

## Three Blind Mice

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# Three Blind Mice

by [jelaine3](#)

## Summary

The survivors of the Hale fire only see what they want.

## Notes

I started this far too long ago and I don't have it finished yet, but it needs to see an audience. Not betaed. Constructive criticism expressed maturely will be gratefully received. I do have several chapters written and will post those soon. Please let me know if I need to add tags or adjust the rating.

I hope you enjoy it.

# Chapter 1

The tall, blonde woman giggled as she pulled Derek Hale into her high rise apartment. She sashayed her way over to a long, low credenza under some sort of modern art painting that Derek thought looked like something a three-year-old might have done during art time in pre-school. Blues and yellows and reds splattered and blobbed across the canvas with no rhyme or reason or pattern. He was sure it had cost more than Laura's beloved Camaro and shook his head at rich people's foolishness.

She had picked up some kind of remote and more lights came on in addition to the spotlights on the works of art scattered around the place and soft jazz filled the air. Coltrane or Davis or Monk. Derek never could be bothered to put names to songs though Peter could have probably named the studio musicians who had worked on it along with amusing anecdotes about the sessions. For the longest time, he'd been convinced Peter had invented them to be cool and charming, but he'd run across a few of them in the books – brand new books – that he and Laura had read to Peter after, and was a little sad to realize Peter didn't have the vivid imagination Derek wanted.

The woman was now over at the bar, pouring what smelled like a very old single malt scotch. He grimaced a little. He didn't care for the taste of alcohol, though there were a couple of micro-brewed beers that Laura had found that he didn't mind and it had no effect on his kind, but he knew he'd drink it for appearance sake. At least in Baltimore, he'd been able to claim driving home as an excuse not to drink. Hell, he could get away with it in Greenpoint as well, but not here.

But she didn't offer him a glass. She hadn't even poured a second one. She was standing in front of the glass wall, swaying to the music that came from everywhere and nowhere.

"I fucking love this view," she said.

They were up quite high, but not enough to see the whole skyline, wouldn't have been able to see much of it even if they were since they were a part of it. They could see the lights not only spread out before them but surrounding them as well. It was rich and opulent and surreal. The longer Derek looked out the window, the more untethered to time and space he felt. Adrift in a world where he didn't belong and didn't want to be, but the world he did belong to no longer existed.

He focused on the woman. This existed. This was something he could do.

He slid up behind her, gracefully, silently, feet sinking into the luxurious carpet. His right arm slipped around her waist, pulling her to him as his left hand pulled the hair back from her neck, pressing his lips to her exposed flesh, a promise of the pleasures to come. His right hand moved up from her stomach, a whisper light touch to the lower curve of her right breast before sliding lower resting for just a moment where her thighs met, before rounding down her thigh, tongue, and teeth making themselves felt at her throat.

Their eyes met in the reflection of the glass, she moves her legs further apart, pushing his hand up under her short skirt. Strong, blunt fingers played along her entrance and rubbed against her clit. She moaned at the touch, her head falling back, allowing him even easier access to her throat as she eased her legs a little further apart. His fingers entered her easily.

“Unzip me,” she said, bringing her thighs together to keep his hand in place.

He leaned back and used his teeth to start pulling down the zipper at her neck, finishing with his hand. He pushed the top down, her full breasts seemed to almost sigh in relief at the freedom. With everything in order, Derek set to work getting her off. His right hand worked automatically, knowing just the amount of pressure, the right depth, when to speed up, when to slow down. His left hand played with her breast, massaging, squeezing, twisting the nipple to add that delightful hint of pain without actually causing any. He licked and sucked on her neck, stopping just short of bruising. The last thing he wanted to do was mark her. He ground his dick against her ass, letting her know exactly what was in store for her cunt later.

A shudder ran through her body and her breath caught in a sound that was equal parts moan and whine. When she stilled, she pulled his hand up to her mouth, sucking and licking, watching the reflection the whole time, which wasn't very long.

Derek made a noise of protest and turned her around, covering her mouth with his. He pulled her closer, intending to rub his body along hers, readying them both for the next step, but not liking the feel of her dress bunched up between them. How could she feel the rough smooth silk of his shirt on her nipples, the hard press of his erection against her sensitized mound with all that damned fabric in the way? He couldn't believe such a skimpy dress could be such an obstacle.

He took a step back, breaking off the kiss, and roughly pushed at the offending material.

“I like the way you think,” she said, shimmying a little to get rid of her scrap of a dress.

The dress hit the floor and Derek's hands tightened around her waist and she braced her hands on his shoulder as he lifted her clear.

She stumbled a little when he set her back down. Derek pulled her close, steadying her. He bent his head, moving as if to kiss her, but not, moving back when she tried to close the distance, forward again when she moved back, a pout gracing her pretty features.

“Nobody likes a tease.”

“It's foreplay, not teasing. I thought women liked foreplay.” He ghosted his lips against hers, surprised when she leaned back, even taking a step back to put a little distance between them.

“If I was interested in foreplay, I'd have a boyfriend. Do you want to be my boyfriend?”

Derek froze. He couldn't think. He barely breathed. This wasn't that. It wasn't... He couldn't.

She laughed. It was harsh and mocking. Derek dropped his eyes, his head. He would not bare his throat to this woman. He would not. Once was more than enough.

“Oh, baby.” Her hand was cool against his face, a gentle pressure bringing his head back up until their eyes met. “It’s okay, sweetie. Neither of us wants that. I just want you to make me feel good. You can do that, right?”

She cupped him through his trousers, the touch light, but solid, definitely not teasing. He rocked into her hand, angled his face into her other hand, mouth moving against her palm.

He could give her what she wanted. Relief washed over him and he could breathe. Now he just had to make sure she didn’t call him sweetie ever again.

He licked his lips, making sure he licked her palm as well, hips thrusting more aggressively.

“I can make you feel real good,” he purred.

She squeezed him once and backed away from him, making sure he enjoyed the view as she moved. A step away from the stairs, she paused, smirked and asked, “Coming?”

Derek smiled. It was his insincere, charming smile, but she didn’t know the difference. Wouldn’t have cared if she did.

She made a production of climbing the stairs, but stopped halfway up, striking a pose and a pout. Derek hadn’t moved.

His smile grew wider, deeper, gaining a wolfish quality he would not have been happy about if he’d known.

He moved then, with grace and speed. She shrieked in delight and ran up the remaining steps. He caught her on the top step, pulling her tight – almost too tight – to him, kissing her. The kisses promising, telling of all the dirty, filthy things he was going to do to her. She responded in kind.

He picked her up and threw her on the California king bed. She bounced and made a small noise of outrage, but it was all part of the game and they both knew it. She leaned back on her elbows while drawing her knees up and letting them fall open.

Derek devoured her with his eyes while he stripped. He disrobed quickly and efficiently, all the while making sure his body was best displayed for her enjoyment.

Taking more time than he really needed just to keep her on edge, of course, not because he was delaying the inevitable. He wanted this. Wanted her. Of course he did. Why else would he be here?

After making sure he could gather his clothes quickly, he turned back to the woman on the bed. She hadn’t moved, though her growing impatience was clear on her face.

Derek smirked and crawled up the bed, up her, dropping kisses on her stomach, between her breasts, on her mouth before returning to her breasts. She moaned and arched up into his mouth, spreading her legs further to make room for him. He adjusted to her movement, lining himself more closely to her entrance.

Realizing she had permission to touch – or at least deciding to take advantage of the opportunity – her hands roamed over every inch of his body she had access to paying the most attention to this ass, pulling him closer to where she wanted him.

Derek broke off his worship of her breasts, leveraging himself away from her. She protested and he smiled gently at her this time and showed her the foil condom packet he had taken out of his pants pocket earlier. Smiling, she reached for it and together they made short work of getting it on him. Hands still entangled, he was guided into her.

He bottomed out and held perfectly still for a minute. This was his most and least favorite part of being with a woman. The tight heat, the wetness, always felt like he was touching heaven or god or the universe. Something infinitely larger than himself, yet something he was connected to, a part of. Yet he could never shake the memory the first woman he'd been with, the woman who'd...

He rocked his hips forward before pulling out almost entirely and snapping forward. The rhythm he set was hard and brutal. A sprint to the finish line for both of them. The women always seemed to like it when he came too and it was something he enjoyed. It was the best way he'd found to take himself out of his head. Who knows what he would have done if he could have gotten drunk or high. But he couldn't and he was good at this. It was the only thing he was good for. Ka... it had been made perfectly clear to him.

It was a photo finish ending with Derek in the lead.

He rolled off her, keeping the condom in place, removing it and tying it off in a few quick movements.

“Waste basket's to your right.”

Derek found it and tossed the used condom in with ease and looked longingly at his clothes. All he wanted to do was get dressed and go home. Hell, right now he'd even welcome Laura's disapproving looks and Peter's leers. But there was one thing left to do and he'd be damned if he left it undone.

Well, he was damned anyway, but that wasn't the point.

He didn't touch her, didn't kiss her as he moved down the bed. This had always been her favorite part, at least after he'd fucked her. She hadn't been nearly as enthusiastic when he'd go down on her before.

He performed quickly and efficiently, getting her off in record time. He hated the rubbery taste of the condom and she was overly sensitive so soon after fucking, but he couldn't stay here any longer. If he waited, there would be some gross imitation of cuddling and he couldn't bear that. This was fucking, not intimacy. Coming, not caring. Those things were not for him. Never had been, never would be.

And he was fine with it. Really. He was. Just because Laura thought she knew something didn't make it right.

The woman watched him with heavy-lidded eyes. “You're every bit as good as I've heard. You gonna stick around?”

“Do you really want me to?”

“While another round would be nice, I really dislike pillow talk. You can take the first shower.”

Derek mumbled a soft “thanks” and gathered his clothes. He had no intention of showering there and if past experience was anything to go by, she'd be asleep before he finished dressing.

## Chapter 2

Derek let himself into the empty Brooklyn brownstone he shared with Laura and Peter. Little pools of yellow light were evenly spaced around the ground floor. It wasn't just the light filtering through the lampshade that made it yellow. Laura had spent weeks, maybe even a month, hell, he couldn't remember and really didn't care, looking for the right, homey shade of yellow. What did that even mean anyway?

The thing though was that it worked.

It wasn't home. It would never be home.

But it kinda felt like home. A little.

More than it should have anyway.

The paint was...

His footsteps echoed on the hardwood floor. It wasn't unusual. Sometimes it was even planned. He should have left entirely. He should have run far, far away from them. They deserved better than to be tainted with his presence, but he wasn't strong enough to do the right thing, never had been and his family had paid for his weakness and stupidity.

He opened the refrigerator, planning on grabbing a bottle of water before heading to his room.

Instead of a fridge full of bottled water and juice and milk, fruit and vegetables, meat and cooked brown rice, all he saw was an empty half-gallon milk container that was out of date if the smell under the plastic smell was anything to go by and a disposable plastic container with a few pieces of cooked chicken on the verge of going off.

“What the hell?”

Between Laura and Peter – when he wasn't off chasing ghosts – their kitchen was pretty much a foodie's wet dream. Restaurant quality appliances and cookware, a huge, well-stocked pantry allowed them to indulge their every food whim whenever the mood struck. It was a point of smug pride and a contest of ingenuity between them to see who could keep it filled with the most exotic offerings. Derek had stopped paying attention after the screaming matched over the ostrich eggs.

He closed the refrigerator door, trying to remember – not remember – the last time he'd talked to Laura or Peter. Well, okay, Peter was off somewhere doing God knew what.

Okay, he knows, but that way lies madness.

If he were lucky.



In the living room, he looked around, hoping to see something out of place, something different than it had been when he left for work, but everything looked the same as far as he could tell.

Now how far he could actually tell was up for debate.

Homesickness and loneliness lanced through him as he really looked at the room for the first time. The guilt was ever present and always would be. He appreciated the irony of the guilt keeping him going when it was so tempting to just quit. Let the darkness and the emptiness swallow him whole, but between the knowledge that he hadn't been punished nearly enough for his lapse in judgment and the fear of facing his mother's wrath, he just couldn't bring himself to give in.

Besides, he's more than half convinced Laura would find a way to bring him back just to kill him herself.

His first thought is that there is nothing from home here. Which of course there wasn't. There was nothing left but ashes.

But there was nothing that even vaguely reminded him of home. The sofa was all 90-degree angles and butter soft caramel leather. It was nothing like the forest green velvet couch in the sitting room that had been handed down from at least Great-Grandmother Hale, if not Great-Great-Grandmother Hale. All he really knew growing up, his life would have been forfeit if he or Laura or Cora had gotten anything kid related – water, mud, blueberry jam, soda – on it. And maybe he should think about that differently if he thinks about it again. Which he won't.

The tables are all dark stained cherry constructed in mission style with faux Tiffany lamps. At least he hopes they are faux.

The room is very Laura. All earth tones and rounded, with just enough touches of color to keep things from getting boring. Nothing showy, nothing flashy, but sly and unexpected all the same.

Further proof they didn't need him. He wished desperately he was strong enough to walk away from them, leave them in peace, stop being a bleeding wound that did nothing but remind them of all they had lost.

Laura and Peter had built a home here and he'd never bothered to notice.

Peter's books carefully marked and stacked next to the chair and a half that was his. Laura's magazines stacked neatly on the lower shelf of the side table, Time or the New Yorker always on top with People or US or whatever tucked away down at the bottom because of course Laura would never read something so empty-headed as that. Must be Peter's.

But he wasn't that strong. He had never been that strong. He would never be that strong.

It was part of the price he had to pay for his weakness. Laura insisted she needed him and loved him, hell, even Peter did in his own uniquely Peter way, but she didn't know, could never know the truth.

Derek pulled out his phone, thinking he'd call and see where they are. Or at least Laura. Peter could be, and probably was, anywhere. (California. Peter was in California if he wasn't in New York.)

He saw he had a text message from a couple of days earlier. How could he have missed that?

All right, okay, he didn't really use his phone that much. He only ever called Laura or Peter or Frank at the bar and they were the only ones to call him. Any private training he did at the gym was arranged at the gym itself. Especially the private private sessions.

Okay, so it was easier to have missed then he would have thought. Dammit, it was from Laura.

“Peter's got a solid lead in San Francisco. Heading out there tonight. It might finally be over. Take care, baby bro.”

Derek didn't understand why the room suddenly looked different. Everything was bigger than it had been. Taller at least. Something wet hit his hand. His phone had been in that hand, hadn't it?

He lurched forward, both hands slamming onto the hardwood floor and emptied his stomach.

No, no, no. It couldn't... they couldn't. Oh, God, no, please, no. He can't. He has to stop....

His arms gave out and he found just enough presence of mind to lean back into a fetal position.

It was over. They would know everything. He's lost them. He's lost everything.

Taking a deep breath, a weight he hadn't realized he was carrying was gone and a deep peace was in its place. If it was over, it was over. The only thing he could do was face the end head on. The way his mother would.

He got up, cleaned up his mess and went online to book the first flight he could get to San Francisco. He was glad there was only one hotel Laura would stay at in San Francisco. It made finding her that much easier.

## Chapter 3

It was one of the few times Derek was actually grateful – sort of – for the way he looked. It made flirting with the desk clerk for information very effective. Of course, he'd probably have to blow the guy later, but he liked doing that, so no hardship there.

If it had been, Derek was sure he didn't have enough later for it to matter.

He couldn't talk Jeff into letting him into Laura's room, but he had been quite chatty about this club Laura had gone to called Wolf's Bane. Jeff didn't have the first clue about werewolves. Nothing had changed in his heartbeat or his scent when he mentioned the club and that was something else for which Derek was grateful. It was just so much easier to not have to deal with that particular fact since the fire.

The club wouldn't be open for a few hours, but there was a companion restaurant called Night Shade. Derek couldn't help a small smile when he heard the name. With Wolf's Bane, he'd been certain the owner was familiar with the supernatural world, but add Night Shade into the mix and maybe it was just a botany geek with a twisted sense of humor. He found himself hoping they'd have something else – another restaurant or bar or club named Bella Donna.

Jeff had spoken sadly of working a double shift that night so he wouldn't be able to show Derek around. Derek was fine with finding Wolf's Bane on his own and he really wasn't planning on sight-seeing. He'd be happy to suck the guy's dick if it came to that, but wasn't looking for a boyfriend. Or even a friend for that matter.

After dropping his bag off in his room, he tried calling Laura one more time, but it went straight to voicemail again. It wasn't like Laura to not answer her phone. Between work and Peter running off hunting, the damn thing was practically glued to her hand. The exact opposite of him. Derek wasn't even sure if Peter took his phone with him when he went hunting.

Though Night Shade was a fair distance from the hotel, he decided to walk. He's accepted that his world is ending, but he finds he's in no hurry to reach that final hour. He doesn't let himself hope that Peter's solid lead will turn out to be nothing. He's been able to hold the truth close far longer than he would have thought possible.

He found the restaurant without any trouble. The interior was airy and light-filled which contrasted nicely with the red and white and black and chrome color scheme that worked when it probably shouldn't have.

A tall, good-looking young man with curly blonde-brown hair and an English accent leads him to a table. The flirting was perfunctory, a part of the job rather than any real indication of interest and certainly not intent. It was an unusual feeling and one that Derek found he enjoyed.

The menu was appropriately trendy with an emphasis on nutritious fare and it didn't take him long to choose lunch.

“My name is Erica and I'll be your server this afternoon. Can I start you off with a cocktail? Our bartender, Russell, makes the best whiskey sours in the city.”

“I'll just have an iced tea and a grilled chicken Caesar salad.”

“I'll put that right in for you and let me know if you change your mind about the cocktail.”

Her smile was beautiful and predatory and it suddenly clicked that she, and probably the Englishman as well – how could he have missed it – were werewolves.

He returned her smile, weakly and confusion crossed her face for just a second before settling back.

When she went to the kitchen, he pulled his phone out and set it on the table, bringing up a picture of Laura. She looked happy and carefree. He liked seeing her like that, though he could never seem to make her look that way. He certainly hadn't the last time he saw her.

Cutting off that thought swiftly and thoroughly, he thought about his pretty blonde waitress. About how she was a werewolf and wasn't that something. He couldn't recall the last werewolf he met outside Myra's pack upstate. It had been years since he'd gone up with Laura. He'd liked the woods and the open spaces and Myra had seemed nice enough.

Erica brought his food and he tucked the phone back in his jacket pocket. It could wait a little longer.

“Can I get you some dessert? We have a caramel pecan cheesecake to die for.”

“No, I'm fine. Everything was delicious. I do have a question for you though.”

Derek pulled his phone out of his pocket and showed it to Erica.

She took a step back, not looking at the phone, with a guarded look on her face.

“Look, you are really hot and all, but I have a boyfriend and he's not into threesomes.”

“What? No. I just wanted to show you a picture of my sister. I came out here to surprise her, but she's not at her hotel and I was just hoping maybe you could point me in the right direction.”

Erica reached for the phone and took a good look at the picture.

“She's pretty, but I don't remember seeing her. Allison might know though. She has an amazing memory for faces.”

“Allison?”

“Allison McCall. She owns and manages this place and Wolf's Bane with Lydia. She's in the office if you want to ask her.”

“I'd like that. Thank you.”

“Just remember how grateful you are when it comes time to leave a tip.”

She gave him a saucy smile and actually sashayed to the office.

“Oh, I definitely will.”

It was about ten minutes before a beautiful brunette approached his table. She was tall with a self-possessed confidence that reminded him of Laura.

“Hi, I'm Allison McCall. Erica said you have a question for me.”

She didn't sit down and kept as much distance from Derek as possible while being at his table. There was a strong sense of professionalism about her, but also a level of wariness that Derek couldn't account for.

Unless Erica told her he was a werewolf.

Why would she have done that?

“My name is Derek Hale. I'm looking for my sister, Laura. The concierge at the hotel where she's staying said she'd gone to Wolf's Bane night before last. I just wanted to see if anyone remembered her.”

“Why not just call her?”

“I've tried. I'll keep trying, but she's not answering her phone.”

“Maybe she just doesn't want to talk to you.”

“Probably.” Derek smiled sadly. “We had a huge fight a couple of days ago. I just want to let her know I'm sorry, that I know I was wrong. I don't want my last words to her to be angry ones if she's not just ignoring me.”

He hadn't meant to tell her about the fight, but he could tell if he didn't give her some truth, he'd never get anything from her. He just hoped some truth would be enough.

“Let me see her picture.”

Derek handed her his phone with Laura's picture onscreen, hopeful, yet just as wary as she was.

“I remember her. She was at the club night before last. Maybe the night before. Nights kind of run together in a club. I didn't really talk to her, but Lydia did. She really seemed to like her and Lydia doesn't really like women that often. They seemed to be talking most of the night. And you didn't know your sister was into women.”

Derek tried to shake the surprise off his face.

“No, it's not that. Really. I just don't remember her with anyone for a long time. I guess I just don't think about her... like that.”

Allison laughed, a silvery, tinkling sound. A dimple flashed making her seem more human and approachable and any wariness she felt seemed to disappear.

“I get that. Even though Lydia's not my actual sister, sometimes I don't even want to think about what she gets up to.” She handed the phone back to him. “Lydia will be at the club tonight. She'll be able to tell you more. If it's any consolation, I don't think they actually hooked up despite how long they talked. Stop by around ten. Lydia will have time to talk and you'll be able to meet my husband, Scott. I think you two might have a lot in common.”

She smiled impishly and nodded.

“A lot in common.”

And with that, she headed back to the offices.

He and her husband might have a lot in common. What did that...

Holy shit. Her husband was a werewolf. His sister might be a lesbian. He wasn't sure which he found more interesting.

## Chapter 4

Derek wondered what it said about him that even though he hadn't brought any clothes specifically for clubbing, he still looked ready to party. Dark gray Henley, black jeans, and black boots highlighted his dark, predatory good looks. Variations of this outfit had gotten him laid more times than he could count.

But he wasn't looking to get laid tonight. Hopefully, tonight he would find Laura. Find out what she and Peter knew. Find out how much longer he'd have a family.

The time was short. He knew that and yet he wanted nothing more than to see Laura, talk to her, apologize for everything – the fire, the fight, the last ten years.

He just hoped she'd listen to him.

Wolf's Bane was quieter than Derek had expected. Granted to was earlier than he normally showed up to a club in New York, but he still thought it would be louder.

There were about a dozen people he could see including staff. He made his way over to the bar, hoping the bartender could point him in Lydia's direction.

“What can I get you?”

“I'm looking for Lydia.”

“We have a manager by that name. You must be the guy looking for his sister. I'm Boyd, Erica's boyfriend.”

“Yeah, I am. Name's Derek Hale. So, is Lydia around?”

“Man on a mission. I can respect that. Lydia's in the office. She'll be out in about fifteen minutes. How about a beer while you wait?”

Derek started to argue, to ask for directions to the office or for Boyd to call her out front, anything that wasn't waiting, but the look on Boyd's face made it clear a beer would be the only thing he was getting for the next fifteen minutes.

“Michelob Ultra.”

“Good choice,” Boyd said, nodding, clearly referring to more than his drink choice.

Boyd checked in with him from time to time as people started piling in. He saw Allison come in from the back and he'd hoped Lydia would be with her, but she was with two guys. He could just tell one of the guys was a werewolf, so that must be her husband Scott. The other guy was definitely human. He was laughing, head thrown back, moles across his cheek,

drawing attention to the smooth, clean line of his neck. Derek wondered what his skin would taste like, just over his pulse point.

Derek turned back towards the bar, nodded to Boyd for another beer.

Okay, so the guy was cute. That wasn't why he was here.

Besides, he's been with way cuter guys. Hell, if they were judging on a strictly physical attractiveness level, Derek was way out of his league.

If they were judging on a decent human being level, laughing boy was light decades out of Derek's league.

"I hear you want to speak with me. I'm Lydia Martin."

A petite red-head appeared on Derek's right out of nowhere. He should have sensed her approach long before she spoke. He really was a shitty werewolf. Maybe he could blame laughing boy for the distraction. Maybe, but he wasn't that self-deluded.

"I do, Ms. Martin. I'm Derek Hale. Allison McCall said you spoke with my sister the other night."

"I did. Laura's quite intelligent. Not on my level of course, but few are. Why are you looking for her? We spoke the night before last, she's only just now been missing long enough to report and that's if I were the last person to see her."

Derek looked at her and realized she was even less likely to respond to any bullshit than Allison had been – if that were possible. Was it California or something else that made these women immune to his charm? He didn't even need to try and charm them and he knew it wouldn't work. Maybe he was tired of being charming. Maybe it was time for something different. At least while he had the time.

"I just need to find her as soon as I can. We had a huge fight and we haven't spoken since. She's not answering her phone and she always answers her phone and, yeah, maybe nothing's wrong and I'm overreacting, but I'd rather look like a fool and she be fine and pissed at me than find out something is wrong and I did nothing about it. Did she say anything to you? Anything to indicate what her plans were, if she were heading somewhere else or...."

"Slow down, tiger, you're getting ahead of yourself. Follow me."

She headed toward the other end of the bar, to a black spiral staircase that blended in seamlessly. No one would ever see it if they didn't know it was there. The stairs led to a small loft area with two small round tables with three chairs each. They sat at the back table, Lydia with her back to the wall. It made Derek uncomfortable, but he successfully fought the urge to squirm. If that was what it took to find Laura, so be it.

Apparently, Lydia found what she was looking for because she started talking.

"I know about werewolves if you couldn't already tell. Some of the drinks have diluted wolfsbane so you all can appreciate more than the taste?"



“What does this have to do with finding Laura?”

“Would you prefer to think your sister shared family secrets because she was overcome with an uncontrollable lust for my perfect self or because she was very happily buzzed?”

Derek smiled. “I have a hard time picturing Laura losing control or talking about family secrets under any circumstances.”

“Broad strokes, no real details on the family secrets and I have to concede your point about control. Though I find the challenge intriguing.” Lydia smirked at his discomfort.

“Anyway. She mentioned the fight you guys had and that your relationship has been strained for years and she hated that. She mentioned your uncle was on some sort of vengeance quest. That he thought he'd found whatever it was he was looking for and she'd come out to support him, talk him out of it, back him up. I don't think she really knew what she wanted, except to have her family back together.”

“They all died in a fire ten years ago.”

“She meant you and your uncle, dumb ass. She had living, breathing relatives in the same house and they were practically strangers and that hurt her every bit as much as losing the others. No, she didn't say that straight out, but a blind man could see how much she was hurting. Or at least a blind man without his head up his ass.”

A cute blonde came up the stairs with a drink for Lydia and another beer for Derek. Derek drained half his beer in one go. That was more information than he was comfortable with anyone other than Laura and Peter having. That was more truth than he was comfortable facing.

But could he really expect any mercy this close to the end? Any protection the facts may have provided was certainly gone.

“Can you, will you, help me find her or not? If not, I need to find someone who will help me.”

“Be thankful I liked your sister. Not that she gave me a detailed itinerary. She said the person Peter was looking for had land in Washington or Oregon. She was meeting Peter somewhere along the coast. Peter apparently didn't want to share details even with her before he absolutely had to. That's all I know about where she might be. Except she promised to stop by before heading back to New York. If nothing else, you can wait here for her if you want. Not here outside of opening, of course, but I believe she'll be back. Maybe she'll answer her phone before she gets back.”

“And maybe I'll turn into the Easter bunny.”

“A wolf in bunny's clothing,” Lydia smirked. “I think I like it.”

Derek wanted to throw something in frustration. This wasn't going the way he'd thought it would. He could have stayed in New York for all the good this trip was doing him. What the

hell had he expected anyway? Laura and Peter would never forgive him. Not that he should be forgiven. Peter's spent the last ten years killing everyone he could prove was connected to the fire. He certainly didn't expect to be spared.

Laughter floated up the stairs followed by Allison, her husband, and their friend.

Laughing Boy threw his arms open wide.

“Lydia, love of my life.”

“Stiles, just because they start with the same letter doesn't mean they sound alike.”

“Doesn't mean it isn't true either.”

Lydia smiled indulgently and stood to meet Stiles' hug.

Now he had Laughing Boy's name at least. That was something.

“Hi, Derek. This is my husband, Scott. You two have a lot in common I think. The annoying one attached to Lydia is Stiles Stilinski.”

“That's a mouthful.”

“You have no idea.”

Honey colored eyes danced with mischief and naughty promises.

Derek did his best to match the look promise for promise. A condemned man got a final meal, right?

“Derek Hale.”

The appraising look in Stiles' eyes changed, less promise and more knowledgeable. But what could be possible know?

“My dad's the sheriff in Beacon Hills.”

A hell of a lot apparently. Why hadn't he recognized Stiles' last name? It sure as hell wasn't common.

“Breathe, dude.”

Scott sat next to him, handing him a bottle of water. Derek drank, simply doing what he was told.

“Sorry I blindsided you with that, but I didn't think waiting would be a good idea either. You okay?”

Derek nodded, not trusting his voice yet. They knew, but they didn't know the worst. That was good. He drank some more of the water.

He should have realized how close San Francisco was to Beacon Hills. Why hadn't it occurred to him that someone would know about the fire? True, San Francisco is a big city, much bigger than Beacon Hills, but they're not that far apart either, just a few hours. Not even that really. Peter used to make it in an hour and a half, if he didn't get stopped for speeding.

“Derek, buddy, I need you to breathe with me okay.”

Derek felt his hand being placed on Laughing – Stiles' – chest. He felt Stiles' chest expand and contract. He felt a gentle pressure on his chest, encouraging him to focus on the rise and fall of his chest, not his inability to breathe.

Wait. What? Breathing wasn't a problem. He was breathing fine. It was everything else that was the problem. Thoughts and emotions racing and flooding, so dangerous, such a disaster. Destructive. Nothing.

“Come on, dude. Work with me. Scott hasn't carried an inhaler since high school. You're just damn lucky I know what I'm doing, but I can't do anything if you don't work with me. One, two, three, four, five, hold, two, three, four, five.”

Nothing but a voice. Strong, steady, comforting. No, don't think about comfort. That's right, let it go. Soothing. Low and quiet. Attracting and distracting and Derek felt himself slot into the count Stiles was keeping. Great first impression there, Hale.

“I'm sorry. I don't know why I reacted that way.”

Allison and Lydia are nowhere to be seen. It's just Scott and Stiles with him. Scott sitting the chair next to him and Stiles kneeling in front of him and why was Scott there again?

“Don't worry about it. It's all good. Again, I'm sorry about just springing that on you, but something just needed to be said as soon as possible.”

“And he couldn't have known how you'd react,” added Scott.

“No, he couldn't. It's fine. I'm fine. Where are Allison and Lydia?”

Ah, his long-time best friends, repression, and deflection. Nice to know they'd never leave him.

“Down to the bar. The fewer people during a panic attack, the better.”

“I didn't have a panic attack.”

Stiles snorted. “Bullshit. I know panic attacks from both sides of the street and that, my friend, was a classic panic attack.”

“I didn't panic.”

“No. Of course not. The terror in your eyes, shortness of breath and the impression you were about to fall out of your chair was just you being all zen and shit.”

“Stiles.”

Derek stood, knocking over the chair and sending Stiles backward, landing hard on his ass.

“I didn't panic.”

He fled down the stairs. He needed to get out of here and not just the club. He was a romantic fool for letting the symmetry of dying in California appeal to him. Finally facing the consequences of his actions head on was a pipe dream. Laura was right. Mom and Dad would be so disappointed in him even without knowing the whole truth.

He slid through the crowd easily, not once paying attention to the looks he received. His only concern was getting to the exit. His only focus on each step that brought him closer to his goal.

Until someone didn't move.

Two someones actually. Allison and Lydia.

Seriously. Why had he ever left New York? Obviously not one of his better decisions.

“Where do you think you're going?”

“Outside. Away. Somewhere that's not here. Which would you prefer?”

“I would prefer you stay. You've barely spoken to Scott. Or Stiles. That boy's a little too honest for his own good. Except when he's lying his ass off.”

“Lydia, you've told me everything you know about Laura and I appreciate it, but I can't use it. What's the point of staying?”

“What's the point of leaving? Laura's coming back here.”

“If she can.”

Allison looked behind him and then moved away. Scott and Stiles must have followed him down.

“There's no evidence she won't come back. You're only borrowing trouble.”

“Preparing for the worst. It's generally considered a good thing.”

“Not everything goes wrong.”

“What are you doing, Lydia?”

“I liked Laura. She likes you. I believe when she's finished with whatever she's doing with Peter, she'll come back here before heading home. Why delay the reunion you came all this way for? Excuse me. Talk to Scott while I'm gone.”

Derek could feel the scream building. What the hell was with these people? Okay, he probably wouldn't be coming back if he could ever get out of here, but wasn't that his choice?

“Hey dude, want to go for a walk? I know fresh air always made me feel better after a ... an incident.”

“Lydia's going to let me leave?”

“You're not a prisoner. Lydia's just a little intense and controlling and bossy. Very, very bossy actually. And she's nowhere near as bad as she was in high school. Talk about ruling the school. She and Jackson were like a total power couple.”

“You realize you're making a better case for prisoner, right?”

“Okay, maybe a little, but hey, you'll be with me. I can definitely leave when I want.”

“But you have to come back for Allison.”

“Doesn't mean you have to.” Scott smiled. “Come on.”

They inhaled deeply as soon as they crossed the threshold. Scott turned to the right and Derek fell in step without a second thought. They walked in silence for a few minutes.

“When were you bitten? If you don't mind me asking.”

“Nah. Nine years ago. Steven was looking to stake out Beacon Hills as his territory. Stiles and I were hiking the preserve and I suffered a pretty bad asthma attack. Using the inhaler didn't help. Stiles got me back as close to the car as he could – which wasn't very – and Steven found us. He said he could help me. We were really scared. I'd had an attack that bad once before, right after my dad left. My mom's a nurse. She had to take me to the emergency room.”

Derek nodded. His mother and Myra had both bitten people to cure serious illnesses. If the bite took, they were never sick again.

“So, Steven bit me and Stiles and I kept it a secret for a little over a year. My mom was furious when she found out and she wasn't mad about the werewolf thing – well, she wasn't happy about it and it took her a while to get okay with it, but what she was mad about was we hadn't told her. Steven was ready to abandon Beacon Hills after my mom got through with him. He took a long vacation when Stiles' dad found out, but that was more because he'd bit Allison's mom when she tried to kill me when she found out I was a werewolf. She killed herself when it looked like the bite would take. Don't say anything to Allison. She hasn't spoken to her family since and it would just upset her.”

“She chose you over her family?”

Derek was shocked at the wistfulness he heard in his voice. But, oh, wouldn't it have been nice. To have someone who was willing to accept all of him.

“Yeah, she did.” Scott sounded more than a little awed himself.

They lapsed back into silence. Derek thought he should have been furious at another taking over the Hale territory. He knew Pete and Laura would have been, but it sounded like this Steven guy was doing a decent job of looking after Beacon Hills. Scott was a good wolf, stable and anchored. Derek would have been proud to call him brother.

Derek jumped when his phone rang. Yes.

“Laura?”

“Hey, Der-bear. Glad to see you figured out how to work your phone.”

“Where are you? Where's Peter? How are you?” He took a deep breath. “Laura, I am so sorry. So sorry about the fight. So sorry about everything. I never meant....”

“I know, Der. I know. I'll tell you everything when I get home. I'm in Washington State. I have to get my stuff from the hotel in San....”

“Francisco. I'm here. I'm staying at the same hotel.”

“Why?”

“I wanted to be here for you. I want to be the brother you deserve.”

“Der, are you okay?”

Derek focused on breathing. No. No, he wasn't okay. He hasn't been okay. He doesn't even care what Scott can see or hear or smell.

And isn't that strange?

He can't say he trusts Scott. He can't say he trusts anyone, not even Laura or Peter, certainly not himself, but he does believe Scott will keep this to himself and that's enough.

“Derek, you're scaring me. Are you still there?”

“Yeah, Laura, I'm here. Where in Washington are you? I can be there first thing in the morning.”

“No, Der. Don't do that. There are some things I need to wrap up here. I'll be back in San Francisco tomorrow. Just wait for me okay. I met some people there, good people, they'll look after till we get in.”

“Lydia and Allison, right? I'm outside Wolf's Bane with Allison's husband, Scott, right now.”

“How? Why?”

“I wanted to find you. There's only one place you'd stay in here. Finding this place was the easy part.” He paused. “So, Lydia.”

“I am not having this conversation over the phone. We'll get everything sorted out when I get in tomorrow. We'll probably be in late. Der, I got to go. I'll call tomorrow when we're close. Love you, Der-bear.”

She'd hung up before he could even start to say it back. He'd heard her voice. He knew she was alive. She had sounded the same. Tired, but not angry or hurt. Surely if they'd found out about him, Laura would have sounded hurt and angry. Surely she wouldn't have told him she loved him like she actually meant it.

“Your sister?”

“Yeah. She'll be in town tomorrow, probably late, whatever that means.”

“Probably means late.”

Derek glared at Scott. Yeah, okay, thanks, Captain Obvious, but late in the day or late that night. There is a difference, you know.

Scott was unfazed by the glare. Obviously, he was incapable of understanding the blindingly clear look he was being given.

“You want to go to the Giants game with me and Stiles tomorrow? His dad was supposed to come out and go with us, the Mets are playing, but he has to testify in court. Probably. Well, he will have to testify, but it might not be tomorrow though it probably will be.”

“He's a Mets fan?” disbelief colored Derek's voice.

“The Sheriff? Oh, hell no, but Stiles' mom loved them and so does Stiles and the Sheriff loves giving him a hard time about them. It's a weird relationship, but the Sheriff's the best dad I know.”

The lack of hurt in that statement, the sheer matter-of-factness of it said far more than words. Derek wished he knew what that place of acceptance felt like. He hoped Laura and Peter would get there one day at least.

“So, you in?”

They nodded to the doorman as they headed back inside the club.

“Would Stiles be okay with it?”

“Would Stiles be okay with what?”

“Hey, man. Derek's sister called. She'll be back tomorrow, so I asked him to go to the game with us since your dad can't make it.”

Stiles' face lit up. “That would be awesome. Listen, man, I really am sorry about earlier.”

“No, it's fine. You were right. It was better to know as soon as possible. You couldn't have known how I'd react. Hell, I didn't know I'd react that way.”

“Let me buy you a beer anyway.”

“I wouldn't say no,” Derek said in his sultriest voice.

Without deciding, without thinking about it, Derek slid into old habits. Stiles was a handsome man and more intriguing than anyone he's met in New York. It had been a long time since he wanted anyone. The people he'd fucked in New York had been just that – people he'd fucked. Stiles, however. Stiles wasn't someone you just fucked.

And that should scare him a hell of a lot more than it did.

“Lydia doesn't charge us.”

Derek laughed and Stiles groaned.

“He didn't know that, Scotty. Way to ruin a first impression.”

“Dude, your first impression already sucked.”

Stiles threw his arm around Scott's neck and started rubbing the top of his head.

“So you had to ruin the salvage operation? What kind of friend are you?”

“The best.”

“The worst.”

“Stiles, what are you doing to my husband?”

Stiles and Scott jumped apart. “Nothing.”

Allison laughed. “How did you get away with anything in high school?”

“Mostly because his dad didn't want to do the paperwork.”

“Bullshit. My worst offense was a Class C Misdemeanor.”

“That you got caught for.”

“Exactly. There was lots I never got caught at.”

“Sadly, including crimes against grammar. Allison, what are these idiots doing?”

“Stiles is supposed to be buying me a beer.”

“Is he indeed? Well, isn't that interesting.”

The look Lydia gave them was lightning quick and Derek couldn't even begin to guess what Lydia was thinking. He just knew he didn't like being the object of her scrutiny.



Lydia grinned and Derek was reminded of Peter when he was deep in the hunt for those involved in the fire. Maybe he should just head back to the hotel, get a good night's sleep. He needed to be well rested for the ball game and Laura. In fact, maybe he should pass on the ball game. Laura took a lot of energy on a good day.

Lydia linked an arm through his. "I think we can do much better than beer."

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