed it back down seconds later. “I can’t do anymore. Let’s call it a day.”

Stiles watched him stand up and begin gathering his textbooks and notes. His dad had called to tell him that he would be late and to go ahead with dinner. Stiles thought of the way his mom used to stand from the sofa around five thirty every evening, setting aside the book she had been reading,
and the rosy yellow glow from the kitchen as she bustled about making dinner. And he thought of the empty dining table waiting for him back in his empty home.

“Hey,” he said, and waited until Derek was looking at him. “You want to grab a bite to eat?”

He was a little nervous; they had gone out plenty of times since their first date, but it had all been initiated on Derek’s part and this was the very first time he was asking.

“A bite?”

“Yeah. Chili’s? I got a coupon. My treat. You can have something of equal or lesser value,” he sang, waggling his eyebrows. “How about it?”

“Uh,” Derek said.

“I mean, it doesn’t have to be Chili’s. I’m down for anything.”

“I don’t think I can. I have a, uh – to be home.”

“Oh. Okay. Maybe some other time,” Stiles said lightly, trying not to show how crestfallen he was. There was frozen pizza from last night. Or that box of macaroni. He didn’t feel much like spending an hour in the kitchen cooking a legitimate meal he would only end up eating by himself in front of the TV or laptop. He began to organize his notes to tuck back into his folder.

Derek looked at him for a few long seconds.

“Actually, never mind. Sure, Chili’s is fine. I’ll let my mom know.”

“Are you sure? She won’t be mad?” Stiles said.

Derek finished firing off of a text, and slipped his phone back into his pocket. “Yeah, she won’t mind. Let’s go.”

The restaurant was bustling at this hour, the walls decorated with colorful pops of light and loops of string pennants and retro posters. A huge plastic red chili hung from the ceiling in the middle of the room. A waiter came by and introduced himself before swiping a damp cloth around the table in large circles, brushing off crumbs and drops of soda. He handed them two sticky, laminated menus.

“I have a coupon,” Stiles told the waiter, holding it out for the man to see.

“You’re so proud of your coupon,” Derek said, once their waiter had left with their orders jotted down on his pad.

“You bet I am,” Stiles said.

They chatted until their food came out. Derek handed Stiles all his fries and his wedge of dill pickle. He had ordered a massive burger with another meat patty added in; Stiles the sour cream chicken enchilada. The food was good, made even better by the company he was with, and Stiles was in high spirits. Derek seemed rather lethargic, but still willing to indulge Stiles’ horrible jokes and puns. He cut off a portion of the burger and offered it to Stiles to try.

As they were eating, Derek’s cellphone made a noise. He read the message and sighed.

“My mom. She’s asking me to buy a few things while I’m out. Do you mind if we stop at the store before I drop you off?”
Stiles tried to remember the current contents of his refrigerator. “Actually, I could use some groceries too.”

Afterwards, they drove over to a nearby grocery market. Inside the store, Derek suggested using a single cart for both of them, and he pushed it forward while Stiles tagged alongside.

It had become so natural, to walk beside Derek, to share his personal space. His eyes kept going to their reflection rippling on the refrigerator display glass as they passed through the frozen food aisles. The grocery store setting and the shared cart added a new element of intimacy to it all; it was so very domestic, something only a real couple might do together.

In the produce section, Stiles added a bag of celery sticks and carrots and cucumbers, everything his dad hated with a fiery passion. A bag of romaine lettuce for a nice salad. Then, feeling a bit sorry for his dad, he added a small bag of Corn nuts. Because he was a generous son.

“Oh, right. That reminds me.” Derek turned around the corner into the candy aisle. “Cora wanted chips. She’ll rip my head off if I forget.”

“Oh,” Stiles said wisely. “A fellow junk food connoisseur.”

Derek perused the selection, then began tossing crinkly bags into the cart, one after the other. “Actually, Laura’s the sugar and salt fiend. Cora normally doesn’t eat junk food, but she’s on her period right now.”

“I guess you guys tell each other all these things, huh?” Stiles said, trailing behind him. Clearly sibling dynamics were different, especially when there was a mix of boys and girls. It would have been nice to have a brother or a sister. He hoped one day Derek would be willing to introduce them to him.

“No, I can smell it,” Derek said, examining a bag of chocolate covered pretzels.

Screech.

Stiles paused at that. “Huh?”

Derek’s face went funny.

“You can smell it?” Stiles said. He did his best not to wrinkle up, because maybe this was normal if you lived with a girl. He tried to be cool and mature with that piece of information. Tact dictated that this would be a good place to put a halt to this particular topic, but he was curious, and when he was curious, he couldn’t help himself. It was a disease, really. “Like… the menstrual blood? You can smell that?”

“Of course I can’t smell it,” Derek said. “She’s just…cranky all the time and that’s how I know. It was a joke.”

“Huh,” Stiles said.

“I was joking,” Derek insisted.

“You have a weird sense of humor,” Stiles said. He couldn’t come up with anything else to say.

“Yeah,” Derek said. “That was pretty gross. Sorry.”

“It’s okay,” Stiles said kindly. “You should hear the things that come out of my mouth. I am the king of having a no brain-to-mouth filter.”
"Well, I think I won this round."

They made their way around the entire store, grabbing what they needed. They paid for the items and loaded up the trunk, keeping their bags separated with a huge bag of toilet paper rolls.

Stiles buckled up in the passenger’s seat. Derek twisted his torso to look behind him as he pulled out of the parking space and Stiles was mesmerized by the line of Derek’s jaw and the faintish-blue vein running through the column of his neck. He wanted to lean over and kiss the skin, and taste Derek’s pulse.

Cars whooshed by. The night air was brisk and the sky dark and starless, with only the half-lit moon peering down from between the row of pine trees. Ten minutes later, they were in front of Stiles’ house.

Stiles got out of the car. Once Derek opened the trunk for him, he reached in for his groceries. He looped several bags up each arm, then hooked one on his left wrist, then gripped the handle of the plastic milk carton with his fingers.

“Maybe that’s too much at once,” Derek said.

“Two trips are for the weak,” Stiles said loftily.

“Uh-huh.”

“Watch and learn.”

He staggered up the walk. Gravity was doing a number on him and the three steps up to the front door felt like an entire staircase worth of steps. The door was an indomitable slab of wood. He had hung out a wreath, something he did every fall to honor his mother’s holiday traditions, and it stared back at him mockingly, just a leafy, mini pumpkin-clustered circle of mockery.

Stiles sighed, wondering how he was going to do this. The plastic straps were digging into his skin and his arms were beginning to go numb. He was going to get amputated by a bunch of grocery store plastic bags.

“Need help?” Derek’s wry voice came from behind him, closer now. He had left the car and followed behind Stiles. “Or do you plan to karate-chop the door in with your face?”

“I, uh…” Crap. He was losing circulation in both arms. Shit. His keys. He tried to contort his hand, twisting his wrist so he could reach down, but the bags were too heavy and –

He squeaked like a mouse when a hand slipped into the right side of his jeans pocket,

“It’s just me,” said Derek, sounding amused, while Stiles’ organs quivered into a mass of jelly, because that hand was really rooting around in there...and ooh! His left arm went lax as a wet noodle, and everything hanging from it would have slid off – shit, the eggs! - but Derek caught the bags deftly, quickly easing the weight off his arm.

“Nice save,” Stiles managed to say. “No wonder Finstock keeps you around on the team.”

“I have my moments,” Derek said. He pulled out the key.

There was that brief moment where Stiles stood caught between the closed door and Derek, the strong, warm chest pressing against the back of his shoulder as Derek leaned forward to turn the lock, emanating that spicy musk that never failed to make Stiles want to chomp down on him.
A click, and the door swung open, revealing the shadowy innards of the hallway and the dining room beyond it.

“You good?” Derek said, and it sounded as if he were smiling. Stiles nodded mutely.

Derek dropped the grocery bags inside and straightened up. “I should get going.”

Stiles stood there, watching Derek drive off. He then closed the door and leaned against the wall. His cheeks were burning and he could still feel the warm pressure of Derek’s chest against his back. Shaking his head in amusement, he began to put away the groceries.

Derek
He was cringing as he drove back home. He wanted to bash his face in for mentioning that period blood thing. Not that it wasn’t true; it was a normal, natural thing around Weres, and while they didn’t go shouting out intimate details from the rooftops, there wasn’t much embarrassment involved. But humans were more sensitive about bodily secretions, whether it was red or white or brown and he wanted to smack himself for blurting it out loud.

He had absolutely no idea why he went stupid around Stiles. He was been so careful around humans until now, guarding every single thing he said, but it was different with Stiles; it was as if he were drunk on something. Maybe that brain-to-mouth filter of his was corroding, just by virtue of being in Stiles’ presence. The words dribbled out like a broken faucet, without thought, and he knew he had to watch his mouth. Sure, it wasn’t as if Stiles was going to connect the dots with the information Derek was accidentally dropping out and think, “Good Lord, he must be a werewolf!”, but he sure was going to think Derek was a big fat weirdo, and Derek didn’t want that either.

Or maybe he would figure out Derek was a werewolf. He knew Stiles was smart. He was smart as a whip, was what Derek was beginning to realize. At first, Stiles’ thoughts were a messed up Rubik’s cube, a jumble of mismatching colors that was frustrating and senseless, but then he dug his fingers deep into his mind and things begin to shuffle around and gain a whirlwind of momentum and then, in a blink of an eye…Boeing VC-25.

He wondered how Stiles would react to being told Derek was a werewolf. Derek almost wanted to tell him, just to see his reaction. It would be funny as hell, that was for sure. He probably wouldn’t be scared or disturbed in the least. His eyes would probably grow wide as saucers and he would screech out how cool that was, asking a hundred different questions, demanding to know more. Asking things Derek didn’t even know about werewolves and couldn’t answer. Stiles would probably come back the next day, having researched the shit out of the subject, and school him. The very thought of it made Derek smirk as he imagined it. If there ever was a human to have the best reaction to finding out werewolves existed, Stiles would probably be it. Hands down.

It was almost a pity he would never find out.

When he reached the driveway of his house, he turned off the engine and stared out the window.

He rubbed his face. Holy fuck, he was tired.

He had been using lacrosse practice as an explanation for his severe exhaustion the past week or so, but that was bullshit. He glanced up at the sky, where the moon was a yellow glow hidden by a strip of clouds. He felt ready to peel his skin off, and not in a good way. Yes, the final days leading up to the full moon could be stimulating. Yes, everything started to get on his nerves, but it
had never been like this.

Everything felt off, askew, like he was in the wrong skin.

Try as he might, he couldn’t relax. He was so uncomfortable, so restless that he didn’t know what to do. His wolf kept wanting to move, to go somewhere, although exactly where he didn’t know, and it was taking him everything to placate it and hold it in place.

He couldn’t bite into an apple without the burst of juice in his mouth reminding him of sex. He wanted to rub himself against skin, to feel the weight of a body on his body, and taste the glide of salt on his tongue. Things had never been this bad, not even when he was going through puberty and his entire system was out of whack with hormones and his dick was constantly embarrassing him to the point he was afraid to go out in public.

Jennifer was just a phone call away, he knew that, and she would have happily dropped everything to meet up with him the second he asked. He knew that as well, but couldn’t bring himself to make that call. He was already familiar with the way she felt against him, the noises she made, the scents she emitted, and his entire being balked at the mere thought of contact with her. The very notion of it repulsed him in a way it never had. She wasn’t who his wolf wanted. It was craving someone specific, someone very, very specific, only he didn’t know who the fuck that was. It was excruciating and he wanted to howl in frustration.

He sat in the car and wondered what was wrong with him.

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Stiles

The next day, he was at his locker when he heard someone approach from behind him.

“Hey, Stiles.”

Stiles perked up at the low, familiar voice. He turned around, and there was Derek, looking sleepy with his tousled hair. He hadn’t shaved this morning, and his cheeks were dark with stubble.

“Hey. Morning.”

Derek leaned his head against the wall, stifling a yawn. He watched Stiles with hooded eyes as he collected his books, and Stiles tried not to blush. Derek had developed a strangely intent way of looking at him these days. Kind of like he was deciding where to bite first. Stiles found that he didn’t mind it at all.

Derek said suddenly, “Did you change the ringtone to my alarm?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Stiles answered, as loftily as he could manage.

“You did, didn’t you?” Derek said.

It took all Stiles had not to grin. “I might have.”

“The intro to Circle of Life from the Lion King? Seriously? You have issues.”

“Woke you up though, didn’t it? You said you needed to wake up early to study.”

“It woke up my entire family.”

Stiles grimaced. “Yikes. I’m so sorry. That was not my intention.”
Derek let out an amused snort. “It’s okay. It was pretty hilarious.”

They began to walk down the hallway together.

“Derek?”

“Yeah?”

“Did you delete Monet’s number from my contact list?” Stiles asked.

“Why would I do that?”

Derek had one hell of a poker face, Stiles had to admit. “Dude, fess up. I know you did.”

“I did no such thing,” Derek said, smirking.

“Liar,” Stiles said. Derek continued to look unrepentant.

They were at Derek’s classroom now. Stiles tilted his head and regarded Derek quietly, taking in the smudges under his eyes. “You okay? I know I sound like a broken record but you kind of look like a vampire. And not like the sexy, yes you may nibble on me kind, but the ones who are severely iron deficient and could use a blood transfusion.”

“I’m good.”

“If you say so,” Stiles said, because he didn’t want to be a nag. He noticed Derek looking at him oddly.

“What is it? What’s wrong?”

Derek said quietly, “You’re wearing my jacket.”

“Oh, right.” Stiles went pink in embarrassment. He had wanted to wear it one last time before giving it back, but forgot to take it off before arriving at school. He hurriedly began to shrug it off but a hand reached out to stop him.

“No, keep it on.”

“What? Are you sure?”

Derek gently tugged the lapel over his chest. “Yeah. It looks good on you.”

Stiles didn’t know what to say to that. This was Derek’s jacket, a part of his identity, and the fact that Derek was letting him wear it was... it was a big deal. Derek didn’t let anyone wear it.

Just then, Derek noticed they were blocking the entrance to the classroom and someone was waiting for them to move. He took a step backwards to let them through and the moment was broken.

“I’d better go in,” Derek said. “See you.”

“Not if I see you first,” Stiles said promptly. Derek groaned, but he was smiling with what Stiles liked to think of as affection.

“Have fun in chemistry with your favorite teacher.”

“Jerk,” Stiles said to the broad backside, because Derek knew his relationship with the obnoxious
man. Derek gave him one last smile, still tired but amused and undoubtedly *fond*, before disappearing inside.

Stiles realized he needed to hasten to his own class before he was late. He turned around, then froze when he found himself face to face with Jennifer Blake.

He had no idea how long she had been standing there, watching him and Derek together. He was stunned by the anger in her eyes.

They stared at each other for a long time. He was the first to lower his gaze. He suddenly felt horrible for being so happy with Derek when she was obviously still in love with him.

“Excuse me,” he muttered, then quickly walked away.
Okay, so here is the next update! After mapping out everything, I am tentatively thinking that this will probably go up to chapter 10. I know I'm taking my sweet time here, and I'm sorry about that, but I promise I will finish the story.

As always, thank you for reading :)
“Shut up,” Derek spat out, and Stiles’ brows rose to his forehead. The dude certainly was grouchy these days.

“You okay?” Stiles said in concern.

Derek glanced down at Stiles. He looked lousy, eyes rimmed an eggplant purple, jaws scruffy and dark with a five o’clock shadow.

“You’re such a messy eater,” Derek grumbled.

A little embarrassed at that, Stiles was about to reach for a napkin, but then Derek was leaning over and he froze as a finger swiped at the corner of his mouth. Stiles kept still, astonished, as Derek sucked the dot of mayo off his thumb. Tossing Scott one last annoyed look, Derek stalked off, the lines of his shoulders heavy and tense. Stiles watched him leave the cafeteria.

"You're as red as a lobster,” Scott informed him after a few minutes.

He felt as red as a lobster. It was a miracle his face hadn't burst into a ball of fire.

"What is with him? He’s so… touchy-feely these days,” Stiles said.

Scott rolled his eyes and rummaged out a potato chip from his bag. “And you're complaining? You like it. Admit it.”

He buried his face in his handed and then peeked at his friend. Yeah, he kind of did. “I want him so bad.”

“Go for it,” Scott said. “Carpe diem. Seize the day.”

“You’ve finally seen Dead Poet’s Society, I take it.”

Scott tapped an emphatic finger on the table. “It’s good advice. Dude, it’s golden. It was how I got Allison.”

“You got Allison because she asked you out first.”

Otherwise Scott would, to this day, have been choking in a morass of agony and indecision, analyzing every single thing she said or did and generally driving Stiles up the wall.

“And I seized that opportunity and said yes.”

“Right,” Stiles said.

“I don’t know why you won’t. The signs are all there. He wants you too. Like, he practically licked your face just now. What more do you need, a banner flown over your house saying ‘Stiles, this is Derek, let’s do it? And by “it” I mean sex?’”

Yes, that actually would have been really helpful, provided his dad didn’t kill him or Derek or both of them afterwards. He was so new at this that he was like a blindfolded kid fumbling around in the dark trying to find a matching pair of black socks. He didn’t know what certain things meant, if they were hints that Derek would be okay with kissing or hugging and holding hands and he didn’t want to jump to conclusions. Yes, there were times when Derek looked at him as if he thought Stiles was the best thing to happen since Nutella, but there were also times when he would turn aloof and distant, as if he were trying to keep Stiles at arm’s length.

Meanwhile, Scott was still in a tizzy. “Seize the day by the balls.” His eyes lit up, most likely
amazed by his own brilliance. “Seize Derek by the balls! By the balls!”

“Okay, okay. Calm down. Wow, could you have said that any louder?”

They went back to eating their lunch. But Stiles could still feel the press of Derek’s thumb on his lips, the warmth lingering on his skin.

**Derek**

He had somehow made it to the end of school.

Now he stood in front of the sink of the employee lounge restroom at the pool, cold water running endlessly from the faucet. The mirror was grubby around the edges, and he stared at his reflection in dissatisfaction. The glare of fluorescent light from the cheap light bulb lent a haggardness to the lines of his face. He looked like a serial killer who was taking a bathroom break from hacking up a dead prostitute.

In the sink mirror, he could see the lacquered wood door behind him with the two signs that encouraged employee hand washing by cheerfully proclaiming: “Even pirates wash their booties! Even mermaids wash their tails!”

It did nothing to lift his gloomy mood. He desperately wished he had called in sick today. He couldn’t stand the idea of spending the next three hours staring at kids and making sure they didn’t drown or pee in the pool water.

Wearily, he twisted off the faucet. He stepped out of the restroom, only to see Jennifer draped on the couch, long legs propped on the armrest, hair cascading down like a wavy curtain over her shoulders. His cellphone was clutched in her hand. Her thumb, with its square of turquoise nail polish, was busy scrolling down the screen.

She glanced up at him, amused. “Wow, he is so unbelievably gone on you. What a dork.”

He closed the distance in two swift steps and tugged the phone out of her grasp, making her jostle in surprise as she tried to keep ahold of it.

“Hey! What’s your problem? Give it back!”

“Don’t read my shit.”

Her mouth fell open in outrage. “I’m trying to see what he wrote you!”

“It’s none of your business, what he wrote me.”

"Are you serious?"

He quickly tossed the phone onto his bag, far away from her reach.

He made sure the wooden shutters were drawn before he shed off his jeans and started changing into his salsa-red lifeguard swim trunks. Jennifer was still glowering at the floor, her lips pressed into a thin, petulant line. She was sulky at being told off. He ignored her.

“You seem to be having a lot of fun with him,” she said suddenly, her voice like a shard of glass cutting through the dusty silence.

He took time folding his clothes. “I’m not,” he answered as evenly as he could manage.
“Well, it certainly doesn’t seem that way. You have pages and pages of messages together. It’s like the Neverending Story. You hate texting.”

“If I text him, it means I don’t have to meet up with him as much.”

“But you’re with him all the fucking time.”

It was a struggle to keep his temper in check. He had been so on edge, so easily angered these past few days that his uncle had asked if he was PMSing in that sleek ‘you need to watch it’ way of his. You knew you were acting like an obnoxious little shit when Peter, of all people, called you out on it.

“What’s your point?”

She made a throaty noise of disbelief. “What do you think? You keep blowing me off to spend time with him. Like last Friday, you blew me off again. How do you think that makes me feel? You do all these things with him that you’ve never once done with me – ”

He interrupted her listlessly. “You’re the one who wanted me to go out with him. You said it would be funny.”

“Yeah, well…” She had nothing to say to that.

It was nearly four and he needed to be out at the pool. He checked himself one last time, making sure nothing was out of place. He picked up the inflated rescue tube he set against the wall. He could hear the shrieking of kids outside and the slosh of water. He suddenly remembered that day at the park with Stiles, watching him feed the ducks, his face bright and happy.

“I need to go,” he said.

“Whatever,” Jennifer said then sighed. Her voice turned cajoling. “Derek…”

He held up a hand before she could hug him. “Make sure no one sees you when you leave.”

---

**Stiles**
Derek was coming over.

Derek was coming over!

Currently, Stiles was dashing around the house like a headless chicken.

They hadn’t agreed to meet up tonight; Derek said he would be too tired after work at the pool and would go straight home afterwards. Stiles understood, and had resigned himself to a night of eating dinner alone and surfing on the internet before he crawled into bed. But to his surprise, Derek had called unexpectedly, asking if he could stay over for an hour or two.

As if Stiles would say no.

He had managed to tidy up somewhat. He had initially intended to go all out – vacuum the carpet and wipe all the dusty surfaces with a tub of Clorox sheets – but he perished the thought even before he made it to the closet to pull out the equipment. Not even the thought of having Derek over could motivate him to do a deep cleaning of the house. So instead he darted around, stuffing everything out of sight. He glanced around and deemed it passable.
He was excited. He was very excited. It would be the first time Derek was coming over, legitimately coming over, as opposed to climbing in through the window like the Hamburglar and being a jackass.

He was filling up a pot with water when the doorbell rang. He opened the door to find Derek standing on the porch, looking strangely bashful.

“Hey,” Stiles said.

“Hey,” Derek said.

Stiles stepped aside to let him in. Derek set his bag down. He took off his jacket and placed it on the back of his dad’s armchair. Stiles tried not to stare too much, but his eyes kept going to the strong lines of his arms and the solid plane of his chest.

“Did you just get off from work?” Stiles said.

“Yeah, came straight away.”


“No, just yelling at kids to stop running around. Other than that, I pretty much sat on my ass for three hours.”

“Hmm. I always expected lifeguard duty to be a bit more thrilling than that. Pointing at things really dramatically, CPR, all that good stuff.”

Derek was grinning. “Oh, I’m not doing CPR. If someone drowns, I’m just thumping them on the chest or shaking them by the ankles until they cough up the water.”

Stiles waggled a finger at him. “You’re a bad lifeguard.”

Derek smirked. “Don’t worry, I’ll give you mouth-to-mouth.”

Stiles went red.

They regarded each other quietly, then Derek reached into his bag.

“I brought something.” Derek held it out and Stiles saw that it was a DVD case. “Here. I thought we could watch it together.”

“Frogs,” Stiles said, reading the title. Derek was rubbing a hand on his thigh and peeking at him from under his lashes, waiting for his reaction.

“It’s stupid, but – ”

Stiles’ face split into a wide grin as he flipped it over. “Are you serious? A movie about man-eating killer frogs?”

“Found it on Amazon for ten cents,” Derek said, rather proudly. “Thought you’d get a kick out of it.”

“Holy crap,” Stiles said, throwing back his head and cackling. “How did you know this even existed? This is amazing. I was planning to make you watch Stephen King’s Rainy Season, but this is perfect.”
Derek gave him one of his rare smiles and it took all Stiles had not to launch himself at Derek and squeeze him until he wheezed. He made himself calm down.

“Okay, so I was just getting some food ready,” Stiles said, gesturing. The water was beginning to bubble.

Derek followed him into the kitchen. “Yeah?”

Stiles held up the packages he had taken out from the pantry and shook them like pompoms.

“Ramen?” Derek said, a bit incredulous.

“Dude. Don’t look at me like that. This stuff is amazing.”

“Are you trying to prepare me for college dorm-life?”

Stiles’ smile drooped slightly around the corners. And there it was, that dreaded word. College. That long period when Derek would leave Beacon Hills and go far, far away.

He wanted to ask Derek about plans after graduating high school, and how he figured into it, if this thing between them was permanent or temporary, but something inside his chest would cry out whenever he thought of Derek leaving him, and he couldn’t bring out the words that would start the conversation. He was scared to hear the answer, that Derek was eagerly anticipating the moment he could leave Beacon Hills and head out into the wide-open arms of the world. A world full of adventure and excitement, things to do and places to see, and people who would be all too happy to take that journey with him. Stiles wasn’t ready to have his dream cut short.

“Trust me. This isn’t anything like the stale Justin Timberlake curls you’re used to. This is gourmet stuff, straight from Japan.”

“If you say so.”

“I do say so.” And having said so, he busied himself with tearing up the plastic wrappers. He slipped in the dry bundle of noodles into the boiling water, then sprinkled in the soup mix.

Derek leaned against the refrigerator, arms crossed over his chest as he watched Stiles work at the stove.

“Do you eat this often?” Derek asked.

Stiles stirred the noodles around. “Um. I try not to, since it isn’t the healthiest thing to eat. But, you know, I get lazy sometimes. It’s a hassle to cook a proper sit-down meal for one.”

Derek nodded, his expression pensive.

“You’re okay with this?” Stiles said. “I know you were expecting pizza or something, but this isn’t half bad.”

“No, I wasn’t expecting anything. It’s fine. Sorry to drop by on such short notice.”

“Dude. This is – ” Stiles shook his head and tried again, hoping his throat wouldn’t lump up this time. “I’m glad you’re here.”

Glad was an understatement. He hated being alone at night, especially Friday nights. When Scott couldn’t come over for whatever reason, his laptop was usually his only friend. Staring at the screen meant that he could lose himself for a few hours and not face how utterly alone he was. He
would turn around in his chair and his room would be empty. He would go out into the hallway and it would be empty. The kitchen was empty, all the rooms were empty. Having Derek here, with him, made everything a thousand times better.

He saw that Derek had picked up a framed photograph from the counter and was examining it quietly.

“It was the very last one we took together before mom passed away.”

Derek nodded and set the frame back down. “Is there anything I can help you with?” he said.

“No, I’m almost done. Actually, get two cups from the rack and something to drink, will you? I’ll have whatever you have.”

Derek examined his choice of cups then set two on the counter. “Is it okay if I open your refrigerator?”

Stiles snorted. “Knock yourself out. How else are you going to get the drinks?”

Derek considered it, then gave him a lopsided grin. “Stupid habit. My mom taught me that it was extremely bad manners to open someone’s fridge without asking first.”

The thought of a young Derek listening to his mother was endearing. Stiles imagined him short and stubby and baby-cheeked, his brows as dark as a Russian author’s heart. “So you’re like a vampire, but with refrigerators. You need permission to open them.”

“Pretty much.”

“Well, you can open my refrigerator any time,” Stiles said, brandishing a wooden spoon, and Derek raised his brows in amusement. Stiles realized what that sounded like, and ducked his head, cringing slightly.

He hastily took two eggs and cracked them into the pot, careful not to break the yolk. The scene was rather cozy and domestic, Derek standing beside him while he cooked at the stove.

“It does smell good,” Derek admitted, as Stiles ladled out the noodles. He had poured them both orange juice and was waiting with a tray.

They took the food and went into the living room. They placed their steaming bowls on the coffee table and settled down on the couch. Stiles passed him a fork.

“You don’t want chopsticks, do you? Not that I have any, but if you want the full authentic experience I could, you know, break off some twigs from one of the bushes outside.”

Derek snorted. “It’d be easier to eat with my hands, so no.”

The movie started, and Stiles could barely contain his enthusiasm. Only three minutes in, he could tell that it would be campy and tacky as hell - there was no way a movie like this couldn't be. But he knew he would enjoy it simply by virtue of the fact that Derek had unearthed some obscure frog-themed film for them to watch together.

They ate their ramen. Derek said it was good, and although he didn’t seem to be lying and finished his portion, he also didn’t seem to have much of an appetite. He set down his fork.

“Tired?” Stiles said.
“Yeah, just. Practice and shit,” Derek said, giving the same excuse he’d been giving for the past few days. Stiles wasn’t quite sure whether he believed him. Derek blinked and rubbed his face with both hands. “It’s nothing. I’ll be fine after Sunday when the moon comes out.”

"…Oh. Okay."

Sometimes Derek would make weird little comments that made no sense to Stiles. This was one of those times.

Even with his tired eyes and gaunt cheeks, He looked like a photographer’s dream sitting there, limbs long and defined with strong muscles, eyes languid and dark and mysterious. To hell with it, Stiles thought, and leaned his head against Derek’s shoulder. Derek went rigid and Stiles almost stopped breathing. But then Derek slowly relaxed, and Stiles tried to relax with him.

“However made this movie had to be on crack,” Stiles said, doing his best to sound casual. Normal. His heart was still thumping away like a drum. “It is so hilariously bad.”

“Mmm,” Derek murmured distractedly.

They sat in silence for a few minutes. It was pleasant. There was a dreamy quality brought on by the warmth seeping through Derek’s shirt and the warm meal he had eaten. He was getting a bit drowsy. He rubbed his cheek against Derek’s shoulder like a cat, more content than he could ever remember being in a very long time.

He absently wondered what they could do together during the upcoming holidays. It would be nice to spend Christmas with Derek. Maybe he could get Derek to bake cookies together, the way Stiles had done with his mom, and dance to Christmas carols. Maybe he could finally introduce Derek to his dad. Maybe Derek would be willing to introduce him to his sisters. Stiles wouldn’t mind being friends with Cora. They were nearly the same age and she seemed nice. He had always longed to be part of a big family. True, he was getting way, way ahead of himself, but he couldn’t help but imagine how nice it would be to…

He went still when fingers stroked his face.

They skimmed along from chin to cheek, almost reverently, until Derek’s large hand was cupping the side of his face. Stiles’ heart was pounding hard in his chest and he wished he could stop blushing. He was probably red as a tomato by now. Derek was looking at him with such intensity that Stiles’ couldn’t handle it and he dropped his gaze in a flutter, more out of shyness than in an attempt to be demure and coy.

I really like you, Stiles thought. I like you so much.

He wanted to say the words out loud, wanted to hear Derek say it back to him, but he was afraid of breaking the spell. Their noses brushed together, and then, Stiles closed his eyes as Derek leaned in the rest of the way to kiss him. He didn’t know what to do with his hands, and they somehow ended up on Derek’s broad chest, curled together in the shape of a heart.

Derek had been so nice to him until now, so gentle, and it shouldn’t have been a surprise, but the kiss was astonishingly slowly and sweet and gentle. Stiles jumped a little when a tongue pressed between his lips, and he peeked to see Derek’s eyes crinkled in amusement yet no less intense, before he closed his own eyes again and opened his mouth slightly to let him in.

Holy crap, it was finally happening. They were making out. They were making out. Holy crap, holy crap, holy crap, this was amazing.

He was so lost in the sensations that he barely realized that Derek was still leaning into him, and
that he was slowly tipping backwards, further and further down until he was horizontal on the couch.

Stiles was beginning to feel dizzy from lack of air when Derek broke apart, licking into his mouth one last time. Stiles hummed in pleasure, eyes barely open. He was flushed, mouth rosy and shiny, and he had no way of knowing how he looked and smelled like to Derek right now.

Suddenly, everything stopped being slow and gentle.

There was a ferocity in Derek’s following movements that both thrilled and scared him. A mouth clamped down on his nipple and suckled so hard that the nerves crackled and he moaned, writhing helplessly. Derek bit a trail down his torso, scraping his teeth along his skin, a low rumble in his throat, and it was only then that Stiles realized his shirt was up to his shoulders. Hands fumbled desperately at his jeans and before Stiles could really understand what was going on, his pants and briefs were pulled down his hips in one swift tug and he was out on full display.

He would have been embarrassed, and he was, at the way his cock sprang free like an ecstatic jack-in-the-box, and how he was the only one between the two of them who was remotely naked, but Derek was kissing him again, and quite savagely at that, as if he meant to devour Stiles whole from the inside out, and his brain melted.

His arms moved up, intending to wrap around Derek’s neck, but huge hands took each of his wrists and pinned them down on either side of his head. Then Derek was swooping down, mouth clamping on the crook of his neck and Stiles winced as teeth bit down. It hurt, and was beginning to hurt more and more, and he twisted his head to the side, back arching, trying unsuccessfully to swallow down a pained whimper.

Suddenly, Derek wrenched away, letting go of his wrists. His hands were gone, his mouth was gone, the solid heat covering Stiles’ body was gone. Stiles lay there for a moment, cold and bereft, then slowly struggled to get up into a sitting position when he realized that Derek wasn’t going to continue. The air prickled his sweat-damp skin.

Derek had pressed himself into the far end of the couch, panting hard. The lines of his shoulders seemed much broader, the muscles larger.

"Derek, what’s wrong?"

“I…” he said, then shuddered violently. He squeezed his eyes shut and lowered his head so Stiles couldn’t see his face anymore. “Fuck.”

That one word struck his heart like a dart. Stiles stared at him anxiously, not understanding what was happening. Was Derek having a heart attack? “Are…are you okay? Derek?”

There was no answer other than a rumbling growl that could only be made by a very large animal, and a chill went down Stiles’ spine.

“Derek. Did I do something wrong?” Stiles asked stupidly.

“I need to…” Derek was climbing blindly off the couch, head still down, still refusing to look at him. “I need to go.”

“Wait, Derek – ” Stiles hastened to pull his jeans back up, scooting off the couch.

“Stay away from me.”

“What?”
“Stay away from me. I mean it.”

“Derek!”

But the front door shut with a mighty slam and he was gone.

Stiles stood there, mouth agape and cheeks mottled red with embarrassment, unable to comprehend what had just happened. With shaking hands, he pulled his rucked shirt back down and tucked himself back in before clasping his jean button. He wiped at his eyes several times.

Still in shock, he took the bowls back to the kitchen and poured the remaining soup and noodles down the drain. He went back into the living room where killer frogs were hopping about. He turned the TV off.

He wrote and rewrote texts on his cellphone – Derek, we need to talk. What’s going on? Sorry, whatever it was I did – but couldn’t make himself push the send button. He didn’t know what to say that would fix the situation. He kept waiting for Derek to show up again or call or send him a message with some kind of explanation but his phone remained dead silent. The dread continued to choke him with each passing second.

Was it over between them? Was he not supposed to talk to Derek ever again?

“This is bullshit,” he declared. “Ignore me, then. I don’t want to talk to you either.”

Then the misery would wallop him anew and his indignation collapse like a house of cards. He went back to checking his phone every few minutes, crushed when he saw that he didn’t have any new messages.

He languished about the house all throughout the weekend. His dad asked him if he was alright, and he covered it up by saying that he didn’t feel well, he thought he might be coming down with a cold.

“Take some NyQuil before you go to bed,” his dad suggested.

“Yeah, I’ll do that,” Stiles said, listless as he moved the broccoli around his plate. His stomach was in knots and he wasn’t hungry. “Don’t worry about me, Dad.”

John squeezed his shoulder. “Is everything okay?”

Stiles gave him a flimsy smile. “Yeah, it’s okay. Don’t worry, seriously.”

On Sunday night, he went outside to drag the trashcans to the curb. Derek still hadn't contacted him.

He glanced glumly up at the sky and saw that it was a full moon. It was a perfect circle of yellow peeking out from a mist of clouds. He wondered what Derek was doing at that moment, then sighed. The stars looked so different tonight. His world was dull again.

Huh?

He paused and peered at the grove of trees across the street. He thought he saw something moving in the shadows and felt a shiver ripple down his spine. Had he just seen… a wolf? Why was his mind insisting he had seen a wolf? He didn't think it had been a normal dog. He tried to peer through the dark.

No. Nothing.
He breathed out a sigh. Just his mind playing tricks on him, then.

He went back inside the house, and closed the garage door. He went upstairs and finished his readings for class, then brushed his teeth and went to bed. He dreaded going to school.

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**Derek**

When Derek woke up early in the morning, he was lying in a clearing out in the middle of the woods, stark naked. The forest was deep and rich green, the birds flitted and twittered from branch to branch, the sunlit sky seeping through the trees.

He felt like shit.

He stayed where he was for a few minutes, lying on the bed of cold, hard earth, arms flung out to his side as he stared vacantly at the sky.

Ants began crawling around too close to his butthole and he knew he was going to be late if he continued to stay here. He lumbered up to his feet and trudged back home, unable to shake off the shame-faced mutt feeling that weighed him down. He passed by his parents who were now dressed like respectable members of society as they enjoyed their coffee at the table, and went upstairs without a word.

In the bathroom, he stood under the stream of hot water, scrubbing the dirt and grime off his skin, the corners of his lips pulled down. The scowl remained as he got ready for school and drove off the preserve.

At school, he bumped into Jennifer in the hallway, and they slipped together into an empty nook near the water fountain.

“You didn’t answer any of my calls,” she said.

“Yeah. I was kind of out of it,” he muttered.

He had been out of it, all right. Out of his skin, in exchange for fur and claws. Out of his human mind, swapped with that of something that was pure beast. He wasn’t going to apologize for that.

She saw that he wasn’t in the mood to deal with her complaining and switched tactics. The accusing, disgruntled lines of her face loosened up and her eyes turned candy-sweet, her pout full and coquettish.

“Are you feeling better now?”

“Yeah,” he lied.

“I’m glad to hear that.”

Her arms wrapped around his neck, pulling him down for a kiss. But when she tried to flick her tongue inside his mouth, he turned his head to the side.

“Derek – ”

“I’m going to be late for class,” he said. He left her standing there, eyes thin and displeased and dark.

But as he was heading towards first period, he caught Stiles’ scent in the hallway and quickly
ducked back around the corner. McCall was joking about, asking about answers to the homework, asking about the weekend. Stiles responded. He sounded normal, if a bit subdued. Derek’s name never came up.

Derek stood there with his back flat against the wall, ignoring the few strange looks tossed his way. He remembered how Stiles had tasted on his lips. He remembered how he had been so, so precariously close to...to... He clamped down tight on the images that threatened to seep up. They weren’t... they weren’t things he could deal with right now.

McCall laughed, jarring him out of his thoughts. Stiles murmured something in reply. The two headed off down the hallway together, their sneakers squeaking on the tiles. Derek waited until they were long gone before slinking off to his own class.

Stiles
Two days passed without them speaking. Then three. Four. Stiles tried to corner him so that they could talk and hopefully hash things out, but Derek wasn’t someone who could be cornered, slipping away like an eel each time Stiles got close.

It hurt, it fucking hurt, because Stiles had no idea what was going on. It made no sense that he would go from hot to cold, from wanting Stiles like that, and then not.

If he could just understand what had happened, if he could just wrap his head around it and get it to make some sense, he would have been less confused. Maybe. But Derek had left him, leaving him utterly bewildered and hurt and completely lost. Without any explanation, they had each returned to their original positions of jock and nerd, the chasm between them so vast that it was unbreachable. The past few months together had meant nothing.

And now he was avoiding Stiles like a slimy rat bastard.

Not that Stiles would give up so easily. Because hell hath no fury like a...a Stiles scorned and this was getting ridiculous. He got that Derek was weird and his ego was the size of Saturn and he had lived most of his life acting on whim and doing whatever the hell he wanted and got away with it, but this was truly and utterly ridiculous. Of all the irresponsible, immature ways to end a relationship...

So the next day, when he knew that Derek was finished with PE, he flung open the door to the boy’s locker room and barged inside.

“Derek!” he hollered as loud as he could, then his voice withered into his throat when he realized he was surrounded by a bunch of big-as-gorilla seniors and they had all stopped what they were doing to look in his direction. The guys were fit and half-naked, a few girdled in towels, and this would have been a scene right out of a porno, if only the place didn’t reek of unwashed jockstraps and soggy socks. He couldn’t breathe for a second.

“Do your laundry,” Stiles said to the room at large, covering his nose with the crook of his elbow. “Oh my God.”

A balled up shirt flew through the air and smacked him on the side of his face. “Hey, pervert,” the guy said as Stiles sputtered in indignation, wiping the dampness off his cheek. “Get out.”

Like hell he would. He turned half-circle and spotted Derek sitting on the bench and changing into his clothes. He marched over. Derek darted a glance at him from under his lashes, mouth set in a thin, grim line.
“Can we talk?”

Derek started unlacing his shoelaces and tugging off his grassy cleats. His movements were swift and vicious and Stiles’ heart sank when he saw how cold Derek was acting. The small, scared voice in his brain was screaming at him to run away before Derek could hurt him any more than he already had and it took all he had not to hunch up.

“Derek. Can we talk?” he repeated.

“…I don’t have anything to say to you.”

Now Stiles was starting to get impatient and not a little angry. “Well, I do. Aren’t you a bit too old to be giving someone the silent treatment?”

Derek’s scowl deepened. “I’m not.”

Stiles sighed. He already felt defeated. “I want to talk to you. Please, Derek. Five minutes.”

Without a word, Derek walked behind an empty row of lockers and Stiles followed him.

“What? What the hell do you want?” Derek hissed, when they were alone.

Stiles clutched his elbow, feeling like a little kid in front of the principal. “About last week…”

"What about it?"

"Look, I know…” Stiles began haltingly, wanting to die a little from embarrassment, "I know I'm really inexperienced and it was my first time and all but if you just, I don't know, gave me a chance - ”

"This has nothing to do with that," Derek said tersely.

"Then what's going on?" Stiles pleaded. No answer. "You kissed me first! You're the one who started it! You were...all over me and..."

Derek wasn’t even listening, his gaze downcast.

“Derek,” he said miserably. "Please." He reached out and to his horror, Derek jerked backwards as if trying to get away from a red-hot poker iron.

“Don’t touch me.”

Stiles was too stunned to react.

They both stood there until a head peeked out from behind the lockers.

“Hey, Hale. You coming?” the guy said. "We need to go."

“Yeah,” Derek called out, then turned to face Stiles again. “You done?”

What more was there to say?

“Yeah, I guess I am.”

Derek left without another word, and Stiles stood there, alone, staring vacantly at the spot where Derek had been seconds ago. So that was that, apparently.
He rubbed at his eyes. Shit. He wasn’t going to cry. Not here. Not in public. He was going to leave this locker room with his head held high, somehow make it through the day without bursting into tears and then go home and... let it all out.

“He’s just not that into you,” one of the guys said, tsking in mock sympathy as Stiles was walking out.

Stiles snatched up a soggy towel from the bench and hurled it at the guy’s face, satisfied at the meaty smack and angry yowl that followed. He then fled before anyone could retaliate.

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