

Whirlwinds in Charcoal

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Whirlwinds in Charcoal

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Summary

At some point the cute little kid that his sisters had joked was his late-to-arrive imaginary friend or his fabled soulmate, he'd grown into a man. A man Derek was attracted to. He kept his head down, kept his eyes on his canvas for every class the young man modelled for. He didn't know how else to cope after so long of coping this way, with everything and anything that he hadn't been able to face, with charcoal and canvas.

He wasn't shy, not really, he just didn't know how to talk to people, or generally feel the desire to. His family knew that, loved him in spite of that, interacted with him around his issues and Derek had a good relationship with them. But Stiles was new, Stiles was an anomaly, someone Derek wanted to reach out for and just couldn't figure out how.

Notes

After I finished my lengthy Sterek story Radio Tower and submitted my assignments for the Steter Reverse Bang, I wanted a few shorter projects to work on to give myself a breather before I dive into the two long Sterek stories I have sitting waiting for me. I asked one of the Sterek groups on Facebook if they had any prompts/wish fics they wanted me to write for them. This one is for AJ who wished for 'a cute little fic where Derek keeps painting a figure he keeps seeing in dreams, but never sees the face. And when he meets Stiles he's like oh duh! It's you!'

Hope you like it my dear! It's so cheesy and fluffy and an utter joy to write :)

It started as a glimpse in his dreams, flashes of dark eyes and hair in disarray, pale skin sprinkled with moles, long fingers reaching for him. Every time they stirred in him a feeling like longing and he didn't even understand why. As he'd grown, he'd tried to make sense of them and had come up short. Laura and Cora had teased him endlessly, quoting the most farfetched tales of fated mates predestined and starcrossed lovers from werewolf fairytales.

It was all a load of crap, he *knew* that they knew that, which only served to aggravate him more.

Werewolves were supernatural, certainly, but there was a difference between the supernatural and utter made-up bullshit. There was no magical destiny laid out for him leading to someone out there, just luck or circumstance or whatever people tended to call it. But even after dismissing that as nonsense, he still had no idea where this phenomenon had come from.

It was almost a nightly occurrence. He'd always presented as artistic. He'd started off as a quiet, withdrawn toddler decorating his entire bedroom wall with crayon, and that need to express himself through means other than communication in a larger than life family had followed him into adulthood.

He was a qualified architect by trade but his preference for more artistic drawings in charcoal took up most of his spare time. He would often catch snippets of conversation, overhear his family's concerns about him, shut up in his apartment and surrounded by charcoal smeared canvases. Canvases featuring hands and eyes, or more recently a pale back and sloping nape topped with a mess of dark hair.

The charcoal drawings weren't sexual in their focus, more snapshots, like that of the sections of flowers they'd drawn in art class in high school. Only no flower could be this...relentless in its pursuit of him. They weren't sexual, no, but they held Derek's attention like nothing else. His family and friends of friends had pieces of his, drawings of landscapes and trees and even commissioned portraits of family pets, but whatever he tried to focus on, he always came back to this person.

"You realise you're drawing him older, right?" Cora had said once from her place on his sofa, where she'd been staring at the latest piece of a pair of bowed lips, slightly parted as if about to speak.

Derek, who had been fetching her a drink, froze. Slowly he turned to look at the latest canvas, rich in tones and shading. *“What?”*

“When you were a kid, the hands and the shoulders, they were like...the hands of a kid, now he looks like a man. It’s like...like you’re drawing bits and pieces as he grows up. It almost reminds me of that home video we had, where I was trying to film you and Laura but I had the camera so zoomed in when we were running around that all you could see were flashes of eyes and hands and hair...”

Still mulling her words over as he stepped into his *Life Drawing* class, Derek swallowed, because, no he hadn’t realised that, hadn’t looked at it that way. Usually he drew the image that stuck with him as soon as he woke, got it out of his system, or tried to, then tried to forget about it. Because the not knowing the source of his insanity would’ve driven him insane long ago if he hadn’t.

His mother had invited the diagnosis and expertise of their emissary and even a few other druids, but none had been able to identify a spell or witch or curse. And as time had gone by, everyone had just accepted he was simply gifted.

Derek set up his easel and canvas as others slowly filtered into the class. It was just a little club really that he joined for the opportunity to draw new subjects; no one was here for a grade, they were here for the experience. Some painted, some sketched, some chatted and brought coffee. Derek pitched himself in his usual corner and accepted the complementary glass of wine the class organiser offered him, taking a sip as he waited for the volunteer subject to arrive.

The dreams hadn’t come to him in a few nights now. He wasn’t ever ‘plagued’ by them exactly, they were filled with a floaty, warm kind of feeling that was definitely not the stuff of nightmares, yet he always felt more withdrawn than normal after them, contemplative, even as he tried to sketch them out of his system. He functioned though, he had a good life, if quiet. He had family and though he’d perhaps never be as loud in his happiness as they were, he was content enough. Quietly content.

The side door opened and the subject stepped in. Derek set his glass down, arranging his sticks of charcoal on the stand next to him. Out of his peripheral vision, he saw the subject

step onto the tall stool. His eyes flicked up with the rustle of cloth that signalled the robe had been dropped to the floor and he felt the bottom drop out of his stomach.

It was him. He was perched on the stool, angled slightly away from Derek so he was half-turned from him. His face was still visible as he chatted, utterly unconcerned about his nudity, to an apparent friend off to the side. It was him.

Derek's lips parted around a breath that got lodged in his chest.

There was no mistaking it. This young man, he was the one Derek had been drawing all this time, his hands, his face, his eyes, there was no mistaking them. His hair even stuck up in the same way at the back. How was that possible?

Then the young man laughed at something his friend said, and the glorious sound of it struck Derek like a freight train or a lightning strike.

He remembered.

He remembered breaking the rules of the full moon, running out of the invisible bounds of their property and into the preserve as the moon's song vibrated through his bones. He remembered coming across a couple of young kids who had evidently escaped the school camping trip set up further into the preserve. He remembered a boy, only seven or eight, naked as the day he was born attempting to scale the tree that jutted from the steep bank and hung over the water. It was likely he had planned to jump in from there, on a dare if the jeers from the other kids had been anything to go by.

But he'd seen Derek, had spooked and jumped down, landed all wrong as he tried to scoop up his discarded clothes. He'd slipped and his arms had swung out. Derek remembered long fingers reaching for him, for anything to save himself. He remembered surging forward, snatching hold of the chilled body and tumbling down the steep embankment, taking the brunt of the fall.

Derek had been around 10 or so, he remembered because it had been Cora's first full moon. He'd promised he could be a good boy and keep within the property bounds, so that his

parents could focus on Cora. He *had* intended to, had been in control but the sounds of the children and their hushed laughter had drawn him to the lake.

He'd only been young and werewolf or not, concussions could last long enough to do damage, enough for him to forget once the moon had dipped and stopped enhancing the power rushing through his still adjusting adolescent body. His heritage healed wounds, not memories.

It had all happened so fast, even now he only remembered snatches of it. His arm had broken, his leg too, but he'd snapped them back into place before the boy had scrambled up and stared at him, doe eyes wide and panicked.

"Oh my god, dude are you okay?"

His voice, it'd been younger than the deep tones of the man sitting on the stool before him now, chatting casually with anyone and everyone, not just his friend as everyone started to sketch him.

Derek remembered the sound of his own mother calling out to him, remembered the increased panic in the boy's eyes, the way he'd patted Derek down as if he couldn't help himself, as if he just had to know if he was okay. Then the kid had snatched up his clothes, which had fallen with them in a spread of chaos, and darted off in the direction of the kids who were already fleeing the scene.

His pale skin had glowed in the moonlight, dotted with moles and Derek had just stared after him, whole but shaken and winded. As it came back to him in flashes he remembered the disoriented feeling all over again. It was like he'd been ripped up by a whirlwind and dropped back down to earth with a crash.

Suddenly, brown eyes that were so much *more* than brown drifted to him and Derek's breath caught, the same as it had done back then. The only thing was that this time it was laced with something else, something more. Something in his chest fluttered and twisted and he exhaled roughly as he paused, fingers still hovering over the charcoals and pencils he had yet to even pick up.

Perfectly bowed lips quirked in a mischievous smile and Derek tore his gaze away, starting to sketch frantically across the canvas. His mind was racing, his heart pounding as he drew without thinking without seeing.

He felt a flush burn deeper than his skin, turn his very bones hot with the realisation that had him tied in anxious knots. He was known for his introverted nature and self-sufficiency; he had never learned this one thing, not really. Not in the noisy household he'd been raised in, among a loving but large family where you had to scream to be heard. He didn't know how to talk to people and now he was here, this man was right in front of him, the person Derek had been dreaming about for years and he had no idea what to say.

*

Derek Hale *senior*, Derek's father, was a psychologist, a damn good one too, and Derek knew he would say the drawings over the years, the dreams were his mind's way of dealing with the memory loss, with the incident he'd forgotten. Even human minds were capable of amazing things, without beginning to consider the potential of a werewolf one. Still, even understanding it didn't change the fact that Derek had felt like, over the years, he'd gotten to know this imaginary person, like he was a figment of Derek's imagination and to have him sitting there, in front of Derek's life drawing class for three weeks running, it was like someone telling him the Easter bunny was real.

At some point the cute little kid that his sisters had joked was his late-to-arrive imaginary friend or his fabled soulmate, he'd grown into a man. A man Derek was attracted to. He kept his head down, kept his eyes on his canvas for every class the young man modelled for. He didn't know how else to cope after so long of coping *this* way, with everything and anything that he hadn't been able to face, with charcoal and canvas.

By the third class, however, he'd started to feel a panicked feeling creeping up in his throat. This was the last session he was scheduled for, him, *Stiles*, as the guy across from Derek kept calling him week after week.

Stiles's friend Scott, who worked with paints, Derek vaguely recognised from annual pack get-togethers or the rare occasion he'd had to help his mother with something at the pack house. Scott was a beta who'd been bitten by a rogue alpha some years ago that his mother had taken into the fold, a generally happy and carefree guy who hadn't known about werewolves until he'd been turned.

Derek, as antisocial as he was, had never spoken to him, but he knew him to nod at in passing, in acknowledgement of their secret kinship that humans didn't comprehend. He could walk over there, start a conversation, insinuate himself into the conversation with Stiles. If he was ever going to say anything, he had to say it now, do something now.

When the class ended, however, people thanked Stiles for his time and started packing up. Derek was still smudging the edges of the background to make for a misty, absence of space that wouldn't detract from Stiles's half-turned form, and he didn't know what to do.

He'd never been unhappy in his reclusiveness; it'd never stopped him from doing something he really wanted to do. He wasn't shy, not really, he just didn't know how to talk to people, or generally feel the desire to. His family knew that, loved him in spite of that, interacted with him around his issues and Derek had a good relationship with them. But Stiles was new, Stiles was an anomaly, someone Derek wanted to reach out for and just couldn't figure out how.

Derek jumped when he sensed movement out of the corner of his eye and looked up to see Stiles standing just to the left of his canvas, a crooked smile on his lips.

"Wow, you really lose yourself when you draw, huh?" he asked teasingly, "even your supernatural senses didn't pick me up."

Derek balked, feeling a sense of dread he hoped to God didn't show on his face, because he was better than this, he was a grown man, he'd been born keeping this secret. But Stiles was...Stiles was there and disarming him in every way and Derek didn't know how to *be* around him. He'd turned Derek's world upside down and yet he couldn't say that it felt bad. He was filled with nervous excitement just to have him close, have him looking at him, breathing his same air and smelling of cinnamon and fabric softener and even a little of the rain outside.

It felt good.

He didn't understand.

“Oh, dude, I’m...” Stiles gestured across the now empty classroom the high school let them use for their weekly classes. His friend Scott stood near the door, chatting up a girl Derek thought was called Allison. “That was like a werewolf faux pas, right? But no one can hear, it’s just... Scott, he’s like my BFF. More like brothers, really. He was bitten a few years ago, but you know that, I guess. But anyway, it’s just normal to me, you know? Ok so, let’s start again.” He held his hand out, even as he used the other to give the belt holding the robe closed around his body a bit more security.

“I’m Stiles. And you’re Derek right? Scott said your mom is like the county alpha, that she’s totally cool.”

Derek stared at his hand for a moment, at the moles beside the joint of his thumb before reaching for him dumbly. His fingers were slender but strong, warm as they gripped his and they shook on their greeting. It felt so foreign to him, because he knew him and yet, he didn’t, did he?

It took a moment for his throat to form words. “I’m Derek Hale,” he confirmed lamely, holding onto Stiles’s hand a second longer than was probably necessary before letting his hand fall away. He felt his thoughts collect at last, his sense of self and winced at the mess of charcoal on Stiles’s fingers he’d transferred. “Oh, sorry, here.” He snatched up the packet of hand wipes he kept in his kit and offered them to Stiles.

Stiles looked down at his own hands with a laugh. “Thanks, man, I so wouldn’t have realised.” Derek started packing his kit away, trying not to notice the movements of Stiles’s long fingers as he wiped off the residue charcoal.

“So, charcoals, that’s a little different. But I think they have one of your pieces up in the hall, the one you did of *Beacon Hills High School* front?”

“Yeah, that’s mine,” Derek replied, wiping up his own hands at last when Stiles was done with the packet. “I do commissions and things. I’m actually an architect by trade but this is my...” He paused, hobby seemed so inadequate, but before he could find a more suitable word, Stiles spoke.

“Passion?” he supplied, head canted just so, unwittingly giving Derek a view of his neck. His voice had a husky little twist to it, and the interest in his scent spiked enough to stun Derek to stillness, even as he reached to remove the canvas from the stand. His eyes locked on Stiles’s. His heart jolted as the musky interest in Stiles’s scent, the open nature of his body language drew him in, beyond the bounds of the walls he’d long ago erected around himself. Crashing through his barriers with so little effort and yet all the devastation of a hurricane.

“Can I see?” Stiles asked softly, one fingertip tracing the corner of the canvas.

Derek gave a short nod and stepped sideways. He knew a moment of apprehension, as he always did when he first shared one of his pieces with someone and as soon as Stiles fell into place beside him, his eyes widened.

“Derek this is...” Stiles’s fingers reached out, tracing the shape of his own portrait’s jaw and half-turned shoulder without actually touching the charcoal. He seemed mesmerised by his own black and white image. His lips worked soundlessly as he stared and stared, drinking it in with clear astonishment. “It’s like a black and white photograph or something it’s...it’s so...” He licked his lips nervously. “It’s beautiful.”

Not for the first time, Derek wished he had his mother’s loquacious nature, Laura’s easy people skills, wished he could say something effortless and smooth like, *‘I had a beautiful subject’* but the words wouldn’t come. He wasn’t good with them. He wasn’t Laura or his mother, never would have their skill with words, that was why he had *this*, the canvas, the charcoal, only that and a family who loved him but struggled to understand him.

The fingers he’d dreamed about stroked the edges of the canvas and he stared at them for a long time, trying to figure out something to say. Then Stiles’s gaze snapped to him. “But I watched you, you didn’t even look at me. You looked at me once that first day and you’ve got like four canvases you’ve worked on the last few weeks. How could you draw so amazing without even looking at me?”

Derek looked from Stiles, to the canvas, his gaze lingering there before he met his eyes again. “So you know about werewolves, I’m guessing that means you’re open to things that are a little...strange?”

Stiles frowned. “Strange...how?”

The lady who ran the class, Heather, was ushering the shamelessly flirting Allison and Scott out the door.

“If I finish packing up while you’re getting changed, there’s...” He hesitated, just for a breath. “There’s something I want to show you.”

*

It was a risky move, laying all the cards out for Stiles to see before they’d even begun, before Stiles had the chance to get to know the man behind the crazy. If Stiles had endured an adolescence with a werewolf best friend though, Derek hoped he could take the crazy with a pinch of salt.

Derek had never been the kind of person to accept halves. For him it was always all or nothing, probably why he’d been alone for so long. His fingers tightened around the wheel as he drove toward his apartment, the obnoxious *Jeep* in disrepair close behind him. He hoped he was making the right choice.

Stiles gave him a nervous little smile as she climbed out of the *Jeep*, looking up at the restored factory that now formed a luxury apartment block. “Which one is yours?” he asked as they approached the doors, close but not touching, Stiles’s body language open and welcoming and warm.

“The top floor,” Derek said, “it has the best lighting.”

There was something about Stiles that just let Derek keep talking, let him add those little extra snippets of information that kept the conversation going. With every word, it felt easier and easier to keep talking.

Stiles’s eyes flicked up to the large expanse of glass, the original restored factory windows that dominated the whole top section of this side of the building. He was silent on the ride up in the elevator, thoughtful, but when Derek started to unlock the door, Stiles offered. “My mum used to paint landscapes when she was alive, she was kinda good. We still have most of

her paintings.” He gave a little laugh. “She used to set up her easel in the kitchen because she said it got the best light, I used to watch her all the time.”

There was a little moment of hesitation, but his genuine interest in Stiles helped to shorten the length of it before Derek managed to ask, “You never wanted to paint?”

Stiles scoffed as Derek lead the way inside. “Ha. I tried, when I was a kid. I was awful. I’m not bad at sketches. I like to doodle manga style mostly, but I’m not really talented. Not like she was. Not like you.”

People had been telling Derek he was talented for years, and while he hadn’t gotten big headed with it or complacent, while he still appreciated it every time he heard it, there was something different about hearing the compliment from Stiles’s lips. It wasn’t because they knew each other, but because Stiles had seen the paintings of *him*, one of the ones Derek had really lost himself in. One of the ones that Derek thought exposed every vulnerable part of him. And Stiles had liked it. That felt more personal somehow, monumental, even.

“I need...you need to see something and it’s...” Derek winced. “It’s completely weird and I’m not a stalker or anything but you need to know.”

Apprehension flooded him with every step up onto the mezzanine. Light flooded everything, his trays of neatly lined charcoals, the stacks of clean, unused canvas and paper. There was an unfinished drawing of his niece standing on a canvas at the end, sketched in thin, barely there lines of pencil, with only her skin and outline lightly shaded in charcoal. Stiles hesitated there, studying the piece but Derek walked right passed it to the shelving unit in the far corner.

He pulled out a large folder and laid it on the bench on the side, the place he usually set pieces for a couple of coats of protective lacquer to stop them from smudging. He didn’t open the folder, but set his hands on the edges of the bench, almost bracing himself forward on it. He dipped his chin toward it when Stiles approached but didn’t touch.

“Open it.” Deerek’s voice was almost lost in the quiet, all he could hear was Stiles’s heartbeat, a little irregular but steady. He wondered what kind of things Stiles had seen of his world, what levels of crazy, to be able to take this all in his stride. He wondered if he’d have the chance to find out after this.

His breath caught as Stiles's long fingers traced the edge of the folder, before finally flipping it open. His heart did stutter then but the shock in it wasn't accompanied by the acrid stench of fear. It was something like awe and surprise and something else all tangled up until Derek couldn't identify it. Stiles turned the page, then another, then another. His mouth worked soundlessly as he did so, before he finally murmured, "they're all of me? This whole book?"

"Those...are the recent ones, yes."

"Recent?" Stiles lifted his eyes to him. "How many are there?"

Derek flicked his gaze to the shelving at the side, then back again. "A lot."

Silence plagued the expanse of the loft apartment for a long time, until at last, laughter bubbled out of Stiles, shattering it to oblivion. It started small, a soft noise of disbelief, then escalated to a relieved belly laugh that had him scratching at the back of his neck and hair.

"Oh my God, I was so worried because you basically ignored me for every week and when I remembered you, I was sure you didn't remember me, from before because....*God*, I was a kid and you swooped out of the air and saved me and I had this crush on you for years and I'd see you when my middle school came to use your school's lacrosse field and you'd be on track and just so..."

Stiles finally took a breath, looking back to the folder. "I thought you were setting me up for something crazy. Honestly, if my best friend weren't a werewolf and totally connected to your pack I'd have been worried about some serial killer vibes but I've dealt with worse and besides which I'm a good judge of people and you seemed so—"

"You don't think this is crazy?" Derek cut him off, shaking his head a little because Stiles was talking nervously but didn't seem scared or freaked out and it just didn't make sense. It wasn't logical. How was he not completely freaked out? *Derek* was freaked out.

“Well,” Stiles offered awkwardly, “yeah, a bit, I guess?” But my friend Lydia? She is kinda ‘psychic-not-psychic’ and she draws things sometimes. So it’s weird but not completely a new phenomenon to me.” His lips quirked in a little mischievous smile. “This is *Beacon Hills*, dude, weird shit happens here all the time. Your level of crazy is like...mediocre, in a totally attractive way.”

Derek just stared at him, stunned for a long moment. Because Stiles was talking like it all made sense to him, or at least like things like this happened every day. Derek supposed they did, in *Beacon Hills* at least, but that didn’t make him able to process the right words any easier. He didn’t know what to say.

“Dude, did I break you?” Stiles asked gently, brow furrowing a little with worry.

Derek just blinked at him. “No, I just...you...you act like this all makes sense to you.”

Stiles’s expression softened and he stepped forward, reaching for him abortively before seeming to think maybe he hadn’t earned that right, at least not yet. “Well, it doesn’t, not really. Just because its not the weirdest thing to happen to me doesn’t mean I’m not a little shocked or whatever but I thought, well maybe we could figure it out together, you know? Over coffee or...a couple of shakes. Whatever does it for you.”

You do it for me, he thought with a sudden moment of clarity. He did it for him in a way only drawing had done in so long.

He was so close now, closer than Derek had ever let anyone who wasn’t family. Stiles moistened his dry lips and Derek found himself mimicking the motion. “A shake would be great.”

*

Derek had dated a few times, but never really put himself out there or invested much of himself, so it had never lasted long. Going out for milkshakes at a ridiculous hour felt exhilarating and intimate in a way he’d never experienced even as a teen.

Stiles talked like it was as easy as breathing. His warm laughter and sarcastic wit filled the spaces his own reservations often left, drawing him out of his shell in spite of himself as if pulled by a magnet. The first time he laughed, Derek had surprised himself with the earnest sound of it, rising right from his core as Stiles's eyes seemed to sparkle with pleasure at the sound.

They'd actually spent most of the time at the milkshake bar talking about everything but the drawings. After hearing some of the tales Stiles told him of growing up alongside a *bitten* teenage werewolf in a town with its own Nemeton, Derek was no longer surprised as to why Stiles was taking this so well. As the alpha's son, Derek had been sheltered from a lot of the chaos that happened around *Beacon Hills*. It seemed Stiles had been caught up in it all more than he had, human or no.

"I don't think it's supernatural," Derek admitted as they walked through the quiet streets back toward his apartment from the milkshake bar. "Things like this have been known to happen to humans, my abilities just exacerbate it. Intensify it. That's what we deduced really in the last few weeks. And my sisters like to joke but it doesn't feel supernatural, it just feels...normal."

Stiles sipped at his shake and nodded thoughtfully as he listened. Derek found himself talking a little more easily the more they walked. They'd circled his block a few times now and his shake was nearly empty.

"What do your sisters joke about?"

Derek flushed and averted his eyes. "Make-believe stuff. The fated soul-mate crap that's only believed by werewolf kids or newbies to the supernatural world that don't know any better."

Head cocked, Stiles offered him a rueful little smile around the straw of his milkshake. He smelled of happiness and fresh air and strawberry ice-cream on a warm summer's night.

"So you think destiny and dreaming of your future werewolf mate is silly, but the coincidence of meeting me all these years later in a fluke of an art class, which my best friend

just happens to be taking to impress a girl, that's reasonable?"

Derek blinked. "I guess stranger things have happened in *Beacon Hills*," he said eventually, voice somewhere far away. He wasn't entirely sure it wasn't just some subconscious repercussion from cracking his head and several bones all those years ago, werewolf healing or not, but he supposed it didn't matter. Stiles was looking at him with this light in his eyes, all mischief and inquisitive eagerness to learn everything there was to know about him and Derek, Derek just wanted the same. Fate or happy circumstance, mystical werewolf dreams or not.

"If there's one thing living in this crazy town has taught me, it's that life is just full of its own kind of magic, werewolves, druids and Nemetons notwithstanding. Sometimes it turns around and surprises you." Stiles shrugged as they came to stand in front of Derek's building, tossing his empty shake into the trash can nearby.

He looked shy all of a sudden with nothing to occupy his hands. He tucked them awkwardly into his pockets as he looked Derek over, as he added softly, "sometimes the surprises are good."

Derek had never felt more exposed, yet more grateful for it in all his introverted life, surrounded by a loud yet loving family he'd never been able to make himself heard or seen in. Until now, because Stiles saw him, saw more than a bit of noteworthy artistic talent or an acceptably skilled architect. No one had ever looked at Derek like that, like he was the most fascinating thing on earth. It made him feel vulnerable in all the right ways. So for once in his life, he took the leap.

"Do you...want to come up?"

Stiles glanced up to the building, to where Derek's apartment was, before beaming. "Wow, sure yeah I... I'd like that."

*

“Have I ever told you that you look unfairly good in the morning? No one should look that good with bed-head,” Stiles commented as he ascended the mezzanine stairs a few weeks later, wearing only the bed sheet as a revealing toga.

The morning sun streamed in the grand windows and painted him with golden light, giving his skin a golden glow and his dishevelled hair a coppery hue. He brought the ridiculously large mug of coffee with him as he always did. Derek took it from him when it was offered, sipping the hot coffee before passing it back to Stiles to sip. It was a morning ritual of theirs, when Stiles stayed over, which was often. They would share coffee from the same ridiculous mug Stiles had brought over one of the first nights he’d stayed and sometimes they would drink it in bed together, or sometimes Stiles would stand and watch him work just like this, in the companionable morning quiet.

Derek wasn’t much more dressed than Stiles, wearing only the sweatpants he’d pulled on as he left Stiles to sleep. Stiles had had a late shift at the station the night before, so he’d left him to bed while he’d crept up here to work on his portrait of his family for his parent’s upcoming anniversary. Charcoal was smudged across his fingers as he gave some tone to his subjects’ skin, relishing in the warmth of the summer morning on his chest and back, as well as the heat of Stiles’s gaze.

“Lookin’ good,” Stiles offered as he sipped at the coffee, holding it out for Derek once again.

Derek smirked. “The portrait or me?”

“Oh, both, definitely.” Stiles studied the portrait for a few seconds. “We’ll have to do the whole ‘meet the parents’ shindig soon. When is an acceptable amount of time to be seeing each other in a romantic capacity before you risk driving your love interest away with your crazy friends and family?”

Deciding not to remind Stiles that he’d met both Scott and the Sheriff in passing at least, if not as Stiles’s boyfriend, Derek dragged the charcoal down across the pencilled outline of Laura in the portrait to bring some life to her eyes. He thought he’d captured the mischievous glint in them well enough. He felt so at ease with Stiles, had done right from the start, so much so that even the current topic didn’t set him on edge. “I don’t know, I’ve never been with someone I wanted to bring home before you.”

“You sure know how to make a guy feel special,” Stiles chuckled, shuffling over to the wall where the portrait Derek had drawn of Stiles in that art class that last day stood, like a reminder of where it had all begun. He studied it for a long time, long fingers wrapped around the ridiculous giant ceramic mug that read ‘Go Big or Go Home’.

“Do you still dream about me?” he asked curiously and Derek paused in his work, really looking at him, silhouetted against the warm sunlight.

He hadn’t drawn Stiles since those classes, maybe because his subconscious finally had a resolution to those lost memories. Maybe for a reason every bit as fantastical and cliché as the ideas Laura and Cora used to throw around in jest.

It didn’t really matter. Derek set down the slender stick of charcoal he’d worn down to his fingertips. He circled the canvas, stopping just short of Stiles to really drink in the sight of him. He still couldn’t believe this was his, that someone had dragged him out of his bubble to wrap him up in their arms and didn’t want to let him go.

“Maybe that’s because what I have now is better than anything I could dream up,” he offered softly.

Stiles’s face was suffused with colour and he ducked his head a little, the way Derek usually did when he felt awkward, their mannerisms already rubbing off on each other just after a few weeks.

“You are such a secret sap,” Stiles teased fondly, sliding his hands up Derek’s bare shoulders, thumbs stroking his collarbones as the sheet clung to his body solely by the messy folds around himself. It was tangled around him, clinging to him in a way that made Derek want to rip it off him to get at his skin as well as swaddle him tight.

God, he really was gone for him already.

Stiles’s eyes glittered as he leaned in, flicking down to Derek’s mouth before sliding shut as their lips met. It was slow, gentle, like the process of waking from a relaxing sleep. It was a

luxurious, therapeutic stretch of tongues against each other, of mouths brushing just enough to send a little zing of heat through their skin.

Derek captured his face with his hands, his jaw, the warm heat of his palms seeping into Stiles's neck as he let his senses drink him in. The scent of coffee and their bed sheets and warm Stiles greeted his nose. The *taste* of the coffee and Stiles that was all bitter deliciousness and sugar. His body sank into it, like a warm bath so that when they parted enough to meet each other's eyes again, Derek felt more rested, more rejuvenated than even the best night's sleep could offer.

Stiles smiled lazily. "You have charcoal on your face."

Derek grinned, rubbing the black smudges he'd smeared across Stiles's cheeks with his thumb a little more. "So do you." He leaned in and kissed him again.

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