Once Upon A Dream

by stilinskisparkles

Summary

Derek watches as Melissa and Queen Claudia move towards the courtyard, Scott and his fairy friends following quickly. The baby makes a small cry as they disappear, and Derek moves towards them on instinct, drawn to it without explanation. Talia catches his shoulder and holds him still, though.

“Not yet, Derek, sweetheart,” she murmurs. “You can’t follow, yet.”

Derek peers over the side of the cradle, scrunches up his nose, “I don’t like him.”

His mother laughs, ruffles his hair, “He’s a baby, darling. You were one once, too.”

“I’m not now, though,” Derek huffs, glares down at the little Prince. “What am I supposed to say to him?”

“I’ll talk to him,” Scott barrels forward excitedly, trips over his own feet. “Mama, can I give him my present?”

Melissa laughs as Scott tugs on her hand, gold dust showering out of his hair as he darts over to the cradle. “He’s not going anywhere, sweetheart.”

“But, mama, I know exactly what I want to give him!”

“I gave him the gift of wit,” Lydia sniffs from beside Derek, “He’ll probably need it.”
King John chuckles, and Lydia remembers herself, blushes shyly, “I was just—”

“I would expect nothing less from an intelligent young fairy like yourself,” he says gently.

“I don’t have anything for him,” Derek tries not to pout; he’s really too old for such trifles. But, everyone else is giving the baby Prince something, and he suddenly feels like he ought to. The baby might not be doing anything, or seem interesting at all, but he’s blinking up at Derek so cheerfully, he wants to keep him happy. “Mama—”

“You’ll give him a whole kingdom one day, Derek,” Talia promises.

“I don’t have any kingdoms.”

The whole courtroom seems to break into laughter, and Derek scowls. Stupid baby making him say stupid things.

“I’m going outside to play with Boyd and Erica.”

“Don’t go far!”

Scott darts in front of him, his young face flush with joy, “Can I come, too?”

Derek narrows his eyes, “We’re going to be knights, Scott; you can’t be a knight, you’re a fairy!”

“Can’t I be both?” Scott’s forehead puckers in a frown, “Why can’t I be both?”

“Of course you can be both,” Lydia soothes, fluttering over a little shakily on her tiny wings. “We can all go. Allison’s outside already. I bet they let her play,” she adds with a pointed glare in Derek’s direction.

Derek scrunches his nose up at her, shoves his heavy crown back up off his face. The baby makes a happy noise, and Derek blinks down at him in surprise. His crown slips again, and when he pushes it out of his eyes, the baby laughs.

“What’s he laughing at?”

“You, darling, he finds you amusing,” Talia sounds pleased, and without totally knowing why, Derek feels pleased, too.

“Oh.”

“Derek!” Scott calls from the courtyard entry, fluttering his wings frantically to keep him in the air. “Come on!”

Before Derek can tear his eyes from the baby the front doors to the courtroom slam open. There’s a flash of green light, and Derek leans over the cradle as he shields his own eyes and the baby’s. The King and Queen Claudia both fly over to him, King John’s hand slipping to his sword as Talia reaches for her own. Derek can smell smoke, but it’s not the nice, woody smell of the wonderful fires that burn in his bedroom hearth at home, or from his mother’s council room; it’s acrid and wrong. As he squints into the light, he sees a black crow sail through the air, and a woman steps into view.

He wants to tug at his mother’s dress in fear, but the baby seems distressed and he stands his ground, swallowing back his panic.

“My, my!” The woman saunters through the parting crowd, her eyes dark and hard as she surveys
Derek and the cradle. “What do we have here?”

“Katherine,” King John murmurs, “Your appearance is unexpected.”

“I like to keep you on your toes, your Highness.”

Derek’s never heard someone speak to the King with such little respect before. It’s the same tone of voice he knows he uses when he’s tired and angry at the end of the day, and his mother’s trying to get him to go to bed. He wonders if this Katherine is very sleepy, or if she’s something else. The way she’s eyeing the cradle makes Derek frightened, tense in a way he’s never been before. He can hear a murmur of witch being whispered through the crowd.

“You’re not welcome,” Talia hisses, “Not since you were banished from my kingdom.”

“Your kingdom,” Katherine retorts, gaze flicking over Talia dismissively, “But, I was perhaps expecting a more… gracious show of respect from your neighbours.”

“We stand with Queen Talia,” King John says firmly, “Our lands will forever be in allegiance, especially when Derek and our son are married.”

“Married?” Katherine laughs, “Goodness, you have it all planned out.”

Queen Claudia steps forward, back straight and stance firm, “We do,” she says quietly, “You should move on. We’ve lived in peace for many a moon, Katherine; it doesn’t have to be this way.”

“Unfortunately, it does,” Katherine glances at her nails, and then lifts the stick she’s been carrying in her other hand. “Listen all, and listen well! For too long I have lived in the shadows, allowing you to rule the lands that should be mine.”

“They were never yours, Katherine, and you were a cruel tyrant, a—”

“Silence!” Katherine strides towards the cradle, and Derek shrinks back over it. Katherine smirks, “How sweet,” she runs a long nail under his chin, and Talia hisses, steps between them.

“Get away from them.”

“Oh, don’t worry,” Katherine smiles, and Derek doesn’t see any happiness in her face as she does so. “I won’t need to be near them, or your new prince.” She raises her stick again, and Derek realizes in horror that it’s a wand like Lydia, Allison and Scott have. But, she doesn’t look like she’s going to make bubbles or flowers come out of the end; she looks like she’s going to use it to hurt them. “I’ll see that your prince doesn’t live to bring about your precious ally ties. There will be no happy ending for him. I swear before his sixteenth birthday he will prick his finger on a spinning wheel, and die!”

“No!” King John shouts, pulling out his sword.

“You cannot,” Talia adds, stalking towards Katherine.

Derek wants to pick the baby up and run away with him immediately. He’s just a baby! He can’t die!

Katherine begins laughing manically, and then there’s another bang, a flash of light, and she’s gone. The courtroom bursts into shouts of horror, and King John turns to the cradle, races to pick the baby up.
“This cannot be,” he murmurs. “Not for our son.”

“John,” Claudia cries, “What should we do?”

“I have a suggestion,” Melissa flies forward, Scott hot on her heels. “Scott has not yet bestowed his gift on the young prince. “He might still be able to help.”

“But, he’s so young,” Claudia looks at Melissa with shining eyes, “Does he know how?”

“He cannot undo Katherine’s spell completely,” Melissa touches the young baby’s arm, “And, I wish I had any powers to help. But, Scott,” she ducks down to Scott’s height, runs her fingers through his hair and then cups his face, “Do you think you could try to help? Use the magic like I taught you to keep witch Katherine’s spell from doing any true damage?”

Scott nods, his expression suddenly more determined than Derek’s ever seen—even more so than when Derek watched him jump from the castle window in order to learn to fly.

“I want to.”

He steps towards where King John’s holding the baby, and flutters up to hover beside them. One of the baby’s hands reaches out and grabs at Scott’s. Scott almost laughs, and then his face goes serious once more. He pulls out his wand, purses his lips.

“If through this wicked witch’s trick, a spindle should your finger prick… a ray of hope there still may be in this, the gift I give to thee. Not in death, but just in sleep, the fateful prophecy you’ll keep. And from this slumber you shall wake, when true love’s kiss, the spell shall break.” Scott takes a deep breath, shuts his eyes as he waves his wand over the baby’s face. There’s a faint shimmer in the air, a warmer light than the one that announced Katherine’s entrance sparks suddenly, and then the baby wails.

Scott scrunches up his face in a panic, “Did I do it wrong?”

“No,” Queen Claudia breathes out, touching Scott’s cheek almost reverently, “Thank you, Scott.”

Derek nudges Scott gently as the adults crowd around the baby, “Good job,” he mumbles.

Scott almost smirks, “I thought you didn’t care about him?”

“I don’t want to see him come to any ill,” Derek tries for a casual shrug, eyeing the baby as he’s passed between his mother and Queen Claudia.

“He might need more safety than my spell,” Scott chews at his lip, thoughtful expression belying his young age.

“I’ll protect him,” Derek declares. “I’m seven and I know how to hold a sword properly now; Laura taught me.”

Lydia and Allison flutter inside, heads bent together as their wings carry them over to the King and Queen. Derek cranes his neck to listen to their conversation, but the baby begins to snuffle, preventing him from hearing anything. Derek sighs, put out, babies are such trouble.

“I think it might work,” Melissa says suddenly, coming to stand over Scott, “I know it will be hard —”

“Sixteen years, Melissa,” King John cries, “That’s his entire childhood!”
“He’d be with Scott and the girls,” Melissa continues, “He’d be safe with them.”

“They’re mere babies themselves!”

“I would look after him as if he were my own,” Melissa promises.

Derek looks between the kingdom’s chief healer and her regent; wonders what they’re talking about. Queen Claudia seems very upset about something once again, clutching the baby tightly.

“Talia, what if he—”

“He could not,” Talia says sadly, “You know she’d find him; she knows of Derek’s attachment.”

Derek starts at his name, tugs on her dress, “What’s the matter? What about me?”

“It’s alright, darling, nothing you need to worry about.” Talia runs her fingers through his hair soothingly. “Tonight?” she readdresses Melissa.

“I think it would be best,” Melissa agrees softly.

“What’s tonight?” Derek looks between them, perplexed. Behind his mother, Queen Claudia begins crying silently, clutching the baby to her chest.

“Oh, John,” she whispers, “Must we?”

“It may be the only way to keep him safe,” King John says in a firm tone, but his face breaks and he turns away from them.

Derek watches as Melissa and Queen Claudia move towards the courtyard, Scott and his fairy friends following quickly. The baby makes a small cry as they disappear, and Derek moves towards them on instinct, drawn to it without explanation. Talia catches his shoulder and holds him still.

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“Stiles!” Scott bursts through the bedroom door, wings fluttering manically as he chases Stiles. “Give me the book back!”

“Never,” Stiles grins mischievously, waves the book in the air, “I want to read the poetry you’re planning on wooing Allison’s heart with.”

Scott’s eyes go wide in horror, and he shuts the door quickly, “Shhh!”

Stiles wiggles his eyebrows, flops down on the bed, “She and Lydia are outside in the vegetable patch. Besides, he rolls to peek out of the window beside his bed, sees Allison glancing up and smiling, “She knows.”

“I knew when we met,” Scott says dreamily, circling over the bed before dropping to sit on Stiles’ legs. “She was so pretty and sweet and the way she held her wand…”

“I bet,” Stiles snickers.

Scott looks scandalized at his bawdy comment, and nudges Stiles’ thigh with his foot, “Stiles!”

“I’m just teasing,” Stiles rolls his eyes, “I know you were talking of her in the _purist_ sense,” he
clutches his hands to his chest dramatically and *swoons*.

Scott punches his arm, “You just don’t get it, yet. You will one day.”

“Will I?” Stiles sighs, buries himself into his pillow. “What if I don’t? What if I never meet anyone that matches up to the man in my dreams?”

“You will,” Scott says firmly, “I promise.”

Stiles arches an eyebrow, “How can you be sure?”

“Because,” Scott shrugs, suddenly looks a little nervous, “I just know there’s a true love out there for you, Stiles.”

“Doesn’t seem likely,” Stiles gestures around the room, “Unless I’m to fall in love with an inanimate object.”

“Have faith,” Scott pats his ankle, “One day your prince will come.”

“Thank you, oh wise fairy of the forest.”

Scott yanks the pillow out of Stiles’ hands, tosses it in his face. “Just for that you can be the one to get firewood this afternoon.”

“But,” Stiles pouts, clings to the bed sheet, “Nap time!”

“Pfft, you sleep enough,” Scott dismisses easily.

“I could sleep for a thousand years and it wouldn’t be enough.”

Scott stumbles in his climb off the bed, his eyes going wide and expression sad when he looks back at Stiles.

Stiles sits up, the air in the room suddenly serious, “Scott?”

“Don’t make jokes like that, Stiles,” Scott says quietly, “Please.”

“I—”

“I would miss you so much if you were to sleep that long, and I just…”

“Scott, is everything okay?”

Scott seems to shake himself, smiles brightly at Stiles as he nods, “Yeah, of course! Sorry, I don’t know what I was thinking.”

Stiles eyes him warily, rolls off the bed and claps a hand on his shoulder, “Don’t worry, Scotty, I never know what I’m thinking.”

Scott snorts, shoves him out of the room, “That’s because you have a thousand thoughts a minute.”

“Hey! I can’t help it if I’m naturally blessed with wisdom.”

“Sure, naturally,” Scott mutters, fluttering down the stairs and into the warm living room.

Lydia looks up from the books she’s buried in, smiles at them both. Allison flutters in from the
kitchen, “Your mother’s on her way,” she tells Scott. “Stiles, do you think you could pick up the extra firewood, now? I don’t want Melissa to be cold when she arrives.”

“You’re so thoughtful,” Scott beams, and Stiles elbows him as he passes.

“Of course,” he grabs his cloak and hat, sweeps it down into a low bow the way Lydia taught him how years ago. “Ladies,” he exclaims dramatically, “Fear not, I shall return post haste and be by your side once again before you know it.”

Lydia rolls her eyes, gives him a fond smile, and Allison kisses his cheek as he passes.

“Don’t be gone long.”

“And don’t talk to strangers,” Scott adds.

Stiles pauses at the threshold to the cottage, turns to stare at him incredulously, “Scotty, would I ever do such a thing?”

Scott scoffs, begins chopping the vegetables Allison and Lydia had collected earlier, “Yes.”

“I promise,” Stiles calls as he sails out of the door, “Not to talk to any strangers, on my word as a gentleman.”

“Ha,” Lydia shouts loud enough for him to catch as he bounds along the path leading to the forest.

Stiles whistles to himself as he grabs the axe Allison’s left neatly beside a downed tree. It came down during a storm in the last winter, and Allison’s been taking wood from it for Scott to whittle into tiny figurines in the evenings. He’s very talented, and Stiles loves to watch him work. He loves listening to Allison hum to herself as she works in their garden, or to Lydia when she forgets her calm, composed manner and begins singing as she flies around tidying the house. Stiles has always been deeply fascinated with each of his friend’s wings. Lydia’s are a beautiful opalescent green; Allison’s a bright sapphire; and Scott’s a deep red; Stiles has often wondered why he wasn’t born with such a pretty gift. When he asked Melissa, many years ago, she’d told him he was born with different gifts, was special in different ways, and she always promised he would know in time. Stiles yearns to know of how he is different, sees nothing special about himself when he examines his reflection in the looking glass. Sometimes, he wonders about his life before he lived in the forest with Scott, Lydia and Allison, but it’s always so wonderful, so full of joy in their small home, that he doesn’t want for anything different. He’s merely curious about his life before, he has no desire to return to it when he knows this life, instead. He is, according to all that know him, far too curious for his own good.

Hence why the very last thing Scott always says to him before he leaves for any of his jaunts, or errands in the woods is don’t talk to any strangers.

As if any strangers would want to talk to Stiles, anyway.

“Isn’t that right?” he comments to a squirrel casually following him from a few feet behind. He spins on his heel, makes a loud noise, and the squirrel’s tail shoots in the air in shock before he scampers away. Stiles chuckles to himself as he goes on his way.

“Don’t you start,” he tells the sleepy owl above his head. “I know you think I shouldn’t tease them, but honestly, if even they won’t talk to me then I have to amuse myself somehow out here.”

The owl hoots lazily, swoops down to hover beside Stiles as he sets his axe down, considers the trees.
“I might just read for a moment,” he whispers to the owl conspiratorially, “Just to the end of the page at least.”

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For once in his life, Derek is winning. Samson is galloping through the trees at breakneck speed, and even straining his ears Derek cannot hear Erica or Boyd behind him. He grins to himself, tightens his heels against Samson’s side.

“Come on, boy, we can do this!”

Samson neighs his response—whether irritated that Derek’s still making him race, or enjoying the thrill of going so far in order to win—Derek can’t be sure. All he knows is that today is his day. He’s endured many years of Boyd and Erica being the faster, stealthier riders, always winning their small wagers and teasing Derek in court. It’s all in jest, and in truth he’s more than grateful for their company. Erica was a young princess abandoned by her own realm at birth, and Talia insisted upon raising her along with Laura, Derek and Cora. She was shy as a child, wary of everything, and she and Derek took to hiding in the shadows together, watching the court life from behind curtains. That was how they met Boyd. As a young lord, Boyd was bored of the stuffy court room, and the endless formalities, and had taken to hiding so as to avoid his mother insisting upon him keep her company when with the Queen. Erica and Derek had stumbled onto Boyd’s secret hiding place when they were all just infants, and they’ve been steadfast friends ever since. Derek isn’t prone to enjoying rambunctious company—his sisters have both always been a little too noisy and excitable for his taste—but, Erica with her sharp wit and kind heart, and Boyd with his quiet humour and steady counsel, have been the greatest company he could have ever wished for.

That doesn’t mean he wants to lose their daily race for the thousandth time in a row, however. Today he’s feeling lucky. There’s a strange, almost anticipatory air in the castle, and his mother wouldn’t stop looking at him, smiling at him with uncontained joy in her eyes. Perhaps it is because both his sisters are returning home from the kingdoms they’re married to for a visit. Yes, perhaps—

Samson lets out what is definitely recognisable as a put out, absolutely finished noise, and jerks to a halt. Lost in his thoughts, Derek loses his balance and flies over Samson’s head, landing in a pool of water. He comes up glaring.

“Oh, very funny.”

Samson almost seems to smirk, drops to his knees and begins to drink the water directly next to Derek.

Derek splashes him in the face, “We were going to win, you know.”

Samson shrugs.

“You’re a pain in the ass,” Derek grouches, petting his neck nonetheless. Samson continues to drink; unbothered that Derek is soaking wet.

He shakes himself off, strips his tunic and wrings it out. Samson makes a noise of contentment, and Derek rolls his eyes, flicks his tunic at him.

“At least one of us is happy,” he mutters darkly. It almost sounds like Samson is chuckling as Derek plunges back into the water, enjoying how cool it is now the shock of being tossed into the pool is gone. “We need to work on your manners,” he tells his horse. “Though, I have none
according to Laura, so perhaps we’ll see how she gets on with you.” He grins wickedly as he thinks of his sister trying to tame his prized, beautiful, sneaky friend; it seems unlikely she’ll be anymore triumphant than he has been. He doesn’t really care, he enjoys that Samson is free to be as wild as he wishes; and he always comes when Derek calls.

“I think we can head back in to find the losers, now.”

There’s a shout of laughter from beyond the undergrowth and Derek snaps his head up in surprise.

“Was that—” he glances at Samson, still laid out resting and watching Derek lazily. “That wasn’t you…”

Another laugh, unlike any Derek has ever heard at court, or from any of his family, an unrecognisable, loud, unbridled laugh. He staggers out of the water, grabs his still damp tunic and tugs it over his head.

“It wasn’t me,” he says to Samson, “And, it wasn’t you… I wonder…” He slips around the pool, clambering through the wild hedges with one hand resting on his sword, just in case. He can hear someone talking, a light teasing note to their voice, and he follows it, drawn without explanation to the sound.

“—she’s been trying for many years, and I still can’t seem to make these big feet work,” the voice says. It’s a boy—maybe a man’s voice—and Derek hunches down as he peeks through the bushes. He sees a clearing, wild flowers strewn around and in the centre there is a young man. His back is to Derek, broad shoulders covered in a plain shirt and his feet are bare as he dances around with… an owl. There is an owl fluttering around the man, making him laugh manically and throw his head back in the sunshine. Derek is flabbergasted. He steps forward, a twig snaps, and the man spins around in shock. Derek stumbles, curses himself for being less than stealthy, and sprawls out across the grass in front of the man.

“Goodness, oh my, goodness, goodness,” the man is hovering over him, hands wringing together. He has nice hands. Derek is not one to admire aesthetics, more bored than anything else with most at court to even notice their appearance, but these hands are long fingered and strong looking. His mouth parts to say something, to apologise perhaps, and the man inhales sharply, is suddenly right above Derek.

“Who are you?”

Derek blinks at him stupidly, taking in wide brown eyes and a sweet mouth, expression torn between fright and something curious, excited as he looks down at Derek.

“Are you—I feel like I—oh, no, I’m in such trouble,” he darts away from Derek and Derek snaps into action, not wanting the man to vanish before he’s had a chance to say something.

“Hey, wait!”

The man turns around from where he’s moving back into the tree line.

“Stop,” Derek stands, and the man’s eyes cast over him making him feel strangely hot and tingly inside. “What are you doing out here? No one is supposed to cross the edge of the kingdom.”

The man snorts at that, and then seems horrified at his reaction, “I’m sorry, please don’t hurt me.”

“I’m not going to,” Derek steps towards him, wishes he wasn’t still wet from his earlier fall. As he gets closer, he takes in more of the man’s form, drinks in his appearance desperately. “What are you doing out here?”
“What are you doing out here?” The man counters, “If the edge of the kingdom is forbidden to be crossed.”

Derek smirks, “I’m allowed to go wherever I please.”

“I wish I was,” the man sighs looking wistful. He gestures at Derek’s chest, “Why are you all wet—do you need assistance? Did you get lost?”

“Hmm?” Derek tears his gaze from the man’s face to look down at himself, and then feels his cheeks flush, “Oh, no, thank you. I—had a disagreement with my horse.”

“You horse,” the man breathes, “You have a horse? I’ve never seen one, I’ve only read about them.”

“You read?”

The man seems to forget his wonder and rolls his eyes at Derek quite obviously. Something in Derek’s chest delights in it. “Of course I read, don’t you?”

Derek nods dumbly, unused to people questioning his ability to do anything unless it’s his sisters or Erica.

“Thank goodness,” the man steps a little closer, “I would hate for the very first person I meet out here to be a heathen.”

Derek snorts, almost shoves at his shoulder, “I’m no heathen.”

“My mistake,” the man drawls, waves a hand at where Derek had fallen, “I should really learn not to make assumptions based on first impressions if I’m ever to meet anyone else.”

“Glad to be of assistance,” Derek says snarkily, and the man laughs. It’s more mesmerizing to see in person than it was to hear from afar. Derek swallows, tilts his head to one side, “Do I—I feel as though I know you.”

The man startles and blinks rapidly at Derek, long eyelashes fluttering against his cheeks, “It’s so funny, I was thinking the same…” he trails off, and then moves into Derek’s space with his hand outstretched, “We’ve never met, but I’m Stiles.”

“Stiles,” Derek repeats, “Of course.”

“What does that mean?”

“An unusual name, for an unusual person,” Derek murmurs as they continue to shake hands.

Stiles smiles brightly at him, and Derek feels his knees sway a little.

“Your second impression is much better than your first,” he says in return.

Derek scowls, lets go of his hand before he becomes too accustomed to the feel of it entwined in his own and can’t let go at all.

“You wanted to see my horse?”

“And then some,” Stiles murmurs, pushing ahead of Derek and back towards the pool. Derek feels his mouth fall open, can do nothing but follow silently.
“Oh,” Stiles pauses in front of the pool, stops so suddenly Derek almost barges into him. He takes a breath, catches the scent of the forest on him, something warm and sweet underneath. He wants to put his mouth to the bare flesh of the back of Stiles’ neck and taste. Before he can utterly mortify himself, or scare Stiles away, he clears his throat, straightens up and moves to stand beside Stiles. Stiles is looking at Samson with quiet awe, eyes shining.

“Is it—does he or she have a name?”

“He does,” Derek whistles, and Samson’s ears prick up. He trots over to them, and Derek catches hold of his reigns, pats his flank, “This is Samson.”

Stiles stares up at him in amazement, hand reaching out to touch and then pulling back as though burnt.

“It’s fine,” Derek says softly, “You can touch him.”

“He’s much more beautiful than pictures or words have ever truly described,” Stiles breathes out. He strokes a hand down Samson’s neck, makes a noise of surprise, “He’s so soft! I never—” he glances at Derek nervously, “Do I seem foolish not having seen a horse before?”

Derek takes in his astounded face, the gentle way his hand is dragging through Samson’s coat and shakes his head. “Not at all.”

“And you ride him?”

“Of course.”

“I’ve never,” Stiles licks his lips, “How do you get up there?”

Derek laughs, and Stiles snaps his head round to look at him in surprise.

“What?” he says grudgingly, suddenly self conscious.

“Nothing, you just seemed so serious,” Stiles smiles, “I hadn’t been able to imagine how you sounded when you laughed.”

“And, how do I sound?”


Derek slides his hand down Samson’s side to brush his fingers against Stiles’, shivers when they touch.

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Stiles feels as though his heart might explode with excitement, or nerves, or both! He’s breaking every promise he ever made to Scott, and Lydia and to Allison and Melissa. He always swore that if he ever came across a stranger he would run, abandon anything he was doing and flee home. And yet, the second the man fell into his clearing, Stiles was dumbstruck. It was like one of the great thunderclaps that so shook their forest last year had beaten down over Stiles’ head. He could only move closer, drawn to the splayed out limbs, so oddly graceful in comparison to his own. He’d peered over him, taken in his features and, oh, this was a man. Stiles should have been afraid, thought maybe he was being as foolish as the heroes Lydia so often turned her nose up at in books, always saying it was their own fault. He wondered if those heroes had ever looked down at someone so beautiful before, though. He’d never known pictures alike to the man on the ground before him. He’d never felt his stomach flip, or his hands begin to sweat when conversing
with anyone before. He wouldn’t blame them if they were driven to stupidity when coming across such a creature.

And, now, his fingers are brushing up against the man’s, and his heart is pounding. He’s filled with a ridiculous sense of joy, at being here, at having been found, discovered by this strange new person.

“You could learn,” the man says presently, and Stiles is drawn back to look at his face, his clear, multi coloured eyes and his dark eyebrows knitted together in earnest as he makes his suggestion.

“I could never,” Stiles sighs, “I’m far too clumsy—I would fall!”

“I would catch you.”

Stiles’ breath catches in his throat, “I’m heavy,” he says to be contrary.

The man grins suddenly, and then both his hands are around Stiles’ waist, and he’s swinging him up in the air.

Stiles lets out a shout of surprise, a laugh coming off the end of it, and when they straighten, he pushes at the man’s shoulder.

“That was very bold.”

The man shrugs, “I was just proving a point.”

“Do you always win your arguments with heavy lifting?”

The man’s eyes go dark as he looks at Stiles, his gaze sweeping over him and making his spine tingle.

“Sometimes.”

“I would try,” Stiles blurts out in a strangled voice, “But,” he gestures at the man, “I’m perhaps not up to the task, yet.”

“I suspect you would win any argument with words, anyway,” the man teases.

Stiles chokes out an incredulous laugh, “You don’t know that! I could be quiet as a mite most days, and you could be bringing it out in me! It could be my nerves making me ramble so.”

“Are you nervous?”

“I’m talking to a stranger,” he exclaims, “I should be!”

“But, you are not?”

“No…” he swallows, looks at his hands, “As I said, I feel as if— maybe I have dreamed of you.”

“Maybe you did,” the man wets his lips, and Stiles watches, fascinated.

“What’s your name?” he blurts out, “I realised just I don’t… if I dream of you again I should like… a name,” he finishes shyly.

The man smiles, and it’s warm and beautiful like the sun beating down on them, Stiles feels light headed.
“I’m Derek.”

“Derek,” Stiles repeats, “Just Derek?”

“Yes,” Derek looks away awkwardly, “I shouldn’t be here,” he adds, almost to himself. “I did go past the edge of the kingdom. My mother will not be happy.”

Stiles hums wistfully, “I’ve never known my mother.”

Derek lifts his eyebrows in surprise, “Do you—Stiles, are you alone out here? You can come with —”

“I’m not alone,” Stiles laughs, “No, I have much company.”

“Do they all talk to strangers as willingly as you?”

“No,” Stiles grins, peeps up at Derek through his lashes, “But, I’m terrible at following orders. I forget myself. I do try, though,” he adds sincerely.

Derek nods, gives him an understanding look, “I know the feeling.”

“You do?”

“Yes,” Derek gazes up through the forest, “Sometimes, I’m supposed to be… someone I don’t feel like being. I have to talk, to be merry—”

Stiles snickers, and Derek glares at him, “I’m sorry,” he says quickly, “Is it really so hard?”

“I don’t like trivial conversations,” Derek huffs, “I like… the quiet.”

“Then I must be awful company,” Stiles bites his lip, feels suddenly very foolish, “I’m truly sorry, I should go—”

“No,” Derek darts towards him, gestures towards the clearing, “Did I really see you dancing with an owl earlier?”

“Quiet and creepy,” Stiles shakes his head fondly, “You are the very definition of a stranger.”

Derek’s cheeks flood with colour and Stiles feels his insides tighten at the sight.

“It’s no bad thing,” he adds, just to see Derek’s shoulders relax and have him look back up at Stiles. He finds he likes the way Derek looks at him. “And, yes, you did.” He scrunches up his nose in embarrassment, “I… I cannot dance, and I’ve been trying to learn but, I end up hurting anyone that tries with me! I step on toes,” he gestures to his own feet, “They won’t work!”

Derek laughs again, moves towards him slowly, “I can show you.”

“Oh, no,” Stiles ducks away, abashed, “I couldn’t ask you to—”

“I want to,” Derek interrupts, “If you’ll let me. Normally, I—I don’t partake in much dancing, but I think… If you want…” he trails off, looks up at Stiles hopefully.

Stiles stares at him, no doubt unattractively with his mouth hanging open in a gawk, and then collects himself. “I—yes, if you—I mean, that’d be wonderful.”

Derek’s mouth quirks in a smile, “You have to come here, then, if you want to dance with me.”
“Oh,” Stiles feels himself flush, “I—should do that.”

Derek suddenly feels so much more far away than he was not a moment before, and Stiles steals himself, breath coming quickly as he moves to stand directly in front of Derek.

“Where do I—” he lifts his hands expectantly. Derek twines their fingers together, and Stiles feels relieved he’s not the only one that inhales sharply at the touch. He feels Derek slide his arm around his waist, mouth falling open in surprise as he’s pulled gently flush with Derek’s body.

“Oh,” he breathes out. “It’s not normally—” his breath stutters as he looks up into Derek’s eyes, sees them gazing back at him intently.

“Not normally?”

“I don’t… feel like this normally,” he says quietly.

“Is that bad?”

“No,” he rests his other hand carefully on Derek’s shoulder, fingers curling in the soft fabric. “The opposite,” he stammers.

Derek ducks his head, squeezes Stiles’ fingers, “You should learn how to lead, too, but it would be easier if I guide you this time.”

Stiles shivers at the implications there might be another time, and by the look on Derek’s face, he’s pleased Stiles caught it, too.

His fingers splay against Stiles’ back, warmth bleeding out of them. Stiles knows he should feel uncomfortable, or even terrified, being this close to someone he’s never met before. But, instead he feels safe in Derek’s arms, he feels oddly like something he didn’t even realise was missing before is suddenly falling into place. He feels at once jittery—his heart beating double time—and yet, strangely calm, too.

Derek clears his throat, juts his chin down at Stiles’ left foot, “Move it back.”

Stiles pulls his foot back quickly, and Derek lurches forward in surprise, “Not too fast,” he says with a laugh.

“Sorry,” Stiles sighs, “I told you I—”

“Stiles,” Derek pulls him closer, their noses almost brushing as he readjusts their stance, “You’re not doing anything wrong, don’t apologise.”

“I don’t know,” Stiles grumbles, “Perhaps this is all an elaborate rouse to waltz me into the forest and murder me. I don’t want to offend you and have you do so before I’ve at least mastered my footwork.”

Derek snorts, steps them backwards, “If I was going to do kill you, I’d have done it by now.”

“Maybe you’re biding your time, maybe I’ve distracted you with my wiles, convinced you to wait a while.”

“You are very distracting,” Derek agrees amiably. “Although, I’m not sure about the wiles, which were those again?”

Stiles pulls back to glare at him, steps on his foot, “Oh! How clumsy of me. Perhaps I’d do better
with some music, can you sing for us, Derek?”

“I don’t sing,” Derek retorts flatly, “And, if you focused more on where your feet were going than on what’s going on in your head, you’d be better at this.”

“I have a lot of thoughts!”

“I had no idea.”

Stiles narrows his eyes at him, digs his fingers into the meat of Derek’s shoulder, “Am I supposed to be learning from this?”

Derek winces a little, glowers at Stiles, and then between one moment and the next Stiles finds himself pressed up against a nearby tree, Derek situated between his legs.

“Perhaps you’re too slow a learner.”

“That’s ridiculous,” Stiles murmurs, “I pick things up very fast.”

Derek lets out an almost wounded noise, presses them together, and Stiles feels hot everywhere they’re touching, his skin too tight for his bones. He can’t help but want to cat into Derek, push back and mould their bodies together. He wonders how it would feel to run his fingers down Derek’s sides, how Derek’s skin would feel against his own, if it would be like in his dreams sometimes when he wakes feeling sated and yearning for something all at once.

“You do?” Derek asks lowly.

“Yes, I’ve been told plenty of times by Sco—” Stiles startles when he thinks of his friend, of how long he’s been gone. “Oh, shit sticks!”

Derek yanks away, and Stiles misses his warmth already, wants to chase after it, bury himself in it.

“I—I’m sorry,” he makes his way back round the pool, ducks through the hedges, “I have to go —”

“Go?” Derek follows, catches his hand, “But, when will I see you again?”

“I don’t know,” Stiles bites his lip apologetically, “I wasn’t even supposed to—I can’t—maybe if you came by the cottage? I could promise you’re not a stranger anymore.”

Derek’s expression goes pleased, and his ears pink up, “No?”

“No,” Stiles smiles brightly at him, squeezes his hand, “You’ll find me, yes?”

“Of course,” Derek says immediately. “I’ll search the whole forest if I have to.”

“That is—” Stiles feels his own cheeks go red, “A very lovely sentiment.”

“It wasn’t a sentiment,” Derek insists, “I have to… I will see you again.”

“That’s what dreams are for,” Stiles says weakly, trying not to melt into Derek’s arms the way he wants to. “Goodbye,” he adds, darting off and towards home.

He didn’t even collect any firewood. He could probably light a fire with the way his whole body is heated right now, anyway. His hands tingle with echoes of excitement every time he thinks of Derek touching them.
“Where on earth have you been?” Erica catches Samson’s reigns, glares as Derek decants.

“Got lost,” he grunts, “Went too far into the forest.”

Erica slaps a hand against his chest, cocks her head to one side as she looks at him, “Liar!”

“Excuse me?”

“You’re all flushed and look,” she jabs at his cheek, “You’re smiling, oh my, Derek! You’ve been with someone.”

“I have not been with someone,” Derek argues heatedly. “It wasn’t like that.”

Erica scrunches her face up in confusion, following him into the castle, “But, you’re exuding happiness, Derek, I can practically feel it.”

“Because I met someone,” he tells her in a whisper, “I swear, Erica, I’ve never felt like this before,” he almost laughs, catches her up in his arms and swings her round. “It was like a dream!”

“Did you fall off Samson and knock yourself out?”

Derek scowls, “See if I give you details now.”

“No! Give me them! What’s he like? Is he handsome?”

Derek shrugs, and Erica rolls her eyes, punches his arm, “Come on, I’m sorry, look,” she mimes closing her mouth and sealing it shut.

“Fine, he—”

“Derek, darling!” Talia greets them in the corridor, pats his cheek, “I was wondering where you’d gotten to. We have an exciting evening ahead!”

“We do,” Derek agrees, “Mother, I have some news.”

“And, so do I, sweetheart, come, come,” Talia takes his hand, draws him into her private bedroom. “It’s time,” she declares as he sits down beside her.

“Time? For what?”

“For you to finally meet your betrothed,” she clasps her hands together, beaming at him. “We’ve waited so long for this day, Derek, I’ve wanted to tell you so many times.”

“I don’t… understand,” Derek says faintly. “My betrothed?”

“Yes, Prince Stilinski.”

Derek balks, “A prince? You want me to marry one of those hideous, boring princes from court?”

“No, darling, he’s special, he’s been away from court.”

“So, an idiot?”

“Derek!”
“No! You can’t do this to me,” he cries incredulously, his stomach sinking as he thinks of Stiles looking up at him from under his lashes, Stiles’ laugh echoing in his ears, Stiles, Stiles, Stiles—

“I won’t marry him,” he states firmly.

“You have to, Derek,” Talia stands as Derek does, watches him begin to pace. I made a promise to King John years ago, we thought you two would be perfect together!”

“I don’t know him, I haven’t had enough time,” he says imploringly, “Please, mother, I met someone, and I—I need more time with them. You can’t take me away from him, yet.”

Talia blinks at Derek’s unusual display of dramatic behaviour, and he falls silent, glares mulishly at the wall.

“Met someone,” Talia repeats. “And, may I ask who this someone is?”

“His name is Stiles, he’s—I met him in the forest.”

“The forest! Derek—”

“Don’t! You can’t turn him away just because he’s not royalty, and I don’t even know if he feels the same, but mother,” he stops, rubs a hand over his face. “I felt as if I’d known him my whole life, as if we were meant to be together.”

Talia gives him a sad smile, rustles forward to take his hands, “And, you will feel that way about Prince Stilinski one day, I promise.”

“No,” Derek shakes his head, “To meet someone like Stiles again in one lifetime, it would be impossible.” He pulls away from his mother, backs towards the door, “I’m so sorry, mama, I just—I can’t—”

“Derek!”

He slams out of the room, racing down to the courtyard before his mother can catch him. Boyd and Erica are tossing stones between themselves, Erica folded into Boyd’s lap, and Derek cannot miss his chance to know the look of pure happiness on their faces. He must know if he could even have a chance at trying for that with Stiles.

“I have to leave,” he tells them, “My mother wants me to marry a prince, a stranger, I can’t—”

“Derek,” Erica scrambles to her feet, “You cannot defy your mother, your Queen.”

“I can,” he insists, saddling up Samson and swinging himself up, “Wouldn’t you? For love?”

Erica glances back at Boyd, and he gives her a look of such understanding Derek’s heart wrenches.

“I’ll be in touch,” he murmurs, cantering out of the courtyard at break neck speed.

* 

Stiles bursts into the cottage, sweating and beaming, “Sorry, I’m later than planned—”

“Surprise!”

He falls back, clutching his chest as he takes in Scott, Lydia and Allison all smiling happily in front of a cake.
“Goodness, I’ve had many surprises today,” he mutters.

“What do you mean by that?” Scott scurries forward, waves his question away, “Never mind. We have such exciting news!”

“So do I!” Stiles tells him laughingly, grabbing his hand and ushering them close. “I met someone!”

“Met someone,” Allison zooms out over the cake, and Lydia sighs when Allison’s dress trails over the pretty writing on the top.

“We spent so long on that,” she joins Scott and Allison, fixes Stiles with a look, “Trust you to be the only person in the kingdom not at all interested in cake when it’s actually available. All you’ve done is talk whimsically about eating cake for weeks, and now—”

“This is bigger than cake,” Stiles cuts in brightly, “I met someone, and he—”

“When did you meet someone? Stiles! You spoke to a stranger?”

“Yes, but he’s not a stranger, I promise! You can meet him later, and you’ll know it, too, the way I do. It was like a dream,” he adds to Scott, “You said I’d know, you promised I’d know and I do, I believe you now, I really do!”

“Stiles,” Scott’s expression of happiness wavers, “I didn’t mean… I meant when you met your betrothed that you would… feel it.”

“My betr—my what?!”

“You’ve been betrothed to be married since you were a baby,” Lydia says eagerly, “We were all there. Your mother and father have been waiting for this day, your birthday,” she gestures to the cake. “We can go home, now.”

“But,” Stiles backs up into the closed door, looks around in confusion, “This is our home.”

“No, Stiles,” Allison says warmly, “You haven’t been home in sixteen years. Today is your birthday, and you’re safe, you’re finally—”

“We’re taking you to the castle tonight,” Scott continues animatedly, bouncing on his toes, “You’re a prince, Stiles, you’re going to see your parents again, and get married, and live happily ever after!”

“But, I—” Stiles flicks his gaze from his wonderful friends, his family, to the walls of his living room, lined with books. He thinks of Derek, of the wonderful afternoon he just had, of how elated he had felt. He can’t leave.

“I like it here, though.”

“This was temporary,” Lydia says more gently than he’s ever heard her speak before. “You don’t need to worry about any silly strangers you met in the forest, you have a prince waiting for you.”

“Lydia,” Stiles grits out, “You always talk about how you don’t want to settle for any man that doesn’t know your worth, you’re always saying you want to be like Queen Talia from the Hale kingdom, how can you want this for me?”

“It’s different,” she says softly, “He is worthy of you, or your parents wouldn’t still be agreeing to
“They can’t choose for me! They don’t even know me! You can’t do this to me, please! I don’t want to go anywhere, I want to stay here, with all of you!”

“We’ll be with you all the time,” Allison says soothingly, “We’ll visit.”

“You’ll get sick of us!” Scott tries.

Stiles gives him a weak smile, “I could never.”

Scott’s face falls, and he reaches out and tugs Stiles into a hug, “I’m sorry, Stiles, I wish we could have told you sooner.”

“I’m not angry,” Stiles promises, squeezing his friend tightly. “I just… I can’t go. Not now. He was magical, Scotty,” he adds in a whisper.

Scott sighs mournfully, clutches his shoulders even harder, “It’s going to be magical again, okay? Don’t my promises always come true? We have to go, Stiles, because I made another promise to your parents. I promised I’d always look out for you, and that we’d bring you home safely.”

Stiles tries to quell his tears as they pull apart, rubs a hasty hand across his cheek inelegantly as Lydia sweeps over to the closet.

“We’ll have you looking like a prince in no time,” she says briskly, but Stiles can see her hands are shaking. When she turns back to look at him, her own eyes are shining and she bites her lip, “Though, you always were to me, anyway.”

“Goodness, if I’d know all I had to do was leave forever to get a compliment from you, I might have tried it before,” Stiles teases.

Lydia’s laugh is stark and strained, but her eyes are more relaxed as she tugs his old tunic off.

Allison fusses with his hair, following him round their bedroom as he picks out his favourite books. When they return downstairs, Melissa is waiting for them.

She smiles widely, rushes forward to embrace them both, “Are you excited to be going home?”

“I already am home,” Stiles says plaintively, “And, did Scott tell you? I already found someone here, Melissa, please—”

“Stiles,” Melissa takes his hands in hers, fixes him with a motherly look he’s seen a thousand times, “Your parents have waited so long for you to return to them. It has been a great privilege and honour to care for you, but it’s time.”

“Won’t I just be going away again if I’m to be married? Why did they even send me away?!” He bites his lip, “Didn’t they want me?”

“They did, so much, Stiles, but there are… there were complications.” Melissa smooths her hand through his hair, and Allison groans in the background, “We’ll let them tell you soon enough.”

“Can I leave a note, at least?” he tries one last time, glancing at Scott hopefully.

Scott looks to his mother, and then to Allison and sighs, “If you were to make him have hope, Stiles, I think it would hurt him more.”

Stiles can’t help the harsh sob he lets out, and strides ahead as they lock up the cottage behind
Stiles can’t help the harsh sob he lets out, and strides ahead as they lock up the cottage behind him. He barely looks up as they slip through a gap in the hedges at the edge of the forest. His mind is too busy reminding him of the easy teasing he’d had with Derek about the edge of the kingdom. He’s thinking of Derek’s smile—shy and sweet at first and then brighter, dazzling and almost wicked by the end of their too short meeting—to notice much of the castle Melissa leads him through. On being led into an empty bedchamber, he sits and looks blankly back at himself in the looking glass. Derek had seen something special in him, and now, no one ever will again. No one will look at him the same way Derek had. His very soul burns to be in Derek’s company again, and he’ll never even be allowed to see him.

He drops his head into his hands, ignores the crown perched on the table beside him, listens as Scott closes the door with one last muffled apology. He doesn’t blame his friends, and he isn’t angry, he’s merely devastated his life is over.

“Poor little prince,” a soft voice murmurs behind him.

Stiles snaps his head up, a strange eerie music catching his attention as he looks around for a body to place the voice to.

“You want the pain to go away?”

Stiles stands as if in a trance, follows the music and the voice.

“You want to live in your dreams forever?”

That certainly sounds appealing, he thinks to himself, fingers touching a stone on the wall as if silently instructed, to reveal a passage behind the cobbles. A flickering green light bobs in front of him, and he stares up at it, hypnotised.

“Follow the light, my poor abandoned prince,” the voice says softly, “I’ll make sure you never feel alone again, that you always feel wanted.”

Stiles clambers up some steps, and follows the strange, green light into an empty room, save for a spinning wheel in the middle.

“Touch it,” the voice says excitedly, “And, you’ll always be living a dream.”

“Stiles! Don’t touch anything!” Scott’s voice is far away, and frightened sounding; Stiles hesitates, looks around for him.

“It will hurt them if you don’t,” the voice says, “It will be better for everyone if you just… touch it.”

Stiles reaches his hand out, finger stretching to hover over the needle point, and then he knows nothing.

*

Derek doesn’t allow Samson to stop this time, and as if realising his distress, Samson gallops hard, getting him through the forest in no time. He doesn’t know how he instinctively knows which way to go, but he finds the same clearing soon enough, and follows Stiles’ footsteps to the cottage. He leaps from Samson, striding up the path as he smooths back his hair, tries to remind himself not to be nervous. Almost the second after he’s knocked, the door creaks open, and Derek tenses, confused at the silence. His hand goes to his sword, but before he can get a grip of it, there’s tiny little monsters leaping at him, screeching in delight.

“Get off me!” Derek wrestles one of them away, only for another three to clamber on top of him,
and strong cords of rope wrap around his chest and arms in no time.

“Well, well.”

Derek snaps his gaze to the darkened corner of the room, instantly recognising the voice that taunted his mother and the baby he’d felt so protective of all those years ago. The baby who would be a prince now, not Stiles, though. He was here for Stiles.

Stiles who isn’t here. Stiles who could be hurt, worse. He swallows back his terror, glares as hard as he can.

“Katherine,” he snarls, and the witch steps out of the shadows with a smirk.

“You remember, how touching,” she leans towards him, runs a finger under his chin in the same fashion she did when he was a child. It feels just as disconcerting as it did then, “You grew up well, Prince Derek.”

Derek jerks his head away, “Where is Stiles?”

“I don’t know,” Katherine blinks innocently at him, “I don’t know any Stiles.” She looks up at the crow lazily circling them, “Do you, my pet?”

The crow lets out a noise that sounds like laughter, and Derek shivers. Something hard hits him over the head, and he grunts, hopes more than anything that Katherine hasn’t gotten her hands on Stiles as he passes out.

When he comes to, he’s chained to the wall of a dungeon. As children, Derek, Erica and Boyd used to sneak down to look in the Hale dungeons, but almost as soon as they realised they were not a fun place to be, they stopped. Derek isn’t happy to be back in one, now. He yanks at the chain angrily.

“Such strength,” Katherine declares from the other side of the cell. “My, what a lucky boy our fair prince is.”

“Why are you doing this?” Derek spits out, “I’ve never hurt you, the prince of the Stilinski kingdom never hurt you.”

“True,” she muses, “But, he got in my way, and you, Derek, you’re in my way, now. You were so close to happiness, and yet,” she snaps her fingers, “That could never be.”

“My happiness was nothing to do with you,” he growls, “I would have kept away, I was happy to mind my own business.”

“Ahhh,” Katherine stands, advances on him, “Yes, I suspect perhaps a romantic heart such as yours would have given anything for true love, but, you see, your true love provides me with a great problem, Prince Derek.”

Derek rears back his head in confusion, “I don’t understand.”

Katherine waves a hand in front of her wand, and the end begins to glow in the same shimmering green light Derek remembers from her first appearance. “You got in the way of my plans.”

Derek feels his insides go cold when he sees Stiles in the light, his eyes shut and skin pale.

“You didn’t—”
“No, fear not, your young peasant boy of the forest isn’t dead, merely sleeping. This may even bring you some relief, you see, this is King Stilinski’s castle, and in the very highest tower, safely placed by those that loved him most, dreaming of his true love, is the Prince. Prince Stilinski.” Katherine widens her eyes in surprise, “Though, what’s this? It couldn’t be! The very same boy of the forest that won our noble prince’s heart just yesterday,” she arches an eyebrow at Derek, “He is, indeed, so very handsome, Derek, and he will remain so for all the years to come! A hundred years in fact, and yet, that is nothing to a steadfast heart,” she points at Derek, “The gates of the dungeon will part, and our prince will ride out, strong and proud in his old age. Off he goes, to wake his love with love’s first kiss, and prove that true love conquers all,” she begins to laugh manically, turns on her heel with her crow hovering beside her. “Such happiness awaits you, Prince Derek, I for one am looking forward to it, already.”

Derek tugs furiously on his chains, tries to break free to no avail. Katherine’s laughter echoes around the walls of the cell for a long time after she’s gone.

He drops to his knees, searching the floor and walls for something useful to help him escape.

This cannot be how it ends. He cannot allow this to be Stiles’ fate all because of a vengeful, evil witch. He didn’t want it for Prince Stilinski, and it doesn’t want it for Stiles. His mind is still reeling at the fact they’re one in the same, he can’t believe he had the chance for the greatest happiness, the most wonderful love, and it’s being snatched from him before he can even touch it.

“Psst.”

Derek snaps his head up in surprise, blinks at an almost tiny version of the fairy Scott he met in infancy.

“Scott?!”

“Heard you might need a little help,” Scott flutters down beside him as Lydia and Allison appear, both of them getting to work on burning through his chains with their wand. “You get in such trouble without me,” he chides teasingly as he peers at the bump on the back of Derek’s head. “Mother can fix that right up when we get out of here.”

“We?” Derek clutches his liberated wrists, smiles gratefully at the girls. “How exactly are we going to do that?”

“With the power of true love, of course,” Lydia snarks, and Derek narrows his eyes at her.

“Helpful.”

She rolls her own eyes back before producing his sword from absolutely nowhere, “I think this might help.”

“I hope you’re better with it than you were when we were children,” Allison adds.

“A wonderful vote of confidence,” Derek snaps.

“Here,” she waves her wand in lieu of argument, and a shield forms in Derek’s free hand, “You might need that, too.”

“Thank you,” he manages gruffly, following them out of the cell once Scott has broken through the lock.

The second they’re outside Katherine’s damned pet crow launches itself at them, shrieking madly.
“This way,” Scott yells, flitting up a flight of steps as Derek fights off the first tiny gargoyles racing after them. He rakes his sword through them, pushing them back with the shield and follows Scott to the open window.

“How like the old days,” Scott says brightly, and Derek snorts at the sheer ridiculousness of the situation as he jumps. Samson is tied up in the rotting courtyard, and Lydia flies over to free him. Derek shields Scott and Allison from arrows being shot at them from above, and after a moment Allison darts out, flicks her wand at them and turns the remaining arrows to flowers.

“Pretty,” Scott cries encouragingly, “Some of your best!”

“I love you,” Allison says in reply, and Scott half falls off Derek’s shield in surprise.

Lydia reappears, hair every which way and she smooths it back into place as she settles on the shield.

“I dealt with the crow,” she states simply.

“Splendid,” Derek grits out, riding towards the rackety bridge that leads them back towards the kingdom. “How do we deal with the damn witch?”

“I don’t know, yet,” Scott calls, leaning over Derek’s shoulder to turn more weapons being thrown at them into bubbles. “But, we better think of something fast, as she’s definitely aware of the situation!”

Derek twists to see Katherine standing atop the tallest tower of her castle, waving her wand in the air and producing a whirlwind of purple lightening. She casts it out towards them, and Samson flinches as they’re suddenly plunged into shoulder high thorn bushes.

“Shit sticks!”

“Hey, Stiles says that!”

“I know,” Derek yells, chopping his way through the thorns. It felt nice to say something that reminded him of Stiles, especially at a time when if he looks back, he thinks he might just begin to be a little afraid for them all.

There’s a howl of anger behind them as they break through the thorns, and then thunder claps, lightning flashes and green flames go up around them as a dragon descends in front of them.

“Oh my,” Lydia whispers, “I had no idea Katherine could do that.”

“Now we know!”

Allison steals herself, begins shooting sparks at the dragon, and it smiles in amusement, flicks her to the side.

“Allison!” Scott dives over to her, Lydia quick to follow as Derek leaps from Samson to protect all three of them with his shield when Katherine sends flames their way.

He gets to his feet, takes a swipe at her nose and she rears back in pain. When she re-attacks her flames are stronger than before, and Derek winces, holds onto his shield tightly. There’s movement to Katherine’s left, and then another horse is flying onto the scene, Boyd wielding an axe he lets fly the second he’s close by. Behind him, Erica comes sailing through the thorns, jabs her sword into Katherine’s side.
Derek leaps over to them, incredulous, “How did you—”

“Magic,” Erica yells, nodding over at Scott.

“Thanks,” he calls back, lunging at Katherine with his sword again when she strides closer.

The three of them manage to lure Katherine away from the fairies, both Erica and Boyd getting in deep cuts and slices where they can. Derek goes for her teeth when she bites at them, determined she won’t hurt anyone he cares about again.

Somehow, Katherine manages to separate Derek from the group with a ring of fire, and Derek rolls back his shoulders, determined to keep fighting till the end. He thinks he hears her laugh when he lashes out again as she gets close.

“Derek!” Scott yells over the flames, “Throw the sword!”

“But, then I’ll have nothing!”

“Trust me! I’ve looked after Stiles all this time haven’t I? I promise you, this will work if you just trust me!”

Derek looks at the sword, pulls it back behind his head and then tosses it straight at Katherine. It soars through the air, piercing her in the heart and she begins writhing in pain, her teeth snapping furiously at him as she falls. Derek jumps out of the way, rolls to where Boyd catches him, helps him stand. They watch grimly as the witch withers to nothing but ash in front of them.

Erica launches herself at Derek, face smeared with blood.

“How dare you abandon us like that! I thought you weren’t coming back, you, you—asshole!”

Derek can’t help but grin, claps them both on the shoulder, “Thank you.”

“We’re with you till the end,” Boyd says seriously, “All of us.”

“Quaint,” Lydia says drily, now at full height once again.

“Like you three are any different,” Derek points out.

“We’re unique,” Scott says proudly, wings fluttering manically. “You did it,” he says to Derek.

“I had help,” Derek argues.

“Sure, but I think the next bit’s all on you, your highness.”

“Oh,” Derek ducks his head, beaming to himself, he gets to see Stiles again. “Yeah, I want to—we should—”

“One little thing,” Allison flutters to walk beside him as he collects the sword from the burned patch of ground where Katherine fell. “We sort of put the entire kingdom to sleep.”

“They’re going to be in for a shock,” Boyd murmurs, helping Lydia perch on the back of his horse.

“And a spectacular party,” Erica adds.

“Later,” Derek pants, still a little breathless, “After—”
“No!” Scott cries, “Don’t even imply what you’re implying.”

“Hey,” Derek grins wickedly at him, “Marriage bed, Scott.”

“Maybe Stiles will decide he doesn’t want you after all,” Scott sniffs, “He was awfully into the handsome stranger he met in the forest. Said it was magical.”

Derek preens, happy to know Stiles liked him for just who he was, and not because he was a prince.

“It’s a good job we’re all still looking out for you,” Lydia says over the horses to Derek, “Or, you really would have been there for a hundred years.”

“I don’t know about anyone else, but it’s been a hundred years since I ate anything,” Allison cuts in, “Can we go?”

They ride back into the silent kingdom together, Derek’s nerves getting higher and higher as he dismounts in the courtyard. He leaves Samson to collect a well deserved drink of water, and follows as Scott leads him up the hushed staircases.

The door to the tower bedroom opens, and Derek peeks through to see Stiles laid out, asleep like he was in Katherine’s story. He swallows, reminds himself this isn’t a mirage and that Stiles is here, Stiles is real. Stiles needs him to fix this.

He twists to look at Scott, panicking suddenly, “What if I’m not his true love—”

Scott rolls his eyes, “You think Stiles has ever broken a promise to me before you? He promised to never talk to a stranger, and he broke it just for you,” he shoves Derek in through the door, “Go, moron.”

Derek huffs at him, and then nods, crosses the room to hover nervously in front of Stiles. He kneels down beside the bed, slides his bloodied up fingers across Stiles’ warm ones. His heart is racing as he ducks down, breathes in Stiles’ wonderfully familiar scent, and presses his lips to Stiles’.

*

Stiles was having a splendid dream. He was baking a delicious smelling cake with Derek. Derek had flour on his cheek, and Stiles was leaning up to wipe it away. Derek was catching his wrist, fingers curling around Stiles’ and then he was leaning in, pressing Stiles against the kitchen table and kissing him soundly.

Stiles blinks awake in surprise before he can finish the kiss. Derek is hovering above him, a cut over his forehead, and the beginnings of a black eye, but he’s smiling down at Stiles. He runs a hand along Stiles’ cheek, bows his head for a moment.

“I was dreaming about you,” Stiles says drowsily. “You’re always… in my dreams. I can’t get rid of you.”

Derek grins, pulls Stiles’ hands up and kisses his knuckles roughly, “Just wanted to make sure I didn’t stay a stranger, I guess.”

"I approve," Stiles sits up, clutches Derek tightly so as to make sure he doesn’t disappear. "What on earth’s been happening? Why is your face bloody?"

"Oh," Derek stands, tugging Stiles with him. "I actually have a lot of explaining to do."
"Huh," Stiles blinks up at him shyly, "And, do we have time for that?"

"Yes," Derek winds his arms around Stiles’ waist, "We do, Prince Stiles."

Stiles feels his face fall, “Oh, no, Derek! I can’t— you— oh—”

"It’s okay," Derek interrupts, "There’s a happy ending for the explanation. A true love thing, too."

"Really?" Stiles finds himself melting into Derek’s arms, "Is it an exciting story? Are there dragons? Horses?"

Derek laughs, “Both, actually. Come on, I’ll tell you on the way downstairs.”

"I’m excited," Stiles tells him, watches as Derek crosses the room and picks up the crown Stiles had flat out ignored before. "I suspect you’re a good story teller."

"I’m not," Derek says apologetically, placing the crown on his head gently, "But, I’ll try for you."

"I’ll hang on your every word, I promise."

Derek kisses his forehead, laces their fingers together as they move to the door, “So, once upon a time—”

Stiles sighs contentedly, feels it in his very heart and soul that everyone involved in this story lives happily ever after.

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